

We the Nemaha County Commissioners being sworn in, January 2021 and January 2023 are submitting an outline of events, difficult challenges, highlighting positives and giving a vision for Nemaha County in an effort to be as transparent as legally possible.

Challenging spots have been the management of our departments, the 100+ employees, and our effectiveness of working together. There was no HR in place, therefore in an effort to streamline we started contracting with HR Partners, LLC in August 2021. The county government has grown exponentially through the years and increased services.

In September 2021, we implemented a time clock system. We were met with a great deal of resistance from employees that found it unreasonable. Many rumors are in effort to undermine changes within county departments. Moving from handwritten time logs to a more modern up-to-date system has allowed us to be more accountable and verify time as an asset. We have been revising and updating our employee handbook. Newer policies were needed as our workforce is changing. Another challenge we had was getting our wage scales competitive with other employers within the county and surrounding communities.

One outdated policy that was putting an extreme financial burden on the county was sick leave. Sick leave had unlimited hours to be accrued and a payout of 50% of final wage at 720 hours. We have seen sick leave paid out on final paychecks in excess of \$15,000. We have multiple employees with a sick leave balance of 720+ hours. This equates to over \$200,000 currently owed to employees. Vacation policies are straining our workforce and require us to hire part-time employees to fill vacancies. Part-time employees qualify for benefits such as health insurance, sick/vacation leave, dental, vision, and 11 paid holidays. The total cost of one holiday for county wages is in excess of \$20,000. Partly, because employees that are required to work holidays will earn 2.5x holiday pay.

Currently, the total cost of insurance for employees is close to a million dollars/annually that the county pays out. Therefore, we have been researching and obtaining quotes for different health insurance plans. Moving from the State BCBS plan to just a standard BCBS plan may save up to \$300,000 annually. This is another cost saving effort for county constituencies.

Facing these challenges, the board was lacking follow through with directives. After many months of discussions, in Fall of 2022, a new position was created, County Administrator. This position will most likely pay for itself by creating a streamlined system for departments, budgets, and services when working with the county. With the assistance of HR Partners the interviewing process has begun. This position will assist with oversight of the day-to-day management and the implementation of policies and procedures. Some of the duties of this position will include; budget preparation and analysis, evaluating each department annually, on/off boarding of employees, and implementing directives at the request of the board. Serving as a final resource and authority for assignments, guidelines and policies. With this position, the County departments will run more efficiently and in a professional manner.

Road & Bridge: We have put more funds into this department than in years past. In 2021 we hired a new department Director, Adam Kuckelman. Adam has proven to be an asset to this county department. His direction and outstanding work ethic has led to better morale and a good team working environment. We challenged Adam and his department to have the best roads in the surrounding counties. We spent over 5 million dollars in 2022 and again in 2023 on roads/bridges. This past summer we re-paved the Bern-Sabetha Road with an asphalt overlay. This is the first time in nearly 30 years that this road has seen substantial repairs. We used PILOT funds to help assist with the cost. This blacktop is the most trafficked road within our County. This coming summer we will tear up a vast majority of the Goff-Oneida Road. The plan

is to put down a 12-inch concrete base with paved hard surfaces. We have also implemented a maintenance schedule with shorter intervals to help maintain our road system.

Senior Services Transportation: We offer transportation services to those in the county with sites in Seneca and Sabetha. They operate on a first come first serve basis and strive to serve as many customers as possible. The transportation department has been a challenge to keep within budget due to the rising costs in fuel and repairs this past year. Our new director, Tammy Epple and her staff have done a great job in keeping cost at a minimum to stay on budget. They are awaiting two new vans from KDOT since September 2021. Our fleet is aging and is now replacing transmissions and other costly repairs. This has led to them not taking as many longer distance routes and staying more local. Our transportation department has been the envy of most counties so hats off to a good group of hard-working folks.

Senior Services Nutrition: This department has been in discussions for a while now. In 2021, the board decided not to proceed with a Senior center building grant. Main reasons were:

1. A KDOT/Federal grant was awarded for a Transportation garage and office, NOT a Senior center and meal site.
2. County was to pay \$600,000 at the end of 2021 and the previous board of Commissioners didn't have it included in the budget.
3. The building site survey was not completed for the soil compaction study. It was planned to be built on top of the old school basement that was filled in. Increasing costs to get the soil compaction to the Federal government's requirements for the grant.
4. Design of the building would not house all of the vehicles for transportation dept. which was the original purpose for the building. KDOT was unaware of this.
5. Federal requirements stated if the building was to be used in any other manner, they reserved the right to require the county pay back the grant portion of the funds. Which were around 1.4-1.5 million.
6. The previous Director had signed the KDOT grant without board approval and legal council reviewing it. Only the Board of Commissioners can enter the county into a contractual agreement.

Therefore, the board chose to return the grant funds of \$160,000 to KDOT for the project. And paid the Architect for services rendered to-date. This could have been avoided if the Department Director had followed County policy.

