



Inside

Page 4

Board Report - January/
February

OMPA MEMBER CITIES

Altus, Blackwell, Comanche, Copan, Cordell, Duncan, Edmond, Eldorado, Fairview, Fort Supply, Frederick, Geary, Goltry, Granite, Hominy, Kingfisher, Laverne, Lexington, Mangum, Manitou, Marlow, Mooreland, Newkirk, Okeene, Olustee, Orlando, Pawhuska, Perry, Ponca City, Pond Creek, Prague, Purcell, Ryan, Spiro, Tecumseh, Tonkawa, Walters, Watonga, Waynoka, Wetumka, Wynnewood, Yale. Also serving Clarksville, Arkansas, Paris, Arkansas, and Electra, Texas.

A member of the American Public Power Association, Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma and Southwestern Power Resources Association.

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OMPA is a wholesale power company owned by 42 municipal electric utilities. OMPA provides economies of scale in power generation and related services to support community-owned electric utilities. The members of OMPA serve approximately 250,000 Oklahomans. This publication is issued by OMPA as authorized by the OMPA General Manager. 425 copies have been prepared and distributed at a cost of \$700. [74 O.S. § 3105(B)]

Board Acknowledgment



outlet

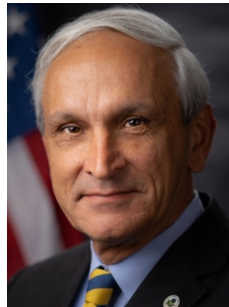
news from your Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority

Secretary of Energy to speak at Annual Meeting

The 2023 Annual Meeting will be March 9 at the Edmond Conference Center. The event allows for the members to vote on Board seats up for election and will also include presentations from industry leaders.

The keynote speaker for the event is Ken McQueen, the Secretary of Energy and Environment for the state of Oklahoma. Jeff Haas, the acting CEO and President of the American Public Power Association, is also a guest speaker.

As part of the agenda, there will also be the presentation of the annual Our Local Power Champion Award and the Charles D. Lamb Scholarship



Ken McQueen



Jeff Haas

Award, in addition to comments from Board Chair Homer Nicholson and OMPA General Manager Dave Osburn. The full meeting agenda will be posted online at ompa.com before the meeting.

Appointed to his role by Gov. Kevin Stitt in 2022, McQueen is responsible for 36 state agencies, boards, compacts, and commissions as well as advancing policies that encourage economic growth. Before this appointment, he co-served as US EPA Region 6 Administrator in Dallas, Tex., and U.S. EPA National Energy Policy Advisor. He was the first and only native-born Oklahoman to serve as a regional administrator at EPA.

Before federal service, he was New Mexico's Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources (EMNRD). Industry experience spanned 35 years as a petroleum engineer, retiring as an asset team Vice President for a major upstream energy company in 2016.

His academia background includes serving as a petroleum engineering adjunct professor at University of Tulsa and guest lecturer at other colleges and universities.

Continued on Page 2

How Are Board Members Elected?

At least one-third of the 11-person OMPA Board of Directors is selected by Electors each year at the Authority's Annual Meeting. All of the OMPA members have a single representative as an Elector to do their voting.

Board members are then eligible to

serve three-year, staggered terms and are eligible for re-election.

Prior to the voting that takes place at the Annual Meeting, the Board Election Committee makes recommendations.

For more on this year's Board members up for re-election, see page 2.

Annual Meeting: Continued from Page 2

In addition to teaching, McQueen consulted on a wide array of natural resource issues, with particular focus on water use/reuse, the hydrogen economy, helium, oil and gas, electrical generation, and carbon sequestration.

Haas has been with the APPA since 2006, recently serving as its Senior Vice President, Membership and Education, where he managed a team of 20 professionals and directed member recruitment, retention, engagement, and educational programming, as well as multiple non-dues revenue streams. He serves as secretary on the board of directors of Hometown Connections, a national, nonprofit utility services organization.

Before joining the APPA, Haas headed up membership and marketing for an agribusiness trade association in Arlington, Virginia. Other experience includes working in technology and sales for Wells Fargo and a start-up broadband company. He holds a master's degree in public administration from American University and a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Pittsburgh. He is an ASAE certified association executive and has an executive certificate in nonprofit management from Georgetown University.

