A public hearing at 7 p.m. today at City Hall is the next step in establishing a sales tax and revenue bond district at 119th Street and Renner Road.

The district would be a mixed-use development that could include extensions of University of Kansas museums, retail, office and industrial space, business park/distribution facilities, a hotel and conference facilities at the site formerly occupied by Benchmark Express.

STAR bonds are state-approved

John Petersen — from Polsinelli Shalton Flanigan Suelthaus PC in Kansas City, Mo. — represents the developer, MaeGrace of Indianapolis, and could not be reached for comment.

City spokesman Tim Danneberg said the district, if approved, could help put Olathe on the map as a regional tourist destination.

“The intent of the STAR bond legislation is for destination-type projects,” he said. “The developers added the museum component to further add to that destination-type draw.”

Danneberg said that although a significant amount of work needs to be done to secure the development, the city needs to see whether the district could provide a “long and positive economic impact on the community.”

He added that the city looks forward to seeing the estimates of the number of people the museum would be expected to draw.

In an economic impact and market analysis study submitted by the developer, more than 434,000 people are estimated to visit the museums each year if they’re built.

Of those visitors, 70 percent would be from 100 miles away, and more than 33,000 people comprising approximately 12,100 parties would spend an average of nearly two nights in local hotel rooms.

According to the analysis, more than $3.4 million in revenue would be generated each year by the museums. It also estimated that more than $11 million would be spent outside the district on food and beverage, accommodations and retail.

A public hearing also will take place tonight to expand the Olathe Gateway tax increment financing district at 119th and Renner.

The developer has purchased more land and proposed to add 43 acres to the site, making the district 150 acres.

The KU museums are proposed for the expanded area.

Ron Shaver, an economic development analyst for the city, said the next step would be ordinances to expand the TIF district and create a STAR bond district, and those would be on the July 24 City Council agenda.

— Contact Jack Weinstein at 764-2211, Ext. 130, or jweinstein@theolathenews.com.
Teachers enter business world

ARLEY HOSKIN

Most people never get the opportunity to make an eight-week career change.

But UpLink made that change possible for Olathe teacher Betsy Wilkin and nine other teachers throughout the Kansas City area.

UpLink, an initiative of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, connected area teachers with businesses to participate in an eight-week externship program called TeachTech.

“The very first externships began the first week of June,” said Karen Grover, UpLink director of education. “The idea of the externship is to give teachers real-life experience in businesses, so they can provide relevant, real-life experience in the classroom.”

Businesses posted temporary positions through the program, and teachers applied for the positions. Participating businesses pay the teachers as though they were temporary employees.

Kansas University Physicians hired Wilkin as a policies and procedures coordinator. Wilkin taught fifth grade at Green Springs Elementary School for the last three years and will teach fourth grade at Meadow Lane Elementary School next year.

“I just thought it was an awesome opportunity to see what the business world was like,” she said.

Wilkin started her externship June 4. Her job responsibilities have included editing and revising the policies and procedures and general human resources tasks.

Wilkin said she already has thought of ways to incorporate her work experience into the classroom.

“The neat thing about this is that they offered us college credit through (the University of Missouri-Kansas City),” she said.

As part of the college credit, Wilkin had to write a lesson plan that includes her experiences in the program.

She said she plans to review the classroom policies and procedures with her students using the methods she used with Kansas University Physicians.

“I really believe that it is important for students to see how what they are learning in the classroom will apply to real life,” Wilkin said.

Ruth Pullins, director of human resources for Kansas University Physicians, said her business appreciates the work Wilkin has done.

“She’s able to work independently, but she is a great team player, too,” Pullins said.

Pullins plans to participate in the program in future summers.

“If I could budget for this type of project again I would absolutely do it,” Pullins said. “It’s a wonderful program.”

— Contact Arley Hoskin at 764-2211, Ext. 133, or ahoskin@theolathenews.
The Hampton Inn at I 208 S. Strang Line Road will complete its renovation to add about 40 rooms and 2,000 square feet of meeting space by December. On the cover: Jessica Bryards, guest services, talked to a customer at the newly renovated front desk at the Residence Inn by Marriott.

Hotels try to meet the demands of booming business, tourist industries

JACK WEINSTEIN

Olathe hasn't built a new hotel since 1999, but don't let the inactivity fool you. The market is growing.

With several local hotel renovations nearly complete and a couple of new hotels in the works, the market seems ready to catch up to the vast residential, retail and commercial development that has impacted the city in recent years.

"There is robust business expansion activity occurring within the region, particularly in Johnson County," said Tim Cowden, the Kansas City Area Development Council's senior vice president of business development. "This alone will drive demand for a variety of services to support corporate growth. While we've already seen a significant amount of new hotel/motel development across the region for the past several years, I would expect it to continue unabated as long as the market proves it can support it."

