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Decommissioning part of wellhead protection plan

By Suzi Nelson
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ASHLAND – The City of Ashland is offering an opportunity for residents to decommission abandoned wells for free.

At the city council meeting last Thursday, City Administrator Jessica Quady informed the council that the city has sent out flyers to a group of residents in the north/northwest area of Ashland to let them know about the decommissioning program.

Landowners may receive up to 100% cost share to decommission abandoned wells through a grant the city received from the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy. The grant money will be used to close abandoned wells to prevent possible contamination

of the city's water system.

"We just want to make sure we're protecting our water source," Quady said.

The identified area is located above the aquifer that contributes to the city's municipal well system. The city has four wells that provide drinking water to residents.

Last February, the city council was told the project will cost \$40,000. The grant provides \$16,500, and city will contribute \$11,750, which will be matched by the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District, which is a supporting partner in the program. The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District is also helping with planning, as a portion of the affected area lies within its boundaries.

Quady said there are approximately three abandoned wells the city is aware

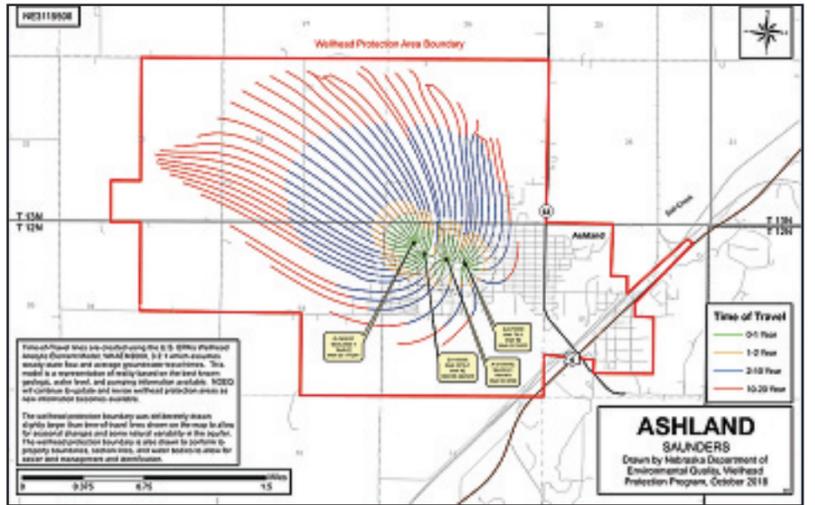
of in identified the area. Sending out the flyers and other public information efforts are being done to make sure all property owners in the area are notified of the program. No deadline has been set for the program.

"We just want in the next few weeks for people to take a look at it," Quady added.

The program is part of the wellhead protection plan that is being developed for the city by JEO Consulting Group, Quady said. The plan was spearheaded by former Council Member Janece Mollhoff, who was an avid environmentalist during her time on the city council and now as an elected member of the OPPD Board of Directors.

The wellhead protection plan is still in draft form,

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ABANDONED WELLS: The City of Ashland is offering well decommissioning in the area identified on the map as part of the proposed wellhead protection plan. (Map provided by City of Ashland)



IN THE WAY: A vehicle sits on an Ashland street days after last month's snow storm that dumped approximately seven inches of snow in the Ashland area. City officials remind residents and visitors that there are rules governing parking on city streets and clearing sidewalks during and after a snow event. (Staff Photo by Suzi Nelson)

Clearing streets, sidewalks required after snow

By Suzi Nelson
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ASHLAND – Clearing the streets and sidewalks in Ashland after the most recent snow storm went well, according to city officials. But there are ways to make things go even smoother when future snow falls.

During the Dec. 28 snowstorm, Ashland received around seven inches of snow. But snow removal was not as difficult as has been in the past, according to Public Works Director Shane Larsen. "During the last storm, I really thought that there were plenty of people that had moved their vehicles off the streets," said Larsen.

Parking cars and trucks on the streets can be an issue as Larsen's crew works to remove snow from the roadways. When cars and trucks clog the streets, it makes it difficult to maneuver snow plows around the parked vehicles.

"It makes it harder to clear streets efficiently," said City Administrator Jessica Quady.

Larsen said safety is also an issue when it comes to clearing snow on streets where vehicles are parked – not only for his plow operators, but also for the citizens of Ashland.

"Of course it's a safety concern, so we make sure we can get around the vehicles safely," Larsen said.

Perhaps because people heeded the weather forecasters' predictions that the snow would pile up, they seemed to be ready, Larsen said.

"I felt like everyone moved their vehicles the night before or during the day," he said.

There were even times when vehicle owners kept an eye out for the plows, and after they had cleared one side of the street, the owners moved their cars to the clean side so the plows could come through and clear the other side,

Larsen said.

"They see us coming and they try and get out of the way," he said.

Because residents moved their vehicles in a timely manner and the fact that the storm happened mainly during daylight hours, Larsen and Quady made the decision not to announce a snow emergency.

"The residents are a big reason why we didn't need to call a snow emergency," Larsen said.

When a snow emergency is designated, no cars or trucks are allowed to park on city streets. If they do, the vehicles can be towed.

"They don't have to move their cars unless we call a snow emergency," said

"During the last storm, I really thought that there were plenty of people that moved their vehicles off the streets."