Board Members Up For Re-election

Three Board members are up for re-election at the Annual Meeting on March 9, in addition to Patty Witchey of Laverne needing to be confirmed by the membership.

The Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority Board of Directors is an 11-seat Board that is elected entirely by electors at the Annual Meeting each year. All 42 of OMPA's members have an elector that can vote at the elections.

The Board members up for re-election and confirmation – all of whom have been recommended by the Board Election Committee – are profiled below.

Jim Greff, City of Prague

Greff joined the board in 2014, and is the current Vice Chairman. He has worked for the City of Prague for 41 years, serving as Water and Wastewater Superintendent, then Public Works Director and finally in his current position as City Manager. He was a 2011 recipient of the Marvin Hicks-Al Middleton Meritorious Service Award and, in 2016, received the American Public Power Association's Larry Hobart 7 Hats Awards.



Jim Greff

Jason McPherson, City of Marlow

McPherson has been on the OMPA Board of Directors since March of 2016. In 2021, he became the first ever representative from a member city or town to also be named to the board for

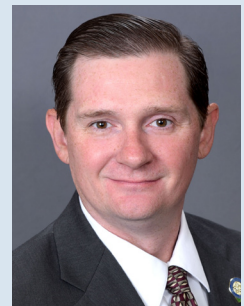
the American Public Power Association, the national umbrella organization for municipal-owned electric utilities. He has been the City Administrator with Marlow for more than nine years, and is active with OMPA, serving on the Board's Legislative Committee and as the Chair of the Board's Risk Committee.



Jason McPherson

Chuck Ralls, City of Comanche

Ralls, the Comanche City Manager, has been on the board since March of 2016. He also serves on the Board's Risk Committee. Ralls was selected as the Comanche Chamber Member of the Year in his first year as the City Manager, and also received the 2016 Keep Oklahoma Beautiful "Best Government Clean-Up" award.



Chuck Ralls

Patty Witchey, Town of Laverne

Witchey joined the Board in July of 2022. She is the Treasurer for the Town of Laverne, where she has been employed for 26 years, including the last 20 in her current position. She also sits on OMPA's Competitive Utility Program (CUP) Committee.

City Update

\$1 million grant headed city's way for water

City Manager Chuck Ralls spent the entire Public Works Authority praising the application process and acknowledging the excitement about a \$1 million dollar grant awarded to the City of Comanche.

The grant comes from the Oklahoma Water Resources Board and according to Ralls, they were one of 50 applications to receive the money that will help with projects dealing with water treatment.

"We were notified that we were awarded this and we've got a few things that we need to do to be able to get money. I have done everything that I needed to up to this point," Ralls said.



"We need your acknowledgment of the grant and then we have got the engineer to do a few things, which is the next few agenda items, but this will be for water infrastructure. It will help with some dam repairs, spillway repairs, both of the water towers, repair and refurbish and a couple of other things."

Ralls stated this is the biggest grant the city has been awarded since he has taken office. The board members present took a vote and passed the acknowledgment 3-0.

The first agenda item pertaining to the grant was to enter an agreement with Chisholm Trail Consulting for the engineering services and for bid

document prep.

Ralls stated there might be an upfront, however he said they will get reimbursed once the grant money comes in from OWRB.

According to Ralls, the money from the grant will come to the city as needed from OWRB. They are starting the process of working with the projects as part of the grant.

One of the other agenda items passed allowed Ralls, with the assistance of Chisholm Trail Consulting, to go out for bids on the two water tower repairs and refurbishing.

That item passed with a 3-0 vote and the final agenda item for the grant passed with a 3-0 vote as well to go out for bids on Comanche Lake Spillway rehabilitation as part of the grant.

With all of the agenda items passed, Ralls reported to the Public Works Authority on a fire that happened this past weekend that caused damaged

Continued on Page 5

City Update

Long-time city manager takes new position

The Village City Council announced an offer of employment to Dave Sleziekey to be the city's next City Manager. Sleziekey was selected after a nationwide search which began in October, led by Mayor Sonny Wilkinson, Council Member Bubba Symes, and City Attorney Jeff Sabin. He also completed an interview with the City Council and city staff.

