

LEGGETT & PLATT: Company rejects acquisition offer. **4A** | **BASKETBALL:** New Heights girls fall to New Covenant. **1B**

Data center annexation, zoning advance

Another round of voting by Joplin City Council set for Feb. 2

BY DEBBY WOODIN
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A majority of the Joplin City Council moved forward early Wednesday morning with proposals that could allow construction of a data or technology center on the

west side of the city despite opposition from many residents who packed City Hall.

The council gave first-round approval to requests for annexation of 540 acres and heavy industrial zoning for 600.4 acres in Wildwood Ranch. There will be a second and third readings on the council bills at a Feb. 2 meeting.

Residents will have to sign up with the city clerk to speak at those hearings, though they did not at

Tuesday's hearings, when testimony, pro and con, went on past midnight, and it was after 1 a.m. when the council voted. Around 70 people spoke.

Many of those who spoke against the proposal to establish a data center at Wildwood expressed concerns about the demand placed on the Joplin water supply and electricity by a data center. They also said they believe it could increase utility rates.

Tim Wilson, president of the central region of Liberty, said at Tuesday's meeting, "It's clear there is a lot of interest in our community about large energy users like data centers. Just seeing this room here tonight tells us how important this topic is."

CROWDED CHAMBERS

Before the hearing began, fire Chief Gerald Ezell called for residents to move from crowded aisles into the hall-

way for public safety. He said council chambers have a capacity of 200 people with perhaps double that number already in and around the meeting room.

"We are way out of code for the fire department regulations and for our safety," Ezell told the crowd.

Mayor Keenan Cortez opened public hearings on the two issues by asking the audience to exercise "decorum."

Outbursts, he said, would

be subject to him asking the sergeant-at-arms to escort unruly audience members out of the meeting. That occurred later in the meeting when an outburst by an unidentified man resulted in the mayor instructing police to eject him. Three officers of the Joplin Police Department surrounded and removed him.

Troy Bolander, the city's planning, zoning and

SEE **COUNCIL**, 2A

Getting exposure



Kayla Koff, manager at Candy House Gourmet, greets visitors during Wednesday's Business Expo at Downstream Casino Resort's Grand Pavilion. GLOBE | ROGER NOMER

Annual event draws large crowd, chamber official says

BY ROGER NOMER
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The Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce presented a ride down Route 66 on Wednesday at its 33rd annual Busi-

ness Expo at the Downstream Casino Resort Grand Pavilion.

Over 100 businesses exhibited at the expo, with EaglePicher Technologies as title sponsor.

Erin Slifka, vice president of the Joplin Area Chamber of Commerce, said the theme of "A Century on Route 66" was fitting as the country celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Mother Road, which

passed near the casino.

"Route 66 has been really significant to our economy in the Joplin area and still is today," Slifka said. "The businesses that are exhibiting have embraced that with their staff dressing up, the booth decoration themes. It's a fun theme, and we're always excited to get involved with that."

The expo kicked off Tuesday evening with Business

Expo After Hours. Slifka said it was the largest after-hours event of the year with over 500 members attending. The event provided a sneak peek of the expo before it opened Wednesday.

On Wednesday morning, the expo opened for business-to-business participation, and Community Day rounded

SEE **EXPO**, 2A

Missouri bills on driverless cars clears hurdle

House committee hears testimony for, against legislation

BY REBECCA RIVAS
Missouri Independent

The push to allow Waymo driverless taxis to operate in Missouri cleared its first hurdle Tuesday evening.

The Missouri House Emerging Issues Committee voted 7-4 Tuesday, along partisan lines, to advance two identical bills sponsored by Rep. Don Mayhew, R-Crocker, and Rep. Brandon Phelps, R-Warrensburg.

The bills had received strong support from advocates for the disabled, Mothers Against Drunk Driving and St. Louis Mayor Cara Spencer during a three-hour public hearing last week.

But committee members heard fervent opposition from numerous Teamsters commercial drivers, who argued the legislation is a "job killer" because it opens the door for driverless trucks on highways.

The legislation also faced opposition from first responders and school bus drivers, who raised public safety concerns.

Tom Mullins, a St. Louis firefighter with Teamsters Local 610, said at last week's hearing that other cities have struggled with keeping robotaxis out of emergency scenes or getting them to move to the side of the road when their sirens are on.

"Delays in even seconds can make a life-or-death difference in property preservation and human survival," Mullins said. "Emergency crews have had to physically intervene, smashing windows to force the vehicle to stop or physically stand in front of an autonomous vehicle to keep it from entering the scene."

Lori Becker, CEO of the St. Louis-based Starkloff Disability Institute, urged the committee to think about people with disabilities and those who have "transit-limiting conditions." Becker said she and others face challenges with Uber drivers and would feel

SEE **BILLS**, 2A

Dangerous temperatures, snow arrive with front Friday

FROM STAFF REPORTS
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Remember those balmy temperatures around Christmastime?

Shorts and T-shirt weather in the middle of winter? Record-breaking warmth? People living like it was a great summer day?

The bill for those temperatures comes due Friday. And it looks like such a bill as to make make

Greenlanders shudder.

"We are looking at the potential for dangerously cold conditions as an Arctic front moves into the region," said Jason Schumann, meteorologist with the National Weather Service station in Springfield. "Temps will plummet (Friday) with lows in the single digits. It's not going to warm up at all on Saturday."

He added: "We're very confident in the cold coming."

Thinks people, pets, pipes, he suggested.

Lows in the single digits are expected to stick around Sunday and Monday nights; wind chills will be below zero.

The front also is likely to bring several inches of snow to Southwest Missouri and Southeast Kansas.

"Total snow accumulations between 6 and 9 inches are possible, with the greater amounts most

likely along the southern state borders," the National Weather Service reported. "Snow is expected to begin Friday afternoon and continue through late Saturday night."

The weather service warns that travel could become difficult, with hazardous conditions possible beginning when driving home Friday night.

"This is going to be im-

pactful weather," Schumann said.

A winter storm watch has been issued for southern Kansas and southern Missouri beginning at noon Friday and running through 6 a.m. Sunday.

By the way, temperatures in Nuuk, capital of Greenland, will approach 40 degrees over the weekend; temperatures on the southern part of the island could approach 50 degrees.