Shane Larsen,
Ashland Public Works director

Quady. "But it's helpful that they do."

Even if a snow emergency is not called, Ashland's municipal code has other regulations regarding parking during a snow storm. According to Municipal Code 5-441, vehicles parked on a city street or alley cannot obstruct the removal of snow. If they do, they can be removed by the police.

Even when there is no snow on the ground, vehicles are not allowed to be parked on Ashland city streets for more than 24 hours at a time, Quady said. When it snows, it is easy to tell when a vehicle has been on the street for more than the allotted time. City officials have used this method to alert police to

illegal parking.

Larsen said there are times when his crew has contacted the police about a vehicle that hasn't moved for a couple of days during and after a snowstorm. But in most cases, they attempt to do everything they can to avoid having the car ticketed or towed.

"We try and have as much understanding as we can and we appreciate everyone's understanding when it's time to plow snow," he said.

In both cases, the vehicles are towed at the owner's expense. There can also be additional fees if the vehicle is not claimed within five days, the code states.

"They can, and they have in years past, towed cars when we had a snow storm and people didn't move their cars," said Quady.

This time around, no cars were towed, Quady said. However, a handful of vehicle owners were cited.

"The next day or two the police did go out and give warnings or tickets," she added.

For a day or two after a snow storm, drivers should also avoid parking on the streets if possible. Larsen said they generally run the snow plows during and immediately after a storm, but also go out during following days to hit areas they could not get to before. They also use that time to clean up the corners and remove piles of snow from the downtown area.

Snow on sidewalks can also be an issue after a storm. Municipal Code 8-201 states it is unlawful to allow snow, sleet, mud, ice or other substances to accumulate or remain on city sidewalks.

In the business district, sidewalks must be cleared within five hours from the end of a snow storm, unless it happens overnight. Then, the deadline is 10

See **SNOW**, Page 3

Ashland area leads way in new house permits for county

By Elsie Stormberg
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WAHOO – Saunders County Assessor Rhonda Andresen has always said the county nestled between Omaha and Lincoln is never going to have a year where it doesn't grow.

In 2020, the assessor's office and Register of Deeds has been busy as ever, which Andresen said is a direct sign that the housing market in the county is booming, despite the pandemic.

Saunders County had 72 building permits submitted in 2020, per data provided by Zoning Administrator Mitch Polacek. While 2019 wasn't too far behind with 69 permits, Polacek said he had expected the permit number in 2020 to be lower because of the pandemic.

"That didn't take," Polacek said.

Forty-five of those 2020 building permits belonged to land in the Ashland area, which is more than half the total of permits from the

year. In 2019, the Ashland area retained the most permits again with 44 permits for residential buildings.

"Ashland is booming," Andresen said.

Andresen said this is due to the new subdivisions in the area and the forecast is that the city will continue to grow and get much larger. Between the steady housing market and lowered interest rates, Saunders County is seeing homes go on the market and sell within hours, she said.

"It opens up the door for new homeowners," Andresen said.

At the Register of Deeds office, Andresen describes the numbers as "astronomical" for the documents filed this year compared to previous years, which also reflects on the Saunders County housing market. In 2020, they had 1,233 deeds which includes farm land, homes and any transfer of real estate.

"COVID has definitely not

See **PERMITS**, Page 3



TRUCK FIRE: A Sunday morning fire on I-80 destroyed a semi and sent one person to the hospital. (Photo provided by Ashland Volunteer Fire Department)

I-80 semi fire injures one close to Ashland

From Omaha
World-Herald

ASHLAND – One person was taken to a Lincoln hospital in serious condition Sunday morning after a fire that destroyed a semitrailer truck on Interstate 80 near the exit to Ashland.

Gretna firefighters responded to the scene in an eastbound lane of I-80 about 9:15 a.m., according to Sarpy County 911 dispatch. Ashland Fire and Rescue vol-

unteers were also called to the scene and reported that one person was taken to St. Elizabeth Regional Medical Center in Lincoln.

All three eastbound lanes were closed for more than two hours. Two of the lanes had reopened as of 1:30 p.m., according to a Nebraska State Patrol report on social media.

The name of the injured person was not released. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

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News Brief

Game and Parks to host free virtual pre-K program

LINCOLN – The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission is hosting a new, virtual series designed for preschoolers. The free Nature Tails will be at 10 a.m. CST on Tuesdays, starting Jan. 12.

Each week, Game and Parks outdoor educators from across the state will kick off nature-themed sessions by reading a children's book tailored to the theme. Afterward, educators will lead a quick activity for children and their families. The themes are Jan. 12, Mammals; Jan. 19, Making Observations; Jan. 26, Owls; Feb. 2, Groundhogs'

Feb. 9, Seeds; Feb. 16, Wintertime Fun. No pre-registration is required. To participate, visit bit.ly/NatureTails to log in and join the fun.

Each virtual event will be recorded and posted to the Nebraska Game and Parks Education Channel on YouTube. Search "Nebraska Game and Parks Education" on the social platform and subscribe for future videos.

For more information, contact monica.macoubrie@nebraska.gov.

Deaths (Page 6)

Tiffany Pauline Gasper
Kenneth L. Vetter