Sleziekey currently serves as the City Manager for the City of Kingfisher where he has been for the past 10 years. He earned his International City/County



Managers Association Credentialed Manager (ICMA-CM) status in 2019, and is one of seven active managers in Oklahoma to hold this credential. He earned his Accredited Manager from City Management Association of Oklahoma (CMAO) in 2018. In 2019, he was awarded the Gerald D. Wilkins Award for Outstanding Municipal Government Service from CMAO.

Sleziekey's municipal career began in 2002 as a volunteer firefighter with Anadarko Fire/EMS. He served as a Council Member with the City of

Anadarko from 2005 until deployment to Iraq with his National Guard unit in August 2008. He served as the Town Coordinator for the Town of Hinton and City Manager for the City of Anadarko prior to assuming his current position in Kingfisher. His education includes a Master's degree in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts with a dual major in History and Political Science. He is also a graduate of the United States Army Sergeants Major Academy.

"I became a City Manager because I enjoy being part of a team that makes a daily contribution to improving the community," said Sleziekey. "I'm very excited to come to The Village, realizing that Bruce Stone is leaving big shoes to fill, and am definitely up for the task."

Mayor Sonny Wilkinson stated that he and the City Council are

Continued on Page 5

Best of luck to one of our Board members

It is with mixed feelings we say goodbye to one of our board members, as Dave Slezickey moves on. We recognize it is a good opportunity for him, but OMPA will miss his leadership at the board level. Over his tenure at Kingfisher and on the OMPA Board of Directors, he has provided sound advice and contributed to the success of OMPA. He will be missed.

The Nominations Committee is

General Manager's Report

**David W.
Osburn**



recommending Karrie Beth Little from Watonga to take his place. We are

excited to have her join the board and add her voice to our discussions.

In this newsletter, you will also see a mention of our Legislative Luncheon. I strongly encourage you to attend if you can make it. It is important that the state legislators that attend see the support from our municipal leaders and membership. Please let Tristan or Jennifer know if you plan to attend.

Be safe and hope to see you soon.

Board Reports



Highlights From January 2023 Board of Directors Meeting



- Approved CUP Interim Review Award to Tonkawa Municipal Authority with three awards valued at 2.5 points
- Approved the Annual Meeting be held at the Edmond Conference Center at 1 p.m. on March 9, 2023
- Approved a Mutual Aid agreement with Municipal Electric Systems of Oklahoma
- Approved a short-term power contract extension with Paris, Arkansas that lasts until the end of 2023
- Approved the awarding of the relocation, oil reconditioning and test of a transformer purchased from People's Electric to RMS Energy in the amount of \$106,000
- Approved authorization to the General Manager to present revised Capacity Purchase Agreements to participating trust currently offering generation to the Authority
- Authorized proceeding with issuing RFP for renewable energy pre-pay item

Highlights From February 2023 Board of Directors Meeting

- Recognized the service of Board member Dave Slezickey of Kingfisher
- Approved Board member Glenn Fisher of Edmond as the new Secretary, upon the departure of Dave Slezickey
- Approved CUP recertification aware to Okeene Public Works Authority and Ft. Supply Public Works Authority for two awards valued at 1.5 points each
- Approved the transferring of excess debt service reserve funds to the decommissioning fund

The next Board of Directors meeting is scheduled to be held at 10 a.m. on March 9 at the Edmond Conference Center.

Thanks For The Service



Kingfisher City Manager Dave Slezickey was acknowledged for his service time on the OMPA Board of Directors at the monthly February meeting. Slezickey, center, has accepted a job as a city manager at a city that is not an OMPA member. Slezickey had served on the Board since 2015. At left is Board Chair Homer Nicholson and at right is OMPA General Manager Dave Osburn.

Slezickey:

Continued from Page 3

thrilled to hire Mr. Slezickey. “Dave is coming to our city during a period of unprecedented investment and transformation. His commitment to serving his community and breadth of knowledge regarding municipal issues is vast,” stated Mayor Wilkinson. “The Village has been so fortunate to have the leadership of Bruce Stone for the past 37 years and we look forward to working with Dave to continue the precedent of excellence Bruce has established.”

The City of The Village anticipates that Mr. Slezickey will begin serving as the City Manager in mid-February. Bruce Stone will continue to serve as the City Manager until that time. Mr. Stone will retire as the longest serving City Manager in Oklahoma after 37 years in The Village.

- OKC Friday

Comanche: Continued from Page 3

to a bucket truck.