This past year, Meals of Wheels/Nutrition has been 140+% over budget. Currently, the county spends \$13.48 per meal serving 32,300 meals in 2022. Most of the meal costs are associated with labor and benefits. Unfortunately, this is not sustainable for years to come. Employees reported concerns with the program's funds and procedures. Prompting the board to complete an audit for fiscal year 2022. Upon investigation numbers submitted by the director of a projected \$15/meal cost and meal counts were correct. The nutrition department is partially funded by grants. With these grants come their own set of regulations. One of those regulations is that meals cannot be issued to staff or volunteers. However, it was documented that over 565 unqualified meals were served to employees in 2022.

There was a lack of planning for menu's in accordance to how many people were signing up for meals. Participant personal/health information was not secured properly, inventory and other records being kept were inadequate per grant requirements. Food on hand and leftovers were not documented or accounted for. No itemized receipts from vendors, improper procedures for checking in and accounting for food inventory were not being adhered to per county policy. Time clock information was being used in violation of policy. A vendor was given access code to the kitchen after hours, in direct violation of county procedures and policy. No nutrition

employee was present to verify inventory delivered and food safety check. This vendor had full access to all participants' records, including health information, computers, inventory and other sensitive county information, due to items not being secured properly. Daily deposits of the nutrition program did not match county treasurer deposits. The voucher tickets for this program are easily reproducible and payments are not traceable. Volunteers were not being properly trained on policies and procedures of the program. Other legal issues that were found will be addressed by the county and department director.

Moving forward, we are not looking to end the MOW program. We are however looking to implement procedural changes to help sustain the program for many years. We look forward to continuing community involvement and raising awareness of seniors' needs.

Solid Waste Department: Proper tools were needed to make it a safe work environment. We have invested in new doors and remodeled offices due to mold and water damage. Replaced broken shop doors and fixed the glass breaker. Instead of crushing glass with a skid steer bucket on the concrete floor. Extended the pit and will continue to make up dates. Budget has been tight but, cost of recycled goods can go up and down.

Emergency Management: In the Spring of 2022 a new director was hired, Eddie Aldrine. Eddie had an uphill battle coming into this position and he has exceeded our expectations. He has been updating reports and KDEM requirements that were grossly deficient. Eddie assisted Marshall County after the tornado in 2022 and swiftly got the Kelly tornado siren up and running again. Throughout the state Nemaha County was known to be "sub par" with this department Eddie has gotten Nemaha County back on track and brought us into the forefront of Emergency Preparedness and leading the way.

Appraiser Office: Betty Roeder is preparing and training a new appraiser Kerri Koch. Appraisers are hard to find and take a while to complete classes and 6,000+ hours. So, we are happy to welcome Kerri to this position before Betty retires. This position isn't the most desired position, so we are thankful. This office has done a good job staying on budget and giving the board new ideas and information.

We have continued to invest in the county fair. New bleachers were added. There has been some upkeep with the community building, we chipped and sealed the parking lots and continue to maintain this building. We also updated the rental agreement/schedules for this facility.

Health Department: Another big change is the addition of our own health department, as of July 1, 2022. We found during COVID the contractual agreement with Nemaha County Community Health Services (a private entity) opened doors for county liability and no oversight from the board of health (the board of commissioners). In August of 2021 our annual contract with NCCHS changed. This new contract submitted by NCCHS excluded the services for a health officer and other key services that are required by state statutes. Yet still requesting funding plus local health dept grants and office space annually to provide services. Forcing the county to legally find a health officer and a medical advisor. The board hired Heaven Schuette in November 2021 as health officer and in July 2022 she became the Health Dept. Administrator, while still serving as health officer. This has been a challenge in starting at ground zero for a health department.

Every county in Kansas is required to provide specific services. For instance, Rabies investigation, disease investigation for over 70 reportable diseases to KDHE, a health officer position and a medical advisor, VFC (vaccines for children program) and PHEP (Public Health Emergency Preparedness) just to name a few. VFC is a program for children to receive immunizations regardless of their ability to pay. The county contracts with Nemaha Valley

Community Hospital to provide this service and we appreciate their partnership. Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) is a service that has needed updating of policies and procedures. The health dept. applies for grants every year through KDHE to help offset costs. We plan to grow this dept over the next several years to include clinical services and help fill gaps not available elsewhere in the county.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding is another topic that there are a lot of questions about. The board has chosen to not disburse said funds; initially waiting for stipulations to be finalized. On 1.9 million, the county has collected 4% interest on these funds and has chosen not to hire a financial advisor like similar counties did for a small fee of \$100,000. We hired Jack Willmeth of Seneca to take this over for a fraction of the cost of what other counties have chosen to do. By looking elsewhere and negotiating better terms we have made it to where the interest off of the funds should pay their rate for administering the funds. Waiting for a qualified Administrator to advise the board. We will have to have expenditures planned by 2024 and funds must be exhausted by 2026.

A county wide survey was conducted and completed in January 2023, our planning commission will get the final plan done June 2023. With proper implementation of our county planning it should lead us to growth and prosperity here in Nemaha County.

In closing, we invited anyone to come into our open meetings every Monday at 9 AM in the commissioner's room upstairs in the courthouse. Also, explore our new website that has a wealth of information www.nmcoks.us. Minutes of every meeting are available for anyone to view motions and/or actions of the board.