Proposed 2016 budget maintains quality services, addresses growth

Careful deliberation has been underway for months on the proposed 2016 county budget, all in an effort to determine the best steps to take for Johnson County’s future. The Board of County Commissioners is considering a mill levy (property tax) increase for the first time since 2006.

The consideration arose after several challenges left Johnson County with an estimated $13.6 million shortfall for 2016. Some of these challenges are actually positive news such as population growth. During the past decade, 60,000 people moved to the county, equivalent to adding a city the size of Manhattan, Kan., and indicating Johnson County is clearly a desirable place to live, work and raise a family.

Johnson County went through the recession without increasing the mill levy by using reserve funds to support county operations, reducing the overall budget by $46 million and cutting 428 positions. However, last year the state began to phase out the Mortgage Registration and Collection Fee, one of the county’s major revenue sources, projected to result in a $30-49 million revenue reduction for Johnson County over the next five years.

With the projected shortfalls, a number of options were presented including additional reductions as well as a mill levy increase to help meet county’s future growth needs.

The current proposed budget is a maintenance budget and includes a mill levy increase of 1.622 to eliminate the county’s deficit, a .178 mill levy increase to expand para-transit and job connector routes; a .75 mill levy increase to open unused park land and trails and make multiple park improvements; and a .75 mill levy increase for new and improved libraries. The needs for parks and libraries were determined through a strategic planning process based on growth and anticipated demand over the next 15 to 20 years.

The total 3.3 mill levy increase county commissioners agreed to consider will position the county for the future and address the revenue shortfall. For a Johnson County family, this would equal approximately $4.75 a month for a home appraised at $150,000; $8.26 a month for a home appraised at $261,000, and $12.66 a month for a home appraised at $400,000. For Olathe families, the effects will be smaller since Olathe has its own library system.

If the proposed budget is approved, Johnson County would remain the lowest county mill levy in the state for general government at 19.564 with an overall mill rate including parks and libraries of 26.570.

In summary, the 2016 proposed budget has a maximum expenditure of $928,684,764, of which $328.7 million is the county general expenditure budget.

The proposed budget is available online at http://www.jocogov.org/dept/budget-and-financial-planning/home (see Proposed Budget tab). A public hearing will take place July 27 at 7 p.m. with the county commission voting on the budget Aug. 13. We encourage the public’s participation in this process.

Ed Eilert
Chairman
Board of County Commissioners

Hannes Zacharias
County Manager
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Ways to Engage with JoCo

Online
Visit jocogov.org to:
• Find your County Commissioner
• Get answers to questions
• Learn about the more than 400 services Johnson County provides to residents.

Social Media
Twitter: @jocogov
Facebook: facebook.com/jocogov
Pinterest: pinterest.com/jocogov

By Phone
Call Center: 913-715-5000
TDD: 800-766-3777

In Person
Attend a weekly Board of County Commissioners meeting at 9:30 a.m. on Thursdays on the third floor of the Administration Building, 111 S. Cherry St., Olathe, Kansas 66061.

Johnson County Elected Officials
Ed Eilert, Chairman
Ronald L. “Ron” Shaffer, District 1
James P. Allen, District 2
Steven C. Klika, District 3
Jason Osterhaus, District 4
Michael Ashcraft, District 5
John Toplikar, District 6
Stephen M. Howe, District Attorney
Frank Denning, Sheriff

ABOVE: On May 13, 2015, students from a K-State architectural studio class were recognized for their work on the Sunset Pavilion — an outdoor structure behind the Johnson County Government Sunset Building in Olathe. The pavilion will be used for outdoor meetings, events and classes.

jocogov.org
In short

A brief glimpse into what’s going on at Johnson County Government

BOCC approves public art for Justice Annex
As part of Johnson County’s 1% Public Art initiative, Kansas City artist Beth Nybeck’s proposed artwork “Tapestry” was selected for the Justice Annex building courtyard at 588 Santa Fe in Olathe. “Tapestry” is a set of five large, plant-like aluminum figures, one as large as 11-feet tall. Each piece will feature letters, sentences and phrases that tell stories associated with the people who work at, and frequent, the Justice Annex building. “Tapestry” will be commissioned for $75,000. The sculpture is scheduled for completion in November 2015.

Vanya visits Johnson County Government
The Johnson County Board of County Commissioners recognized 2015 Scripps National Spelling Bee co-champion and Olathe student Vanya Shivashankar with a Certificate of Special Commendation.

“It means so much to me that the Johnson County community has supported my sister and me since she started competing in the national spelling bee in 2006,” said Vanya Shivashankar.