City Manager Ralls awoke to a call early on Feb. 5 from Comanche Fire Chief that the water plant was on fire.

He showed a photo of the bucket truck that was fully damaged and stated a busted line prevented the power plant from burning. Operations continue despite the damages.

During the presentation, Ralls stated he was surprised how much didn't catch on fire despite having a lot of flammable items in the building. He said it was a miracle it wasn't a total loss.

The city is only out a \$500 deductible for insurance because the Public Works Authority was fully insured. The truck will be covered



along with some other items, although it is uncertain about the building at this time.

A couple of months ago, the Public

Works Authority ordered a new bucket truck. The company providing the truck is going to help out in getting one sooner than the 18 months quoted.

The company will send a truck pulled off the line, according to Ralls, and the city should have possession by the end of this month.

Ralls stated said as a result of this, he has met with a contractor to outfit all city owned facilities with a fire monitoring and carbon dioxide monitoring system for all the areas.

An agenda item will be presented to council once Ralls and the company finds the right fit for the city after the contractor gets the specifications for the costs.

- The Duncan Banner

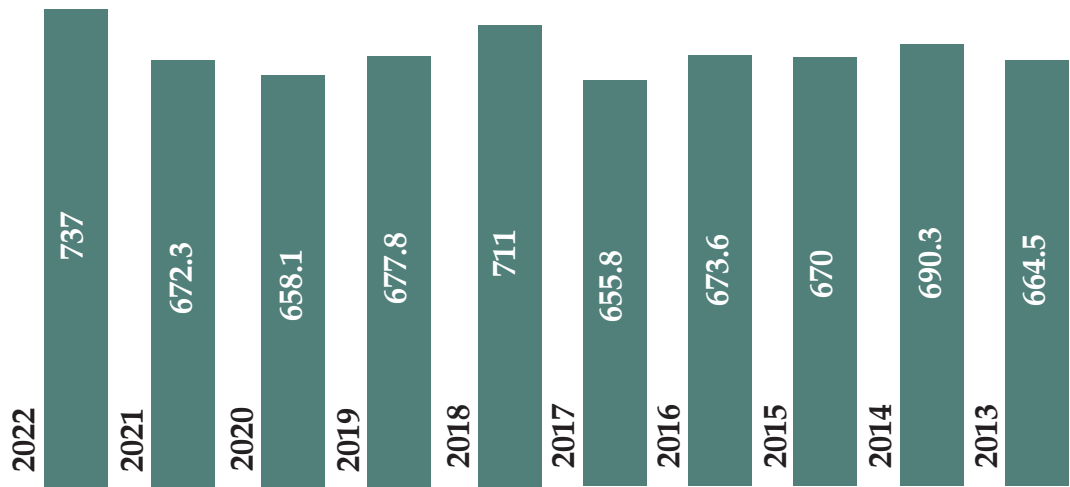
OMPA 2022 Generation Report

Resource Mix

Natural gas was the leading resource for the Authority in 2022 at 46 percent of the mix. Renewables decreased from an all-time high, but were still 27 percent.



Energy is listed in megawatts



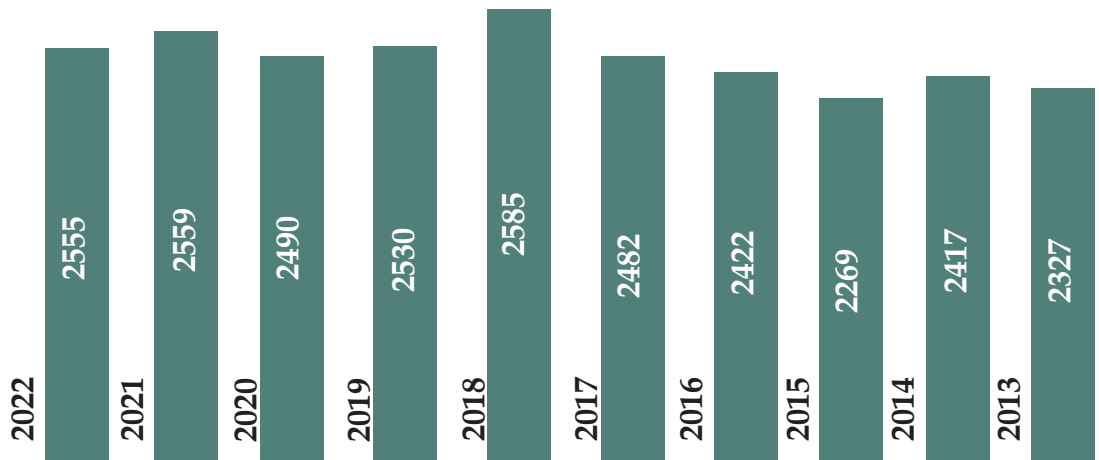
System-Wide Peak

OMPA’s coincident peak for utilities served in Oklahoma only was 736.9 megawatts in 2022. It was the highest peak of the most recent decade.