Tim McKee, the Olathe Chamber of Commerce's vice president of economic development, said the demand for rooms has outpaced supply because the city has added 18,000 to 20,000 residents and thousands of jobs in recent years.

Construction of an 80-room Candlewood Suites near 151st Street and U.S. Highway 169 began in June. Nearby, La Quinta Inn is scheduled to begin building a franchise in December at 151st Street and Interstate 35 with completion in November 2008, said a spokeswoman.

"Right now, lenders are very open to lending money for these types of projects," McKee said. "So what you're going to see most likely is a huge influx of new hotels, and then at some point the supply will outstrip the demand, and then it will enter back into that cycle again where we won't see anything being built."

Several local hotels are remodeling to meet the increased demand.
"We decided to add more rooms because Olathe and the community is steadily growing," said Courtney Ford, general manager for the Hampton Inn at 12081 S. Strang Line Road. "The increase in occupancy made the decision for us."

The Hampton Inn will add about 40 rooms to its 85-room inventory. The hotel also is adding 2,000 square feet of meeting space, and its renovation is expected to be complete by December.

The boom in the corporate business market in Olathe has increased occupancy at Residence Inn by Marriott to the point that the hotel usually is booked, said Michelle Gressel, sales manager.

The 40-room extended-stay hotel, 12215 S. Strang Line Road, isn't adding rooms, but it will complete a renovation in a week that includes a new lobby, new furnishings and improved guest amenities.

Still, Gressel said, it's important for Olathe to add hotels. "All these companies that come into town need a place to stay," she said. "If we don't have enough room, they'll go to other cities. That's why it's so important that we grow the hotel market in Olathe."

According to the chamber, Olathe has 794 rooms: That total doesn't include the most recent expansions and new hotels on the horizon.

The Holiday Inn, 101 W. 151st St., is in the middle of a $3.7 million renovation that is expected to be complete by late October or early November. The hotel is overhauling its rooms and remodeling the lobby, banquet areas and restaurant. A new pool with water-park elements and a new fitness area will be added.

The hotel discussed with the city adding rooms and a convention center but decided against it, said Kent Olson, director of property design for Leisure Hotels and Resorts, the company that owns the Holiday Inn. Those are future considerations, he said, but the decision will depend on the demand.

In addition to the weekly business traveler, the area has seen a boost in the number of out-of-town visitors. Kansas City has become a regional tourist destination that attracts more than 16.5 million visitors a year, said Alan Carr, spokesman for the Kansas City Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"A lot of people want to come to Kansas City," he said. Carr cited not only the $4.5 billion in development in downtown Kansas City, Mo., but also the Legends at Village West shopping and entertainment district in Kansas City, Kan., Bass Pro Shops in Olathe and Independence, Mo., and a possible Legoland theme park in Lee's Summit, Mo.

The high cost of gasoline also has contributed to metro area becoming a regional tourist destination, Carr said. He referenced a study by the Travel Industry Association of America on gas prices' effect on travel.

"One of the things it impacts in a positive way is people tend to stay closer to home so if someone can drive somewhere on one tank of gas," he said. McKee said the development at the Legends — which includes the Kansas Speedway, Community America Ballpark and the soon-to-be-completed Schlitterbahn Vacation Village hotel and water park — is a good model of a regional tourist destination. That, McKee said, is what Olathe is trying to do with the proposed development at 119th Street and Renner Road. That development could include extensions of University of Kansas museums, a retail component and a hotel.

The university has signed a letter of intent with the city to bring extensions of KU's Natural History Museum and Spencer Museum of Art to Olathe.
The developer is seeking state sales tax and revenue bonds for the project. STAR bonds are tax incentives paid for by the sales tax revenue generated at the new development.

"It's very important to bring in outside individuals because those are new dollars to the community," McKee said of making the development a destination. "Those aren't existing dollars that are being circulated within the community."

An economic and market analysis for the museums projected that of the approximately 430,000 visitors the museums are expected to draw, more than 70 percent will come from outside Kansas. Of those visitors, the study estimates, more than 33,000 people comprising about 12,000 parties would stay about two days in nearby hotels.

Carr said his bureau launched its annual TV, print and online campaign in late April to promote travel to the Kansas City area. This year, the $1.1 million campaign is being shown in seven regional cities: Des Moines, Iowa; Lincoln, Neb.; Omaha, Neb.; St. Louis; Springfield, Mo.; Tulsa, Okla.; and Wichita.

"We're having pretty phenomenal success with the campaign," Carr said. "Inquiries are up more than 200 percent over the same period as last year."