New energy conservation initiative
Johnson County Government is moving forward with a new energy-saving initiative announced earlier this spring. The county entered a five-year agreement with Cenergistic, Inc., a firm specializing in behavioral-based energy management. This program is estimated to save the county approximately $500,000 per year in utility costs.

Kudos!

Walt Way gets Lifetime Achievement Award
Emergency Management and Communications Director Walt Way received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Kansas City Regional 9-1-1 System for his dedication and leadership in the fields of public safety and 9-1-1 operations for Johnson County, the Greater Kansas City region, and the state of Kansas. He started working for the Johnson County Sheriff’s Office in 1973 and was promoted to captain of the operations bureau in 1986. In the early 1990s, Way’s guidance enabled the state of Kansas to provide a stable funding source for 9-1-1 services. In 2004, he retired from the Sheriff’s Office and become the Director of Johnson County’s Emergency Management and Communications department where he leads efforts to provide quality service to citizens.

quotable

“Throughout our history, when faced with a choice to maintain or build for the future, we have looked forward. The proposed budget strikes a positive balance between good stewardship and providing the best possible services at their current levels. It provides for a positive environment for our employees to continue their commitment to high performance on our community’s behalf.”

— County Manager Hannes Zacharias, from his Budget Message to the Board of County Commissioners
What would you guess is the nation’s largest provider of mental health care? Are you picturing a large hospital or medical clinic? You should be picturing a jail. A recent CNN article says that the three biggest mental health providers are the Los Angeles County jail, Rikers Island in New York and Cook County jail in Chicago.

Each year nearly two million people with mental illness are admitted to a U.S. jail. That’s equivalent to the combined populations of Vermont and New Hampshire. A new national initiative is calling counties to “step up” and find a solution, and Johnson County was one of the first to answer that call.

Time to “Step Up”
The Stepping Up initiative launched in May 2015 in four jurisdictions: Johnson County, Washington D.C., Miami-Dade County, Florida and Sacramento, California. National partners for the initiative include the National Association of Counties (NACo), the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center and the American Psychiatric Foundation.

“Johnson County was selected as one of the launch sites because of the progress that’s already been made here in this area,” said Sallie Clark, president of NACo and a county commissioner in El Paso County, Colorado. “Over the past several years Johnson County’s collaborative efforts have resulted in data-driven programs that are already showing success.”

Why it matters
People with mental illnesses tend to stay longer in jail and are at higher risk of getting arrested again, compared to the general population. Also, jails spend two-to-three times more on people with mental illnesses than they do on others.

One local advocate of the Stepping Up initiative is Howard Snyder. The Leawood resident has served on the board of the Johnson County Mental Health Center and was on a team that helped change state legislation about committing people with mental illness. He learned a lot about the problem because of his son who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia for 27 years.

“For a while our son lived on the streets in Arizona, and we know that along the way he had brushes with the law and most likely spent a bit of time behind bars,” Snyder said. “Jails are not the appropriate place for someone with a mental illness.”

Johnson County Sheriff Frank Denning agrees. “I’ve had parents tell me they hate to see their child incarcerated, especially if they have been arrested on a minor violation, but there is no other place for them to go,” he said. “For the last few decades, I’ve been running the largest mental health hospital in the state of Kansas.”
Recent community survey shows that residents are mostly pleased with county services

By ANDY GRAHAM

Johnson County’s 2015 Community Survey reveals increases in overall satisfaction with quality of services, value of county taxes and effectiveness in communicating with residents. The survey is conducted every other year to receive community input on services provided by Johnson County.

“The 2015 survey shows that Johnson County is moving in the right direction on several fronts and is setting the standard in service delivery when compared with the rest of the country,” County Manager Hannes Zacharias said. “We are grateful for the time Johnson County residents gave to this survey and we will continually work to improve our services.”

Overall key findings
Satisfaction with the quality of life in Johnson County was measured at 94 percent — 13 percent higher than the national average.

Regarding the overall value of county taxes, the 2015 satisfaction rate increased 5 percent over 2013, and is up 11 percent from 2005.

When asked about the availability of arts and cultural amenities in the county, residents voiced a 66 percent satisfaction rate in 2015. That’s up from 63 percent in 2013 and 52 percent in 2011.

Satisfaction with the effectiveness of county communication increased 8 percent from 2013. Additionally, the survey revealed significant increases in residents’ familiarity will 11 of the 22 county departments and offices assessed in the survey.