Energy is listed in gigawatt hours

Energy Delivered

OMPA’s total power delivered in 2022 was 2,555 gigawatt hours, which remained similar to recent years. In all, 24,636 gigawatts of power have been delivered in the last 10 years.



Nominations being accepted for committee

Nominations are being accepted to fill two openings on the Competitive Utility Program (CUP) committee.

Per the CUP manual, the governance of the CUP Oversight Committee reads that the committee shall comprise of eleven members, and the OMPA Board Chair shall serve as a non-voting ex-officio member of the committee.

The committee make-up shall be a member from each of the big-four cities (Altus, Duncan, Edmond, Ponca City) and the remaining seven from the other member cities. Up to three members can be from non-CUP-certified cities.

Currently, there are three openings on the CUP Oversight Committee.

Competitive Utility Program



of the Oklahoma Municipal Power Authority

One is from a big-four city (Ponca City), so therefore, the city will determine who fills that vacancy. The other two openings are open to someone from the other member cities other than the big four.

Therefore, nominations are being accepted to fill those two openings.

The current committee consists of

Jason McPherson, Marlow, (Chair); Mike Villareal, Altus; David Yeager, Duncan; Glenn Fisher, Edmond; Sandy Henley, Pawhuska; Starland Davis, Prague; Nancy Skipper, Tonkawa; and Karla Eschiti, Walters.

Please send nominations to Palma Lough, OMPA, by March 31st. Feel free to nominate yourself.

It is recommended that the nominee be the CUP Coordinator for the city, or someone within the city that is interested in the CUP program and is working on, or considering working on, a CUP application for the city.

For more information, please contact Palma Lough at plough@ompa.com.

Legislator luncheon scheduled for April

OMPA will host a legislative luncheon at 11 a.m. on April 4 at the Oklahoma History Center, 800 Nazih Zudhi Dr. in Oklahoma City. The event is being organized to educate members of the legislature on who OMPA is and the role that it plays as a power supplier to public power utilities across the state.

Electors from each of OMPA's 42 members are encouraged to attend to express their own support for public power. They are also asked to contact their local representatives and encourage them to attend.

Local outreach by OMPA members has played a significant role in preventing damaging legislation from moving forward during previous sessions. The Authority has a Legislative Committee, made up of board members and OMPA staff, that regularly promotes OMPA's message, but additional assistance from the



Ponca City Mayor and current OMPA Chair Homer Nicholson has a discussion at a previous legislative luncheon hosted by the Authority.

rest of the membership is always appreciated.

For more information, or to RSVP

for the luncheon, call (405) 359-2500 or email Jennifer Rogers at jrogers@ompa.com.

Committee approves changes to rebate programs DEEP and W.I.S.E.

The Programs and Services Committee approved a series of changes to rebate programs members participate in at a Feb. 16 meeting.

The first involved bringing back certain customers as potentially eligible for the Demand and Energy Efficiency Program (DEEP). The program – which provides rebates to customers for the installation of high-efficiency LED lighting and heat pumps or geothermal heat pump systems – had been limited to organizations like government or non-profits in recent years after originally also offering eligibility to commercial and industrial customers.

The committee voted to bring commercial and industrial customers back into eligibility for the program, only with a cap on the rebate they can obtain of \$5,000 per facility. The cap would not have applied to 85 percent of the rebates funded to commercial and industrial customers, before they were removed from the program.

The change to the DEEP program will need to be approved by the OMPA Board of Directors, before it is finalized.



Demand and Energy Efficiency Program

The second program change involved the Ways I Save Electricity (W.I.S.E.) program, which provides rebates for qualifying heat-pump systems. The committee voted to raise the minimum Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio (SEER) for qualifying rebates to match new minimum efficiency standards from the Department of Energy and Energy Star, which went into effect at the start of 2023. These new standards raise the minimum from 16 SEER to 17 SEER.