The campaign will run through August.

McKee said the Kansas City area's attractions will help draw more visitors to Olathe. "More synergy creates more of a destination-type draw," he said.

Carr said the Kansas City area has 26,613 hotel rooms. There are 8,042 rooms in Johnson County.

In both the metro area and the county, there are more to come.

As far local hotels are concerned, Cowden said ultimately, as in any development activity, the market will have the final say.

"For the past few years, the KC market has been saying very clearly to those deciding where new services investment will be made, 'bring us more, we can handle it,'" he said.

The Residence Inn by Marriott is finishing its renovation. Pictured is the gatehouse, where guests can watch TV or enjoy the kitchen.
East graduate dies in car wreck

JACK WEINSTEIN

A 2004 Olathe East High School graduate who was a junior at the University of Kansas died in a car wreck Friday evening.

Cecile Hernandez, 21, was on her way back to Lawrence from Kansas City, Kan., about 5:45 p.m. Friday when her 1999 Dodge pickup truck left westbound Interstate 435 west of Interstate 35, according to a Kansas Highway Patrol report. Her truck entered the median, struck an overhead sign post and caught fire, the report indicated.

She was wearing her seat belt.

Lisa Allen, a friend of Hernandez, said she was returning to Lawrence from her job at Cheeseburger in Paradise at the Legends at Village West when the wreck occurred.

Lt. John Eichkorn of the Kansas Highway Patrol said Hernandez was dead at the scene. He didn’t know the cause of death. Officials are investigating the cause of the wreck, Eichkorn said.

Allen, who is president of the KU Women’s Lacrosse Club, of which Hernandez was a member, said Hernandez became a part of that family after only a year on the team.

“Practice every day will be different without her,” she said when the team meets again in August.

Allen described Hernandez as an easygoing person who would do anything for anyone. Allen said Hernandez, who was a midfielder and defender on the team, will be missed.

“It’s been a really hard time for the whole team,” Allen said and added that the team is trying to stick together.

Hernandez was in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and worked at KU Recreation Services during the school year.

Mary Chappell, director of KU Recreation Services, said in a press release that Hernandez’s “energy, smile, enthusiasm, zest for life and free-spirited talents will be missed and celebrated.”

A visitation will be from 5 to 8 p.m. today at McGilley & Frye Funeral Home, 105 E. Loula St.

Funeral services will be at 10 a.m. Wednesday at Prince of Peace Catholic Church, 16000 W. 143rd St. Burial will be at Mount Cavalry Cemetery, 19800 W. 159th St.

“This is a tragic loss for the KU community,” KU Chancellor Robert Hemenway said in a prepared statement. “Our thoughts are with Cecile’s family and friends during this difficult time.”

— Contact Jack Weinstein at 764-2211, Ext. 130, or jweinstein@theolathenews.com.
Kansas bioscience vision comes into clearer focus

MANHATTAN, Kan. (AP) — It’s no stretch to say Kansas officials were giddy last week when word came that the state had made the short list of sites under consideration for a new federal biosecurity facility.

The excitement was for more than just the prospect of being the home of the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility. It was for the validation that decisions made nearly a decade ago were correct.

In the late 1990s, Kansas State University made the decision to build on its strengths in plant and animal research and focus on becoming a national — if not global — leader in bioscience. It meant concentrating efforts and resources on those departments, assembling an accomplished staff and making the case for increased state and federal research dollars.

The site on the north side of Kansas State’s main campus was one of five announced by the Department of Homeland Security as a possibility for the new $451 million NBAF center.

Other sites still in the running are in Texas, North Carolina, Mississippi and Georgia. Originally, 18 sites in 12 states — including the San Francisco Bay Area’s Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory — were considered by Homeland Security.

The federal facility is scheduled to start operating in 2013-14. Officials estimate the federal facility would generate 1,500 construction jobs, up to 500 scientific jobs and $3.5 billion over 20 years.

Kansas State University President Jon Wefald compared last week’s announcement to making an NCAA Final Four. Landing the center would be a trophy of epic proportions for the university and state.

“I don’t know that any other state has put together a unified team like we have here in Kansas,” Wefald said.


The Kansas Economic Growth Act established a state policy of focusing efforts on recruiting and developing jobs in emerging technologies. The goal was to tap into this market, with projections that it could pay off as much as $500 million over 10 years. Central to that was building new research centers at Kansas State, the University of Kansas and Wichita State University.

“We saw the opportunity to create jobs in Kansas by recruiting bioscience firms to our state,” Sebelius said. “So in 2004, we made a commitment to make Kansas a leader in bioscience research by building on our existing assets and by creating the Bioscience Authority. The Authority allows us to focus our efforts and show bioscience firms and the federal government the advantages of choosing Kansas.”

