

A directly elected mayor needs much more discussion, city leaders say

CLEARLY WE'RE NOT THERE RIGHT NOW

By SYLAS MAY

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While their opinions differ on how Lawrence should choose its mayor, city commissioners think there should be much more discussion before they ask voters about it.

On Tuesday, commissioners discussed the idea of a future ballot question on whether Lawrence residents should directly

elect the mayor. Under the current system, voters don't choose the mayor directly; instead, the five-member City Commission chooses one of its members each year to serve as mayor and another one to serve as vice mayor, normally using a set of unwritten rules based on the results of the most recent City Commission elections.

The Lawrence Chamber

of commerce brought the issue before the commission, and Chamber staffer Evie Lazzarino said they weren't asking for a vote yet, but just looking at how the discussion could move ahead.

"Clearly we're not there right now," she said of putting the question before voters.

Commissioner Amber Sellers said much the same: "This conversation,



Sellers

yes, we need more time. I wouldn't vote on this, I wouldn't ask us to consider this, because right now is not the time or the place."

See MAYOR, A7





Polian

Polian thinks commission can find consensus on forensic audit of city's capital projects

By SYLAS MAY

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City Commissioner Kristine Polian, who's worked for two decades in municipal governments, knows "audit" isn't a

pleasant word to hear.

"Audit, and add 'forensic' to it, forensic audit, it's a four-letter word for most people," she told the Journal-World on Wednesday.

She's calling her proposal

for a forensic audit of 15 major city projects a "stewardship initiative" instead, and she expected that the other four commissioners would see it as that.

See AUDIT, A7

BALDWIN CITY

Man pleads guilty to shootings at bar, library

He faces 20 years for attempted murders, aggravated assault

By KIM CALLAHAN

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A 23-year-old man was convicted Wednesday in Douglas County District Court of two attempted murders and aggravated assault for a series of public shootings more than three years ago in downtown Baldwin City.

The defendant, Junah Sisney, was convicted after pleading guilty to one count of attempted first-degree murder, one count of attempted second-degree murder and one count of aggravated assault, pursuant to a plea agreement with the state. He conceded that all three felonies were committed with a deadly weapon, and he is expected to face nearly 20 years in prison when he is sentenced later this summer.

Deputy District Attorney David Melton, in providing a factual basis for Sisney's plea, told Senior Judge Nancy Parrish that on Dec. 30, 2022, Sisney — intending to kill people — drove from Baldwin City to a relative's home in Arkansas, where, without permission, he retrieved a gun. He then drove back to Baldwin City, where that evening he drove by the Bullpen bar twice and the Baldwin City Public Library once and fired multiple rounds out his car window toward people inside and outside those establishments.

Sisney's bullets did not strike anyone. The people at the library were exiting the building after a child's birthday party, and one man — the victim of the first-degree murder attempt — was putting a baby in a car seat.

See SHOOTINGS, A8

County leaders review five-year plan as major spending looms

By JOSIE HEIMSOOTH

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Douglas County's capital improvement fund balance has grown significantly in recent years, and the county is preparing for a large wave of spending over the next two years.

The 2027-2031 Capital Improvement Plan

outlines plans for transportation investments, bridge replacements, and long-term courthouse and other upcoming building projects. At the start of 2026, the administration CIP fund held nearly \$66 million, while the Public Works CIP fund had \$19.7 million. Combined, the county's CIP fund balance

totalled \$85,713,318 — an increase of approximately \$55 million compared with the beginning of 2021.

On Wednesday, county staff presented the projected expenditures for the CIP over the next five years. The county's expected to spend the largest amount of CIP funds in the first two years of

the plan. The county estimates it will spend \$35.3 million in 2026 and \$37 million in 2027, before declining to \$16.9 million in 2028, \$14.3 million in 2029, \$12.5 million in 2030, and \$4 million in 2031 as major projects are completed.

However, many those numbers are likely to

change. Chad Voigt, the county's Public Works director, said individual project costs often change over time. Voigt said he had to make several cost reestimates for projects due to changes in prices, such as asphalt and labor costs increasing.

"As a project is like five or 10 years out, it's

maybe less of a defined scope," Voigt said. "If it gets within two or three years, we want to look at more of what (we are) really doing here and get a good estimate based on a more refined scope, and so we did some of that work too."

See COUNTY, A8

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 Rain likely | High: 81° | Low: 67° | Forecast, B8

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