Johnson County as a place to live, work and play
• 96 percent were satisfied with Johnson County as a place to live (consistent with the 97 percent in 2013 and the 96 percent in 2011). The national rate was 83 percent;
• 95 percent were satisfied with Johnson County as a place to raise children (96 percent in 2013, 94 percent in 2011). The national rate was 79 percent; and,
• 87 percent were satisfied with Johnson County as a place to work (down from 90 percent in 2013). The national rate was 58 percent.

Public safety
• 96 percent of residents feel safe in their neighborhood during the day (consistent with the 97 percent in 2013 and 95 percent in 2011). The national rate was 90 percent;
• As far as feeling safe after dark, 90 percent of residents feel safe in their neighborhoods at night (92 percent in 2013 and 85 percent in 2011). The national rate was 68 percent;
• Johnson County residents feel safer in their parks than prior years, and significantly safer than people in other parts of the U.S. 75 percent reported feeling safe in County parks in 2015, compared to 72 percent in 2013 and 58 percent in 2011. The national rate in 2015 is 62 percent.

Satisfaction with county services
The highest areas of satisfaction were with Johnson County Library (88 percent), Johnson County Park & Recreation District (87 percent), and 67 percent for both the county’s Election Office and Emergency Medical Services/MED-ACT.

Satisfaction with the county’s Department of Motor Vehicle services (vehicle titling and registration) increased 17 percent over 2013.

“People may remember that in May 2012, the implementation of a new state computer system caused a period of long lines,” Thomas Franzen, Johnson County finance director and treasurer said. “Since that time, we have worked to improve the titling and registration process. We have a very hard working and customer service-oriented staff, and we are pleased to see that satisfaction rates have improved.”

Other findings
Parks: 84 percent of participants feel the county’s park system meets the community’s needs. 42 percent would support a property tax increase to make improvements in existing parks, while 23 percent would support a property tax to acquire more park land.

Libraries: 79 percent feel the county’s library system is adequate to support the needs of residents. 40 percent said Johnson County should build additional libraries in areas where population growth is expected, and 28 percent said they would be willing to pay more in property taxes to build new libraries.

Transit: More than two thirds (69 percent) of residents felt the county should increase efforts to coordinate routes and schedules with regional transit partners. Nearly half (48 percent) said Johnson County should offer bus service in all parts of the county, and 29 percent said they would pay higher taxes to expand transit services.

Survey methodology
ETC Institute of Olathe conducted the 2015 Johnson County Community Survey in April. This was the fifth community survey since Johnson County started surveying residents every other year in 2005. The survey involved a random sample of 3,000 Johnson County households with 1,329 completed surveys that included at least 200 responses from each of Johnson County’s six districts.

WEB Visit www.jocogov.org/jocomag to read the complete 2015 Community Survey and findings report.
Bound by a love of gardening and sharing information, volunteers work to improve JoCo’s quality of life

By ADELE L. WILCOXEN

Extension Master Gardener Ray Stolhand was working the Gardening Hotline when a gentleman walked in seeking help.

Inside a plastic bag was a large clump of bulbs. The man wanted to know what they were because they didn’t bloom this past spring and he wondered why, so he dug them up and brought them in.

After taking one look Stolhand told the fellow that they were daffodils and were too compacted, which is why they didn’t bloom. He told him to spread the bulbs apart, plant them this coming fall, and they would bloom again next spring. He thanked Stolhand for his help and went on his merry way.

Another satisfied customer had just used the free gardening hotline service, courtesy of Johnson County K-State Research and Extension.

Many people have heard the term “master gardener,” and some even call themselves master gardeners. But unless they underwent university training they are not a certified Extension master gardener.

In Kansas, K-State Research and Extension started the Extension Master Gardener (EMG) program statewide in 1980. Johnson County was the first program in the state and is now in its 35th year with 410 volunteers.

The program is supervised by Dennis Patton, horticulture agent for Johnson County Extension in Olathe. The program requires 48 hours of training and a minimum of 40 hours of service to earn certification. After that volunteers must continue to volunteer a minimum of 30 hours and attend at least 10 hours of EMG advanced training each year to maintain their certification.

On average a Johnson County EMG donates 113 hours annually. Last year, 46,172 hours of service were donated to the county.

“EMGs volunteer because they are passionate about gardening and educating people,” Patton said. “They have no hidden agenda or ulterior motive. They simply love what they do and want you to be successful in your landscape. Oh, and they have a lot of fun.”

Johnson County citizens have access to EMGs through numerous events, a speakers bureau, demonstration gardens, the biennial public garden tour, youth education, and the gardening hotline.

Seven demonstration gardens are located throughout the county. Citizens can visit the gardens and see recommended plants, best maintenance culture and plant combinations to implement at home.

