

Officials take no salary action

Platte County officeholders will not receive a base pay increase this year, or for the next two years.

The County salary commission met Oct. 31 and adjourned without reaching a decision on how to tackle adjustments to the base scale for officeholders. According to County attorney Bob Shaw, such an adjournment means the previous scale will remain in effect until the next meeting of the salary commission in two years. In 2005, the Salary Commission upheld a 2001 decision to grant cost-of-living adjustments and voted the County Commissioners would approve such adjustments yearly.

The County's salary commission is required by law to meet every two years and sets base officeholder salaries. It also discusses and sets pay scales, changes to pay scales and cost-of-living adjustments. The commission had until Dec. 15 to make a decision.

At an Oct. 16 meeting, with several officeholders absent, the salary commission voted down a motion by First District Commissioner Tom Pryor to keep base salaries at the same level established in 2005 and protect a previous decision allowing the County Commission to approve cost-of-living adjustments. The majority of officeholders voted to continue discussions, and those talks reconvened on Oct. 31.

Absent Prosecuting Attorney Eric Zahnd, whose salary is set by state statute, the county officeholders met for approximately 45 minutes to discuss Shaw's recommendation that the officeholders not approve any mid-term salary increases, but that the commission did have the authority to create a new base scale for officeholder pay.

With Sheriff Richard Anderson again acting as commission chair, Pryor again moved officeholder salaries remain at the same level. Anderson said the motion was out of order, as it had already been voted down once. However, if any of the officeholders who previously voted against the motion wished to reconsider their vote, the motion could return to discussion. None did.

Treasurer Bonnie Brown said since Platte County's assessed valuation was now past the valuation-based pay scale set by the Missouri legislature, the county could simply extend the existing scale to set new base salaries.

Pryor said he didn't think it was a good idea to tie salaries to assessed valuation and 2nd District Commissioner Jim Plunkett said if the state wanted the salaries tied to valuation it would have extended the scale itself.

Presiding Commissioner Betty Knight said the Missouri Association of Counties was working on lobbying a new pay scale to the state legislature, but so far no new scale had been set.

"I feel we're sending the wrong message to the taxpayers," Plunkett said.

He said in a year where some taxpayers saw a huge jump in taxes due to reassessment, such an increase in officeholder salaries appeared selfish and the general public could think that the reassessment was done to increase salaries.

Brown said she didn't believe the public would feel that way, and also didn't think the County Commission should be the sole body approving salaries and cost-of-living adjustments. She made a motion the County adopt a new salary schedule based on assessed valuation and based upon previous schedules set by the Missouri legislature. There was no second.

Pryor moved the meeting be adjourned, with no decision made, thus extending the 2005 decision. Plunkett seconded and stood, remaining standing until after the vote. Brown and Anderson voted against adjournment, with County Clerk Sandy Krohne abstaining.

MRSA infection forces West Platte school closing

The West Platte School District closed its campus Tuesday for cleaning after a case of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) was reported in an elementary student Monday.

“We just want to take whatever precaution we can to make sure everything is OK,” said Superintendent Kyle Stephenson.

Stephenson said Tuesday that the school district would be open on Wednesday (Nov. 7) and that the reported infection appeared to be an isolated case.

Stephenson said he had been in contact with the Platte County Health Department, and the district was following Centers of Disease Control guidelines to sanitize the school. Maintenance staff spent the day Tuesday spraying down surfaces with a bleach solution, followed by additional cleaning.

MRSA has been in the national news recently, and just this week, an elementary school in the Richmond School District was closed when seven students were diagnosed with the infection.

According to the Mayo Clinic, MRSA infection is caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria — often called “staph.” Decades ago, a strain of staph emerged in hospitals that was resistant to the antibiotics commonly used to treat it. MRSA was one of the first germs to outwit all but the most powerful drugs. MRSA infection is generally not serious, but can be fatal in older adults and people with weakened immune systems.

In response to the school closure, the Platte County Health Department issued a statement outlining recognition and prevention of MRSA.

“MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage,” the release states. “MRSA infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, or parts of the body covered by hair. Almost all MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by the drainage of pus with or without antibiotics. More serious infections such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections or bone infections are rare in healthy people.”

Because the infection is transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items, avoiding these situations and frequent hand-washing are effective means of prevention of transmission.

The health department recommends, in addition to hand washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, showering immediately after exercise or participating in sports, covering cuts or abrasions, not sharing towels or other personal items, and cleaning surfaces with disinfectants sprays.

For more information about MRSA go to cdc.gov; for a list of approved disinfectants go to epa.gov.

Parkville board hears good news from MoDoT

The Parkville Board of Aldermen received some good news from a Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDoT) representative about a project to widen Hwy. 45 during a work session held prior to its meeting Nov. 6.

MoDoT representative Randy Jackson presented an update on the project, which will widen Hwy. 45 from Hwy. 9 to Hwy. K, a distance of about three miles. Jackson reported that an original cost estimate for the project had been reduced from approximately \$62 million to \$39 million, and that construction should not be too restrictive. The project will include roundabouts and provide full access to several intersections.

“We don’t believe we will need to close segments of Hwy. 45 to build, but it would be advantageous,” he said. “The plan is to build one side at a time.”

Jackson said the project was one of MoDoT's highest priority projects and that a tentative timeline for the project would include a public hearing in May of 2008 and completion of final plans by December of 2008, with construction to begin during the summer construction season of 2010.

During the meeting, the board:

- Held a public hearing for a sewer rate increase, which was approved along with the 2008 sewer budget later in the meeting. The increase raises rates for a family using 5,000 gallons from \$33.75 per month to \$36.45, an average increase of \$2.70 per month.

“This rate increase is needed to plan for the future and to be proactive in trying to avoid bond issues for capital improvements,” Parkville City Administrator Joe Turner said.

- Purchased new LED holiday lights and approved the installation by an electrician at the farmers' market, gazebo and depot. The cost of the lights and wiring is approximately \$2,700, with the cost of the electrician's installation \$1,575.

There was no mention of holiday lights downtown, which had been in the news recently because of the City requiring downtown lights to be inspected by an electrician to meet code. However, prior to the meeting, Mayor Kathy Dusenbery told *The Citizen* she believed the matter had been blown out of proportion, and that the issue came about because the lights are not just Christmas lights, but year-round outlining lights.

“We are working with the Main Street Association and our community development department has been working on it for a while now,” she said. “The whole thing got way overplayed by the press; it's not near as big a deal as it's been made out to be.”

- Discussed becoming a sister city with the City of Jesus Maria in Jalisco, Mexico. The Board received a letter from a group of people in the metro area, including Parkville, promoting the relationship. Jesus Maria is a city with about 20,000 citizens located near Guadalajara that is known as the capital of blue agave tequila.