Kansas State will open its Bioscience Research Institute this fall, capable of handling many of the same tasks that would be conducted at the NBAF site. That means there would be a smooth transition from the current aging Plum Island, N.Y., site to Manhattan. And it gives federal officials options, either expanding the BRI or building a new facility on adjacent ground.

House Speaker Melvin Neufeld said the announcement shows that others outside Kansas see the state’s potential.

“Such a center would complement and expand the work of the Biosecurity Research Institute, a state-of-the-art bio-research facility at Kansas State, as well as the numerous plant and animal companies already located in our state,” said Neufeld, R-Ingalls.

Legislators passed three measures during the 2007 session to pave the way for landing the lab. One created an interagency working group to coordinate efforts, a second conveyed land at Kansas State to the federal government to build the facility, while a resolution pledged the Legislature’s full support to do everything necessary to make the project a reality.

Everyone remains on board and focused for the next round of deliberations before the NBAF decision is final. Wefald and his staff are confident that if politics don’t enter the process, Kansas State should win the competition.

But even if that doesn’t happen, Wefald is confident that Kansas is now at that elite level in bioscience research.

The corridor stretching from Manhattan in the west to Columbia, Mo., in the east has the highest concentration of animal health companies in the world. They account for nearly a third of all dollars spent on animal health in the world. In addition, Kansas is a global leader in production of wheat and beef. Locating the lab would complement the long-standing tradition of Kansas agriculture and put researchers within a country mile of those who depend on food safety and security for their livelihoods.

Kansas has the tools, the staff and desire to win the championships, and Wefald and others say other big time recruits, comparable to the NBAF project, will be forthcoming. He called it “the biggest thing to happen in Kansas since the Civil War.”

That might be a stretch, but landing the NABF lab could have the same lasting impact on Kansas and its economy for the next 100 years as the day Clyde Cessna and Walter Beech started putting together airframes in that little old cowtown called Wichita.
The University of Kansas is giving students affected by recent natural disasters some extra time to pay their tuition.

Tuition bills for fall semester will be sent out next week, with the first payments due Aug. 15.

The university said Tuesday that it will waive late fees and will work out individual deferred payment plans for students living in 10 counties hit by flooding and storms this spring and summer. Usually an initial $100 penalty is assessed after the deadline and additional penalties are applied each month the bill is overdue.

"When your family home or business has been flooded out, you have more immediate concerns than a tuition due date. We hope this will give those students under hardship some time and flexibility to focus on recovery and getting their lives back to normal," Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor Richard Lariviere said.

Students may fill out a form on the university's Web site to qualify.

The policy applies students in Elk, Miami, Montgomery, Neosho, Wilson, Edwards, Kiowa, Osage,
LAWRENCE — More than 4,690 undergraduate students at the University of Kansas earned honor roll distinction for the spring 2007 semester.

These students, from the Lawrence campus and the schools of allied health and nursing at the KU Medical Center in Kansas City, Kan., represent 99 of 105 Kansas counties, 44 other states and the District of Columbia and 37 other countries.

The honor roll comprises undergraduates who met requirements in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and in the schools of allied health, architecture and urban planning, business, education, engineering, fine arts, journalism, nursing and social welfare.

Honor roll criteria vary among the university's academic units. Some schools honor the top 10 percent of students enrolled, some establish a minimum grade-point average and others raise the minimum GPA for each year students are in school. Students must complete a minimum number of credit hours to be considered for the honor roll.

The students are listed online by hometown in the following format: first name, last name, school or college, level (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), gender, parents or guardians, and high school (when available). For students in the School of Allied Health, a level in school is not always listed.
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By JOHN MILBURN
Associated Press Writer

Kansas’ bioscience vision focusing

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The University of Kansas announces honor roll

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Local and area students include:

- Burrton — Stacy Lynn Burke and Brianna Dahn Flickinger.
- Halstead — Aaron Jacob Keller, Elizabeth Ann Major, Casey M. Miles and Lindsey Nicole Miles.
- Hesston — Jonathan Kurtz Goering, Andrew Milo Kauffman and Kayla Vernise Schrag.
- Sedgwick — Nicholas R. Degner and Crystal Lynn Leming.
- Walton — Megan L. O'Brien.
- Burns — Shelby L. Plummer.
- Hillsboro — Adam Wade Driggers, Emily J. Ratzlaff and Megan Anne Vogel.
- Marion — Ashlee K. Moore.
- Peabody — Rachel Potter Berns and Jeremy Keith Carroll.
- Lawrence — Amy Rochelle LaGesse, graduate of Newton High School.