Two of the best known demonstration gardens are at Deanna Rose Farmstead and the Monet Garden at the Overland Park Arboretum. All demonstration gardens have a garden crew of EMGs that work weekly (recognized by their shirts and nametags) and are available to answer questions.

Citizens can also call the gardening hotline, email pictures to the hotline, or use the Extension’s walk-in service. While EMGs are university-trained they don’t always have an immediate answer to every question. Volunteers will research answers or consult with experts.

Most of the EMG services are free. For example, residents can get a free soil test, courtesy of Johnson County Stormwater Management. EMGs will help to fill out forms and can advise on how to take a soil sample. Samples are sent to the Kansas State University lab, and results are interpreted by Patton, who writes recommendations for each citizen’s soil.

The reasons Johnson County residents volunteer is as varied as the skills and talents they bring to the program. As for Stolhand, he says that besides learning about all aspects of gardening, volunteering in other garden projects for the public appealed to him.

“The opportunity to help others with their garden problems and questions is something I enjoy, along with becoming friends and associates with other EMGs,” he said. “EMGs are from a wide range of backgrounds which makes them some of the most interesting people to work with. This has made retirement an exciting venture.”

To learn more about the services provided by Johnson County Extension Master Gardeners go to www.johnson.ksu.edu and click on “Lawn and Garden,” then “Extension Master Gardeners.” If you’d like to join the program, click on “Becoming an EMG.” 🌷
What does Johnson County’s proposed 2016 budget mean for you and your family?

By breaking down Johnson County’s budget into a few key concepts, it’s easier to see how the proposed changes in the 2016 budget would impact each family in the county.

Concept 1: Appraised value vs. assessed value
The appraised value of a home is its fair market value as assigned by the Johnson County Appraiser’s Office each year.

Kansas law says that the assessed value of a home is 11.5% of the appraised value.

$261,000 x 11.5% = $30,015 assessed value for the Johnsons’ home.

Concept 2: Explaining the mill levy
A mill is similar to the relationship between a meter and a millimeter.

1 millimeter = 1/1000 of a meter
1 mill = $1 taxes per $1,000 assessed value

With a house assessed at $30,015, the Johnsons pay $30.01 in property tax per mill.

Concept 3: Multiple taxing districts
Every Johnson County home belongs to several taxing authorities and districts. All homes belong to the state of Kansas, Johnson County Government, Johnson County Park & Recreation District and Johnson County Community College districts.

A house could be in a city or township district. It’s also located in a school district, which is another taxing authority. Unless you live in Olathe (which has its own library system) your home is part of the Johnson County Library taxing authority. And, your home may belong to storm drain, cemetery or recreation districts.

When the Johnsons look at one dollar of their property taxes, here’s how it’s divided into the various taxing districts:
What's proposed for the 2016 budget?
Johnson County’s 2016 published budget includes a 3.3 mill levy increase which includes funds for maintaining current service levels for Johnson County residents, expanding services for The JO transit system, adding parks and improving libraries. The mill levy has not been increased since 2006.

The Board of County Commissioners is considering the following mill levy rates for 2016:

**Johnson County General Fund mill levy rate**
2015: 17.764
2016 proposed: 19.564
Increase: 1.8

*Why?*
This increase is necessary to maintain current service levels in Johnson County. During the Great Recession, Johnson County reduced staffing and programs, and used funding from reserves to prevent a mill levy increase. Unfortunately, a loss in revenue from Mortgage Registration Collection Fees, along with the need to increase law enforcement resources, left the county with a significant deficit.

A portion of the proposed mill levy (.178 mills) will expand services for The JO, providing an alternative transportation method for everyone, especially some of our most vulnerable populations (the elderly and disabled) who rely on public transportation to get to jobs and medical appointments.

**Johnson County Park & Recreation District (JCPRD)**
2015: 2.349
2016 proposed 3.099
Increase: .75

*Why?*
This mill levy will ensure that Johnson County meets the needs of expected population growth and demographic changes projected for the next 20 years. A .75 mill levy provides for five new parks at various phases, development of 30 miles of new streamway trails, and improvements and upgrades to existing parks.

**Johnson County Library (JCL)**
2015: 3.157
2016 proposed 3.907
Increase: .75

*Why?*
This .75 mill levy will ensure JCL can meet the growing needs for library services in the county by modernizing existing facilities and expanding capacity throughout the entire county.

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### How will these mill levy increases impact the Johnsons and their $261,000 home?

