

March 22, 2022  
Reno County Annex  
Hutchinson, Kansas

The Board of Reno County Commissioners held a special study session at the Annex Conference Room with Chairman Daniel Friesen, Commissioner Ron Sellers, Commissioner Ron Hirst, County Administrator Randy Partington, County Counselor Patrick Hoffman, and Minutes Clerk Cindy Martin, present. Also in attendance from Reno County were the following: Sheriff Darrian Campbell, Patrol Captain Levi Blumanhourst, Emergency Management Director Adam Weishaar, Reno County Fire Administrator Travis Vogt, Assistant Fire Chief District #3 Gerald Wiens, Reno/Kingman Joint #1 Pretty Prairie Fire Chief Rick Graber, Public Works Director Don Brittain, and Reno County Planner Mark Vonachen. Others in attendance were as follows: City of Hutchinson Fire Chief Steven Beer, City of Hutchinson Deputy Fire Chief Doug Hanen, Tabitha Neahring and Megan Niemeyer with VOAD/TSA, Reno County citizens Dr. Christine Sanders, MD and Chris Corey, Mayor of Highlands Carol Moore, Kansas Forest Service Rodney Redinger and Dennis Carlson, USDA-NRCS Dusty Tacha, and Marcus Preuninger CEA-A/NR KSRE.

Mr. Friesen stated today's session was to discuss recommendations for fire mitigation and management in the county.

Mr. Weishaar met with the Commission to give a summary report. He said in May of last year Emergency Management was instructed to coordinate with various organizations to come up with recommendations to find better ways to coordinate/mitigate the fire risk in the county focusing on the higher risk areas. A meeting took place in August 2021 with Kansas Forest Service Rangeland Management Specialist, Agriculture Extension Agent, Reno County Planner, and the Hutchinson Fire Department to discuss ideas to mitigate wildfire activity in the county. In 2009 the Kansas Forest Service Fire Prevention Specialist completed a Community Wildfire Hazard Assessment report finding 26 communities surveyed, noting that ten of those were low hazard rating, seven were moderate, and nine were a high rating. There are several areas that are now at risk that weren't previously causing a potential high fire danger.

County Planner Mark Vonachen explained the history of zoning. Mr. Friesen questioned if there was fire zoning on hazardous dead-end roads. Mr. Vonachen replied not prior to zoning however, currently we do have regulations with

subdivision plats developed to Township Road standards from this time forward. Mr. Friesen requested Mr. Vonachen research deeper in counties out of state that may have zoning fire mitigation. Mr. Friesen then requested Mr. Vonachen make a note for the Planning Board to study

Mr. Hirst asked about ETJ for Hutchinson. Mr. Vonachen replied that Hutchinson never did acquire the ETJ however, Buhler and Haven have a one-mile radius, and South Hutchinson, and Nickerson have a three-mile radius which is the limit they can do. Mr. Friesen requested Mr. Partington research the ETJ that the past commission did not relinquish around Hutchinson.

If a violation occurs with zoning the homeowner will get a letter and the county could take them to court. An alternative would be to have a codes court since any enforcement of zoning or codes could be a very costly approach. There was more discussion on zoning and options available, one being education provided to homeowners. The Hutchinson Fire Department conducted four sessions with limited success with educating homeowners, and each property owner had the opportunity to have a risk assessment done on their property.

Conservation District Chloe Wilson spoke about possible coordination of an event with education and subject matter experts. She could offer resources but no technical expertise because it was not what they do.

Mr. Hirst asked how insurance companies fit in with education.

Hutchinson Fire Chief Steve Beer stated at 10:30 a.m. on April 7<sup>th</sup> there is a scheduled roundhouse meeting with insurance carriers in the area on this subject matter.

Rodney Redinger with the Kansas Forest Service stated it was a big challenge to get the participation of homeowners not only here but across the state with the "Fire Wise" training.

Dr. Christine Sanders addressed the Commission as a homeowner in The Highlands area and said she hosted a "Fire Wise" meeting in her home for their neighborhood to educate them. She stated the Fire Wise was a great program and needed to be pushed annually around this time of year. She was concerned about getting rid of the fuel and the cost of removing cedar trees off people's properties was very expensive.

Enforcement in the current resolution #2017-12, needs more in-depth review in some sections, the Board discussed these issues. Mr. Weishaar stated after meetings it was decided that dispatch will start letting a citizen know if they are allowed to burn or not on high-risk days. If the resolution was violated, the Sheriff's Office will make a case and send it to the District Attorney's Office for prosecution. One action item was a modification to the current resolution, to modify section 3A which gives dispatch authority to tell citizens no to burning. The second proposed modification was to grant the Fire Chief's in their jurisdiction the authority to be able to tell people no burning that day after they have had a fire out of control.

In the other category it was mentioned about changes to the burn resolution and how the same people either follow or are the cause of problems. All large fires in Reno County have not been caused by controlled burning. Some small property owners do not have the education or equipment for safely conducting a controlled burn. The mitigation of volatile fuel needs to be the county's priority. In the past two years, the Hutchinson Fire Department along with Fire District #2 have burned over 20 miles of ditches and rights-of-way that would be hinge points and potentially stop large fires and they plan to continue to burn these each year. Our volunteer fire districts do not have the time or manpower to make this an effective strategy through the whole county.

Sheriff Darrian Campbell stated that since the burn ban has been in effect, two weeks or so ago, we have had three incidents from the citizens not calling in to dispatch or didn't know about the ban. They did not have permission to burn, and those cases would be forwarded to the District Attorney's Office.

Mr. Sellers had concerns about citizens calling into dispatch for burning and asked if there should be a different point of contact. Sheriff Campbell stated that we need a 24/7 service or more training for dispatch regarding burning before saying yes or no. Mr. Hirst gave a background of the 2017 resolution origination.

Kansas Forest Service Dennis Carlson spoke about Federal Grants that can be used for fire mitigation in larger areas.

Chief Beer suggested education for a no burn ban, and also no burning three to five days around a red flag day. He said changes need to be made.

USDA-NRCS Dusty Tocha mentioned FEMA money for fuel mitigation, farm bill programs, and cost sharing of AG related issues. He said the biggest problem was an education gap and growing season burns.

A recommendation is for the county to come up with a funding source or tax incentive to help individual property owners with fuel mitigation. This would assist small property owners to contract to mitigate the fuel load on their property helping to save money in comparison to the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on wildfire response.

Mr. Friesen said, 1) no countywide policy- but specific zones will get a map with high, medium, and low priorities. 2) classify red, yellow, and green for landowners and suggested using the recommendation from Adam for approval of classification of property in the county. 3) the ordinance task force informal group will leave to Administration and the Emergency Management Department to revise a set of ordinances to consider adding teeth. 4) zoning staff collect and bring back items for consideration to the Planning Board, and then recommend a study session. 5) mitigation of fuel cost - Adam Weishaar will get a team together with the 1<sup>st</sup> set of recommendations on cost to work on fire mitigation. 6) media to put videos on commission education for fires and maybe keep the task force going with monthly meetings.

At 12:17 p.m. the meeting recessed until the Joint County/City Work Session and reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

Approved:

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Chair, Board of Reno County Commissioners

(ATTEST)

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Reno County Clerk  
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Date