In addition, since the minimum was raised by 1 SEER, increased \$/ton rebates that apply to higher-efficiency



installations were also increased by 1 SEER. Consult the below graph for the complete numbers.

The final proposal that was approved by the committee makes it a requirement that customers applying for rebates as part of the W.I.S.E. program have an in-home energy audit conducted, before they qualify for the rebate. This requirement was already in place for those customers applying for rebates for ceiling insulation and high-efficiency hot water tanks.

For questions about rebate programs, contact Steve Mathena at smathena@ompa.com.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: 12.0 EER- 9.0 HSPF- SEER RATING SHOWN IN TABLE				
All UNITS WILL BE REBATED PER COOLING TON, TO THE NEAREST HUNDREDTH				
	RESIDENTIAL AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP REBATE	RESIDENTIAL DUAL FUEL HEAT PUMP REBATE	COMMERCIAL AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP REBATE	COMMERCIAL DUAL FUEL HEAT PUMP REBATE
SEER 17.00-17.99	\$175 per ton	\$125 per ton	\$125 per ton	\$75 per ton
SEER 18.00- 18.99	\$200 per ton	\$150 per ton	\$150 per ton	\$100 per ton
SEER 19.00- 20.99	\$275 per ton	\$225 per ton	\$225 per ton	\$175 per ton
SEER 21+	\$300 per ton	\$250 per ton	\$250 per ton	\$200 per ton
Ducted or Non- Ducted Mini Split Heat Pumps 18 SEER Min	\$150 per ton	N/A	\$100 per ton	N/A
Multi-Family Unit Heat Pumps 18 SEER Min	\$150 per ton for the first 50 units \$100 per ton for remaining units	\$100 per ton for the first 50 units \$50 per ton for remaining units	\$100 per ton for the first 50 units \$50 per ton for remaining units	\$75 per ton for the first 50 units \$25 per ton for remaining units

Keynote speakers and sessions lined up for this year's Public Power Conference

The MESO Public Power Conference will be April 23-25 in Tulsa at the Renaissance Hotel & Convention Center.

The annual Public Power Conference brings together leaders of municipal electric systems across Oklahoma and neighboring states, allowing participants the opportunity to connect with key decision-makers. It is typically attended by more than 200, drawing in city managers, supervisors, lineworkers, and customer service professionals.

Featured sessions include Dave Young, Kansas Deputy Homeland Security Advisor, on "Error Reduction: Why We Get Things Wrong" and Paul Mellor on "Electrifying Your Memory". Other scheduled session topics includes those on grid security, understanding the mutual aid process, generations at work, recruiting and retaining talent, emotional intelligence, understanding the supply chain, a metering class, a capacitor class, android and iPhone cybersecurity, a class on contracts and negotiations,



under the Power Cost Adjustment and managing conflict.

Several members of the OMPA staff are again set to present on some of the topics.

Attendees can register online or visit the MESO website for additional information. Full conference registration is \$525 per person and includes lodging for Sunday, April

23 and Monday, April 24, all meals, sessions, etc. Other options are available for those who are unable to attend the full conference. To register online, go to meso.org by April 5.

The event will begin on April 23 with the pre-conference golf tournament at Page Belcher Golf Course in Tulsa. Cost is \$65 per person for green fees and a half cart.

City Update

Residents fight to keep local hospital open

Leaders of Stillwater Medical Center – Blackwell told community members at a meeting that securing additional federal funding may be the only way to keep the local hospital open.

"The alternative is to not have a



hospital at all," said Steven Taylor, the hospital's CEO.

"If you're running a business, and you're losing \$1 million per year, you can't do that for a long period of time. Eventually, you have to do something different."

Taylor and Courtney Kozikuski, the hospital's CFO, spoke to about two dozen community members at the Blackwell Event Center that evening during a Town Hall style meeting to discuss the hospital's future and potential service changes.

It was the second community meeting they hosted that day. Hospital leaders announced in January that they intend to apply for a new designation from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid that would give the facility an additional \$267,000 per month on top of reimbursement.

However, if the hospital is

Continued on Page 11

City Update

City moving to upgrade water system

Edmond officials said they're investing big money into the city water system.