**Assessed Value:** $30,015

**Per Mill:** / 1,000

**Property Tax / Mill:** $30.015

**2016 Mill levy Increase:** x 3.3 mills

**Annual Impact:** $99.05

**Monthly Impact:** $8.25

The monthly impact for the owner of a $150,000 house would be $4.75 a month. For a $400,000 home owner, it would be $12.66 a month.

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### How about your home?

**Your home's appraised value**

x 11.5%

**Your home's assessed value**

/ 1,000

**Property tax per mill**

**2016 mill levy increase** x 3.3

**Annual impact**

/ 12

**Monthly impact**

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WEB EXTRA To learn more about the County budget and read the latest Budget Blog post, visit www.jocogov.org/jocomag.
This summer marks the 46th season of raising the curtain at the Theatre in the Park, Johnson County Park & Recreation District’s community theater located in Shawnee Mission Park. More than 35,000 people attend a live theatre performance here each season, when professional staff team up with hundreds of volunteer actors, crew and musicians to put on a season of five musicals.

Here we give you a peek behind the curtain at this season’s auditions, casting and preparations for the first show of the season, “The Wiz.”

**Auditions: March 28**

597 aspiring Theatre in the Park performers, ages 7 to 70, auditioned for the 2015 season of Theatre in the Park.

A well-oiled network of Theatre in the Park volunteers, ambassadors and staff collaborated to get through nearly 50 auditions an hour during two days at Blue Valley High School.

Those auditioning came prepared with 16 bars of a song for the singing tryout, and belted out audition pieces to a roomful of casting directors and musical staff.

Theatre in the Park Choreographer Kacey Christensen brought in groups of auditioners to spend 10 minutes learning a 25-second dance routine. After a few minutes of practice, the group performed it in front of a panel of judges.
Out of the 597 people who auditioned, more than 300 were invited for callbacks. From there, the directors of each show selected a first, second and third choice for each role. Conflicts are identified, and the actors’ show preferences are factored in. At a casting meeting, casting directors, producers, musical directors, etc. make the decision about who to cast for each role. Nearly 200 actors were hired for the 2015 season.

The first production of the 2015 season is “The Wiz.” Rehearsals began on April 26 at Leawood United Methodist Church. For a little more than a month, the cast and directors met nearly every evening for hours of character talks, script reading, blocking, music and choreography rehearsals.

Rehearsals kick off with a warmup that includes scales, tongue twisters, the Hokey Pokey, the Macarena and the Star Spangled Banner.

By mid-May, actors could still be “on book,” but were encouraged to memorize their lines.

Actors playing principal roles of Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tinman and Lion run lines with Director Bess Wallerstein Huff and Assistant Stage Manager Charlotte Gilman.

Cast members get coaching from Vocal Director Donna Dandino and learn new dance numbers from Choreographer Kacy Christensen.
On May 31, rehearsals moved from Leawood United Methodist Church to the Theatre in the Park stage. Actors and production crew worked on spacing, progressed to running through the whole show, and then added in the live musicians and the costumes, makeup and hair. The show opened on June 5.

Preparations: Landscaping, Lighting, Sets and Costumes

One of the things you notice before you even get through the Theatre in the Park gates is the beautiful landscaping surrounding the venue. Craig Shafar, a horticulturist for Johnson County Park & Recreation District, works with one other seasonal employee to plant and maintain the grounds each season. They plant close to 1,000 plants each year.

It takes about a week for a master electrician, lighting designer and three other electricians to load the lights that will shine on the cast all season long. 180-200 lights illuminate the Theatre in the Park stage.

Scenic Director Michaela Stein, Technical Director Jason Harris and Associate Technical Director Mark Jacobsen lead a team of six carpenters and three painters who will build sets all season. Set building for The Wiz took three weeks, and each other show should take two weeks.

As costume designer for The Wiz, Jenny Green went by one rule: there ARE no rules in the Land of Oz. Costumes for this production trended towards the funky with bright colors and a variety of textures. Green was responsible for designing 165 costumes. Members of the chorus had as many as six costume changes.

Attending a show

- Curtain opens for all shows at 8:30 p.m.
- Gates open at 6:30 p.m.
- Tickets prices range from $0 for children 3 and under to $20 for reserved chairs.
- Buy your tickets online or at the gate.
- Things to bring: blankets, chairs, food, bug spray, Frisbees and balls for pre-show entertainment
- Things NOT to bring: Pets, video cameras, alcohol, glass containers
- More information can be found at theatreinthepark.org

By the numbers

80 Reserved chairs available for each musical
$25 The cost to park in reserved parking for an entire season
26 Donors for the 2015 season
$53,850 Total sponsorship money for the 2015 season

WEB Visit www.jocogov.org/jocomag to watch a video of the cast of “The Wiz” during a warm-up session.
Pledge to protect Johnson County’s waterways

By JODY HANSON

This time of year you might enjoy walking or biking along Johnson County’s streamway trails, or fishing or boating at Shawnee Mission Park. And even if you don’t, you most likely drink water from a tap. That’s why all of us are invested in protecting the quality of our County’s water resources.

How the Johnson County Stormwater Management Program helps
The primary objective of the Johnson County Stormwater Management Program is to provide cities with funding to design and construct flood mitigation projects. It partners with the 20 cities in Johnson County as well as other cities, counties and agencies in the Kansas City metropolitan area. A 1/10th of one percent sales tax funds the program, and has helped pay for an estimated $200 million in flood mitigation projects for cities.

“Johnson County Stormwater Management significantly helps cities with our flooding mitigation projects, as well as the public outreach and education required to help us stay in compliance,” said Joe Johnson, public works director for the city of Leawood. “It’s a very valuable program.”

While there is still a significant number of flooding issues that need to be addressed in Johnson County, better planning efforts and development standards adopted over the last 20 years have minimized the creation of new flooding problems today.

Clean water regulations are now focused on cleaning up stormwater runoff.

Keeping stormwater clean
Stormwater is rain or snow that “runs off” across the land instead of seeping into the ground. Runoff is increased on surfaces which don’t absorb water such as roads, parking lots, and roofs. The storm drains along streets and curbs allow rain and melting snow to move from the streets into a network of manmade pipes and natural channels ending up in our streams and lakes. This water is not treated before it ends up in a stream, lake or river.

“As stormwater flows over the ground it carries pollutants that are on the ground or dumped into a storm drain,” said Heather Schmidt, water quality specialist for Johnson County. “Most of the pollutants come from us, and without knowing it, we are damaging recreational waters, endangering wildlife and habitat, and potential sources of drinking water. We need to make sure there is only clean rain in the storm drain.”

Potential pollutants that affect stormwater quality:
• Litter, including cigarette butts
• Fertilizer and weed killer
• Grass clippings, leaves and other yard waste
• Automotive fluids
• Pet waste
• Cleaning supplies, paint and solvents

Three for Clean campaign
Johnson County Stormwater Management has launched a new campaign called “Three for Clean Stormwater.” It’s a checklist of six easy ways to help protect our water supply, and the campaign is a call for action to every Johnson County resident to pledge to do at least three of them. Feel free to cut out the checklist and put it on your refrigerator as a reminder of the three actions you’ve pledged to do.

What else can you do?
In addition to the Three for Clean Stormwater campaign, there are many other options, and depending where you live, your city might help you pay for them. These include incorporating rain barrels or rain gardens into your landscaping. You can also report stormwater pollution in your area by calling 913-715-6900 or online at www.jocogov.org/stormwater.

WEB EXTRA Please visit www.jocogov.org/jocomag for links to more information about stormwater management and a photo gallery of some local rain gardens.

The Blue River in south Johnson County.
What do you find most interesting about the recent Community Survey results?

“Public safety remains a top priority with increased awareness and appreciation of our efforts in being prepared for an emergency, natural or manmade, and in keeping Johnson County a safe place for all.”

Chairman Ed Eilert

“Overall high satisfaction levels show our citizens feel good about what’s happening in Johnson County. They understand the need to make tough budget and tax decisions, and feel the county’s leadership has, and is, making the right choices.”

First District Commissioner Ronald L. “Ron” Shaffer

“The high marks show that our citizens understand and appreciate the high level of public services that Johnson County provides.”

Second District Commissioner James P. Allen

“High overall ratings were not complete surprises, but keeping them at those levels remains a constant challenge. Johnson County needs to continue educating and informing the public about the important services it provides.”

Third District Commissioner Steven C. Klika

“That consistently over the last decade we have greatly outpaced other counties across the country in regards to satisfaction the citizens have in the quality of life here in Johnson County.”

Fourth District Commissioner Jason Osterhaus

“Human Services provided by the county was the highest priority item found in the entire survey. Citizens expressed concern that while this was one of the most important services provided by the County, they were least satisfied with our delivery efforts in 2015.”

Fifth District Commissioner Michael Ashcraft

“Our library and park systems received high marks and reflect the pride we have in these shared community assets for all ages.”

Sixth District Commissioner John Toplikar

At work with the Board of County Commissioners

By GERALD HAY

As required by state law, the Johnson County Board of Commissioners serves as the Board of Election Canvassers.