Millions of dollars would go toward new infrastructure that they hope will benefit the city for decades to come.

"Our planning experts tell us that we could get another thirty to forty thousand people in the next twenty to thirty years," said Bill Begley, spokesperson for Edmond.

Basic supply and demand with population growth are driving Edmond's huge plan to upgrade their water system to the tune of about half a billion dollars,



edmondelectric
The POWER of Edmond

but the cost won't be paid all at once.

"We're able to spread that cost out over the next 30 years, it ensures the residents today have the water they need, and the residents of the future have water," Begley said.

First on the to-do list is a new intake facility to pull around 18 million gallons a day from Arcadia Lake.

"Our first priority is to get the intake facility finished. That's what we're working on right now, that'll allow us to pull in more water, and process more water," Begley said.

Next, the city wants to build a

bigger water processing plant with a goal for completion around 2028. They've also dug some new wells to store water.

"When we finish with those wells, we'll be getting an additional four to five million gallons on average," Begley said.

Currently, Edmond pays Oklahoma City annually to preserve water just in case the city runs low and needs to keep water service going. The city wants to ditch that and those water wells are a big piece of making that happen.

"In 2019, we took a look at drilling wells that might supplement our water supply and keep us from having to reserve that water at a cost every year," Begley said.

The city said Edmond's population has continued to grow every year for the past 20 years and they hope this water plan will benefit locals for the next 30 to 40 years.

- KOCO

City Update

City welcomes new police chief at meeting

Duncan's newest police chief officially took his position's oath before city council, family, friends and fellow officers.

Municipal Judge Joe Eños swore Police Chief Bo Walker into his position at the beginning of the meeting in front of a packed room after City Manager Kim Meek formally recognized him to the position. Walker took over as the interim police chief for Duncan when former chief Danny Ford retired in mid-December. He served as acting chief for the month before that



to train with Ford.

During the ceremony, they changed Walker's Major bars for his new Chief bars. He then signed his oath of office under the direction of City Attorney David Hammond.

Walker, who boasts a career of 31 years in law enforcement, said it was an honor to be selected for the chief's position.

"We have a great department because of the employees that work for our organization and because of the support of our community," Walker

said. "I am proud to be a part of the Duncan Police Department, which I view as the best in the state, and possibly the nation."

According to City of Duncan, Chief Walker has also served as the Second in Command of administration and personnel operations and has provided "direct oversight and operational management" for multiple divisions, including the detective division, the patrol division and the communication division. Additionally, he also served as an incident commander during emergency events, according to City of Duncan, and recently assisted with "policy development and functioned as a Drug Recognition Expert."

Along with this, Walker "previously supervised Patrol Division, Advanced Accident Team, Dive Team, and Lake Patrol" and is the Special Response Team Commander.

Blackwell: Continued from Page 9

redesignated as a rural emergency hospital, it would no longer offer acute inpatient care, though patients could be admitted for observation care.

Hospital officials said they're applying for the new designation because the hospital has lost roughly \$4.7 million since January 2020.

"We're looking for ways to be more financially viable," Taylor said.

The rural emergency hospital designation was the result of federal legislation passed in 2020, and it went into effect Jan. 1.

Hospitals can now apply for the new designation. The new designation would allow the local hospital to keep its emergency room and outpatient services open, Taylor said.

The hospital would no longer be considered an acute inpatient care hospital, but it could keep patients for observation care by a physician.

Under the new designation, the hospital's average yearly admission time cannot exceed 24 hours per patient, which means that some patients may be under observation care for more or less than that period of time, Taylor said.

"Some patients may only need to be observed by a physician for 12 hours," Taylor said.

"It may be 36 or 48 hours. It all depends on the patient. ... A year is a long time to come up with an average. Now, that's something obviously we'll be monitoring on a monthly basis, a weekly basis, to see where we're at."

Patients who need acute inpatient care, generally referred to as short-term hospitalization for treatment of injuries and illnesses, or additional observation care would have to be transferred to another facility, Taylor said. "People should still come," Taylor said.

"We're going to take care of them as much as we can. If somebody has pneumonia and they're not improving, sure, we may have to ship them

somewhere else. But it's not like you cannot stay at the hospital."