The Board of Election Canvassers must review and certify the results of all elections conducted within Johnson County. The canvass addresses the counting of ballots cast and certifies the winners in an election.

The Board of Canvassers determines which ballots shall be counted.

Counted or partial counted ballots may include voters who moved within the county, who had advanced ballots mailed but didn’t return, or who had name changes.

A ballot might not be counted because of unregistered voters and failure of a voter to provide government-issued photo identification.

After determining the validity of any provisional or challenged ballots in an election, the Board of Canvassers certifies the final official election results of Johnson County.
Lyndsey Sherrow is going into her senior year at Pittsburg State University, where she studies criminal justice.

What do you do as part of your internship?
I shadow the youth care advisors as they do things like watch over the kids. I also do a variety of odd jobs to get a feel for the different jobs available in this field.

What has been the most interesting part of your internship so far?
Things are always different and you see new things each day. You get to know the kids and develop relationships with them. It’s also been interesting to see how the detention center works on the inside. It looks like a jail, like Leavenworth. I thought it would be a less restrictive environment.

What’s been the most challenging part of your experience?
Sometimes the kids can get out of hand.

Megan Peat is a political science major at the University of Kansas, where she will be a sophomore in the fall. She began volunteering at the Johnson County Museum in high school.

What are your duties as a summer volunteer?
I give tours of the 1950s All-Electric House every half hour and I help out by doing odd jobs for the art department.

What do you like best about your volunteer position?
The people are great and I really like showing off the Museum and the All-Electric House. The Museum has so much stuff and I think it’s cool that we offer free activities for kids, like KidScape.

What is the most challenging part of your job?
If there are large groups for tours, sometimes it can be difficult to facilitate and for people to hear. Sometimes, people touch things, especially those adults who grew up in the fifties and are so familiar with the items in the All-Electric House.

Joe Flowers is a nursing student at the Research College of Nursing. Previously, Flowers earned a bachelor’s degree in health science from the University of Central Missouri and worked as an industrial hygienist during his time in the U.S. Air Force.

What do you do as part of your internship?
I check the chlorine PH levels, pump rooms and overall safety at public pools. I have also done work for the Green Business Program and helped organize some workshops for childcare licensing.

What do you like best about your internship?
The people. They say the people you work with make the job and that’s definitely true. Plus, I like being outside.

How do you like working for Johnson County?
It’s a much different experience from working in the military. It’s been fun and the diversity of all that I do is pretty great.

Joe Flowers, Intern
Department of Health and Environment

Lyndsey Sherrow, Intern
Department of Corrections

By ANDY GRAHAM
Mitvah Garden delivers bounty of food, passion and joy
By JODY HANSON

When you stand in the parking lot of The Temple, Congregation B’ni Jehudah (just south of 119th street and Nall in Overland Park) and look up the hill, all you can see is a wood and wire archway with the “Mitzvah Garden KC” sign on it. It’s not until you walk up the stone pathway to the top that you can view the bounty that has grown from the passion of three members of the Jewish community — a community garden that is self-sustaining and provides thousands of pounds of donated produce every year.

How the Mitzvah Garden sprouted
In 2000, Overland Park resident Ken Sonnenschein installed 10 raised beds on the grounds of Village Shalom, a retirement home just up the street from B’ni Jehudah, so residents could do some planting and harvesting. Sonnenschein is friends with B’ni Jehudah members Larry Lehman and Andrew Kaplan.

Over the years, as plans for a new sanctuary at B’ni Jehudah never materialized, the three friends eyed the available land with a vision for something bigger than what Sonnenschein created at Village Shalom — a garden cultivated by volunteers from the area’s Jewish community, with the harvested produce going to the greater community as donations.

“In 2010, we were able to get the congregation to allot 10,000 square feet for a community garden,” Lehman said. “That grew to 15,000, and today we have grown into almost a half acre.”

What does your garden grow?
This spring, volunteers planted kale, beets and onions. Summer crops are peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet potatoes and corn. Thanks to a grant and a partnership with the Giving Grove, The Mitzvah Garden’s 18-tree orchard has pear, peach and apple trees. Three beehives produce honey. A section of beds are reserved for the B’ni Jehudah preschool class to plant and tend.

Symbolism also plays a role in the Mitzvah Garden. Jewish tradition refers to the “Seven Species” — two grains and five fruits — known as special products of the Land of Israel. They are wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. Some grow in the ground and some grow in pots, but all can be found in the garden.

“A special tree and the special volunteer who planted it
A peach tree in the middle of the orchard stands out from the rest. In front of it are three painted tiles on posts displaying names that might sound familiar — William, Reat and Terri. A volunteer named Joe Karbank donated the tree and planted it on April 13, 2014, just hours before the shootings outside the Jewish Community Center and Village Shalom that took the lives of Dr. William Corporon, Reat Underwood and Terri LaManno.

“I love the satisfaction of seeing things grow”
Karbank volunteers once or twice a week at The Mitzvah Garden. He studied agriculture and tree grafting in school. It should also be mentioned that Karbank is 81 years old.

“I love the satisfaction of seeing things grow,” Karbank said. “It’s a natural desire in human beings.”

Off the grid
David Ruppel, another volunteer with an engineering background, led the charge towards an important step to the garden being self-reliant — creating an irrigation system that didn’t rely on city water. With grants from several organizations and benefactors (including a $1,000 grant from Johnson County Stormwater Management) volunteers built a rainwater collecting structure that creates water runoff. Every inch of rain collected equates to 900 gallons, and the water system’s holding tanks can hold 6,000 gallons of rainwater at a time. A pump moves the water — 100,000 gallons are needed on average each year — to a drip irrigation system throughout the garden.

The power to operate the pump used to come from an electrical cord that ran to B’nai Jehudah’s building. Today, that power comes from four solar panels installed on the roof of the rainwater collecting structure. Funding for those panels came from a KCP&L grant, with assistance from Black & Veatch.

Giving back to the community
While one goal of the Mitzvah Garden is to be “off the grid,” its mission is to feed those who can’t feed themselves. Nearly 10,000 pounds of produce are harvested and donated to various organizations, including Jewish Family Services Food Pantry, Grandview Assistance Program, Village Presbyterian Church food pantry, Shawnee Community Services and the Blue Valley Multi-Service Center.

The Grandview Assistance Program (GAP) receives enough produce each month from The Mitzvah Garden to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to 60 families. GAP Executive Director Sharon Kinder said their organization is so grateful for their partnership that’s now in its third year.

“GAP doesn’t have the funding nor the space to run our own community garden, so our partnership with The Mitzvah Garden is vital and one of the only ways we can provide fresh produce to our clients,” Kinder said. “They even deliver the produce to us so we don’t have to send a volunteer to get it. It is such a blessing.”

Join the gardening community
The Mitzvah Garden is always looking for volunteers and the best way to learn more is by visiting their Facebook page (www.facebook.com/mitzvahgardenKC). According to Lehman, volunteers will experience more than dirt under their fingers and sore backs.

“I remember a few years ago watching a volunteer dig up a sweet potato,” recalls Lehman. “Once she had it in her hands she danced and laughed. She literally could not contain her joy at seeing this sweet potato come from the earth.”

WEB EXTRA Tell us about a Johnson County community to profile in a future issue of JOCO Magazine by emailing us at jocomag@jocogov.org.
Help Johnson County choose a new flag design

The flag is a symbol of our county visible at all of our buildings. It helps residents identify places where county services are offered.

As part of a countywide rebranding effort that began in 2013, Johnson County adopted a new logo that can now be seen on county vehicles, informational materials and forms, the website, facilities and many other places.

Now is the time to implement a flag featuring the new logo which will replace the current flag (pictured to the right). An online survey is available (see address below) where residents can vote once for the flag design they would like to see flying high above county buildings. Voting ends August 14, 2015.

If you do not have access to the Internet, please use a public computer at a Johnson County Library branch, or call 913-715-0725.

Vote for your favorite flag design at www.jocogov.org/flag

*Residents may vote one time for their favorite flag by August 14, 2015.
The Department of Health and Environment operates a public health clinic in Olathe (11875 S. Sunset Dr.) and one in Mission (6000 Lamar Ave). While these clinics don’t serve as primary care providers, they do provide a number of services (we’ve listed 10 of them) for Johnson Countians of all ages.

“10 things” our public health clinics provide for you:

1. Community garden, food assistance, nutrition education and breastfeeding classes for WIC (Women, Infants and Children) clients.

2. Immunizations for school, travel, flu prevention and more — no appointment needed!

3. Walk-in clinic hours for family planning and pregnancy testing.

4. Walk-in clinic hours for HIV, STD and TB testing.

5. Free blood pressure checks from registered nurses that rotate among more than a dozen sites around the county each month.

6. Prenatal care, utilizing a multidisciplinary team to improve birth outcomes.

7. In-home postpartum visits by a registered nurse.

8. In-home visits by registered nurses for senior adults.

9. The Early Detection Works program that provides screening for cervical and breast cancer.

10. Lots of information about all kinds of health topics!
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