Rural hospitals across the nation have grappled with low reimbursement from Medicare and insurance providers for years, Taylor said. Hospitals also had to spend more money during the coronavirus pandemic to provide additional care and purchase personal protective equipment, and they've faced the costs of pandemic-related inflation.

About 76% of Oklahoma's hospitals are operating "in the red," Kozikuski said, as operating costs have risen by about 26% in the past two to three years. The additional funding from the new designation should allow the hospital to remain open, Taylor said.

However, he said he could not make any guarantees, and hospital leaders currently have no "plan B" for keeping the hospital open if the redesignation isn't approved. "We believe that it will [stay open] as long as the funding continues to come in like they say it is," he said.

Although the funding comes from the federal government, it's contingent upon the passage of state Senate Bill 293, which would allow the Oklahoma Healthcare Authority – the state agency responsible for dispensing Medicare and Medicaid funds – to give the money to rural emergency hospitals.

The bill is up for consideration in the state legislative session beginning in February. If the state Legislature approves the bill, hospital officials say they hope the additional funding will arrive shortly thereafter. Other hospitals, including Stillwater Medical Center – Perry, would benefit from it as well, Taylor said. He believes the Legislature will pass the bill, and he encouraged citizens to contact their state legislators to discuss it.

While the new designation may allow the hospital to stay open, city leaders say that shutting down inpatient care services could have a

negative financial impact on the city's ambulance service.

During the Jan. 19 City Council meeting, City Manager Jerry Wieland, Fire Chief Cory Hanebrink and other city officials said the new designation likely would mean more patients have to be transferred by ambulance to other hospitals in the region. The increased number of transfers could leave the city without an ambulance nearby for short periods of time, and it could cost the city an additional \$500,000 per year in operational expenses, Councilman Robert Husted said during the Council meeting.

Taylor disputed those figures during the Thursday Town Hall meeting, saying the number of transfers cannot be predicted. "I think speculating on what it is going to cost isn't accurate until we start doing it," Taylor said. "Based on what we think, there could be 10 transfers per month over and above what there is now based on the patients we currently serve. But one month, it could be five. One month, it could be 10."

While Taylor and Kozikuski spoke to audience members at the front of the room, Wieland, Hanebrink and Chief of Police Dewayne Wood sat toward the back of the audience and remained silent during most of the meeting. In response to a question from an audience member, Hanebrink said:

"We'll just be on reacting mode. We don't know if it's going to happen. They're waiting on legislation. They may or may not pass it. Then, we'll just have to see how many patients are transferred out to determine what the impact will be on the city."

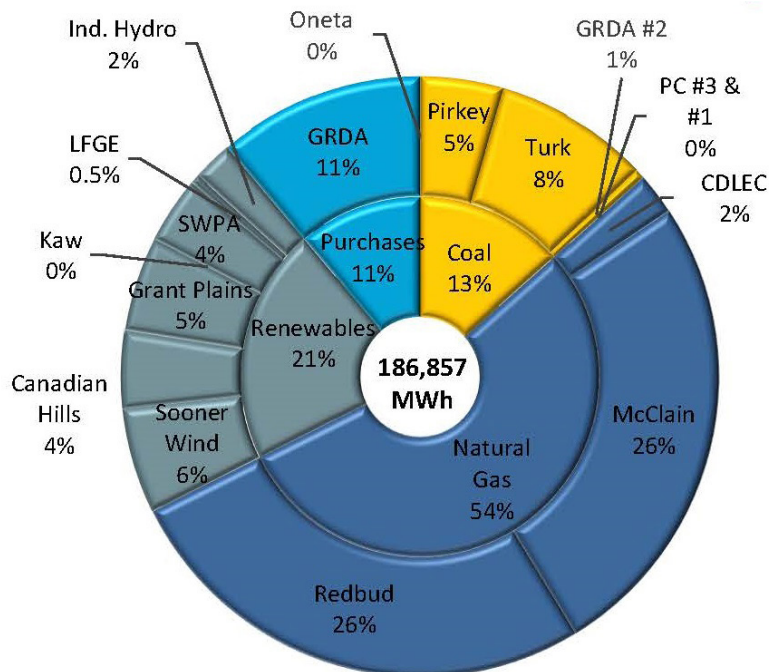
Taylor also said the hospital does not plan to give the City of Blackwell any of the additional funding it may receive to help offset increased ambulance costs. However, he said the hospital and city leaders could have discussions about the situation.



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