Boone County legislators share goal for session

By Rudi Keller

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Boone County's five House members haven't filed any bills for the legislative session that begins Wednesday, but all have staked out issues they said will consume their energies in the coming months.

Because of population growth, Boone County will have four residents in the House for the first time and a fifth, Rep. Caleb Jones, R-California, whose district has a Boone County majority. There will be two new members, John Wright, D-Rocheport, and Caleb Rowden, R-Columbia, and three returning lawmakers — Jones, Rep. Stephen Webber, D-Columbia, and Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia.

All five House members have endorsed plans for a bond issue to finance new college construction, and all three Democrats support expanding Medicaid, the health care program for the poor, to cover approximately 300,000 more Missourians. Jones and Rowden haven't endorsed Medicaid expansion, but neither has come out in opposition.

Kelly is the most experienced member of the House because of his service from 1983 to 1994, before term limits took effect, in addition to his two terms since returning to the House in 2009. He has used that experience to work closely with Republican leaders on major bills and budget issues. Kelly said that won't change this year as he encourages House Speaker Tim Jones, R-Eureka, to be the lead sponsor on a bond issue.

Kelly also said he wants to focus on fixing the insolvent Second Injury Fund, which is designed to protect employers from bearing the full brunt of a workplace injury that aggravates or adds to an existing disability. Claims exceed the revenue from employer taxes, and no new claims have been paid since last year.

Kelly wants to either severely limit who can receive awards or eliminate the fund, which was begun after World War II to promote employment of returning veterans. Kelly acknowledges his personal agenda is ambitious.

"Any one of them would be a hugely successful session," he said.

The newcomers in the delegation aren't staking out such ambitious ground, but both Wright and Rowden said they have issues that will keep their attention.
Wright, a venture capitalist who has used his earnings to set up a foundation for early childhood education, said he hopes to make a difference as lawmakers debate tax credit reform. Business tax giveaways need to be viewed in terms of how the state would use the money if it was in the treasury, he said.

"If we are allocating $50 million to a particular tax credit program, what are the opportunity costs?" Wright said. "It is incumbent on all of us to call attention to how these programs work and the trade-offs."

Rowden said he will be looking closely at job training programs and how to improve both on-campus and online opportunities.

Jones, who won his seat in 2010 but will be representing Boone County voters for the first time, said lawmakers need to address campaign finance and highway funding. Both are issues that divide lawmakers on more than party lines. And both, he said, involve public trust.

A bond issue or other measure to finance roads must go to voters, and voters "are very aware of where we spend our government dollars," Jones said. If they are not convinced the money is well spent, he said, they won't approve it.

On campaign finance, the public needs assurance that elections are contested fairly, Jones said. Political action committees that can hide their donors increase public distrust, he said. "That needs to be solved and addressed to reassure people that the political system we have in Missouri is intact and functioning properly."

**Webber, who will be in his last semester of law school at the University of Missouri, said he will work to support a bond issue and Medicaid expansion. He also said he intends to renew his effort to expand anti-discrimination laws to cover sexual orientation and gender identity.**

He said he will renew efforts to provide stable incomes for state employees called to duty with the National Guard or Reserve. Webber said his proposal would pay them the difference between their state salary and active-duty pay.
Grasslands

A new look at the traffic problem

By Henry J. Waters III

Monday, January 7, 2013

When news first broke about planned demolition of eight houses along Providence Road near its intersection with Stadium Boulevard and the Grasslands subdivision, initial reactions here and elsewhere questioned the potential use of city eminent domain power. The justification had better be based on a broad public purpose and not merely as a way to placate subdivision residents over evolving uses of the targeted properties, it said here.

Additional discovery leads to a better understanding of the city's proposal, which is based mainly on demands of the Missouri Department of Transportation to correct a growing traffic problem in the area.

Discussion began about 10 years ago when Grasslands residents simply wanted easier left-turn access onto Providence Road, perhaps with installation of a traffic light at Bingham Road. MoDOT objected, wanting a more comprehensive plan involving a longer right-turn lane extending north from Stadium.

MoDOT was willing to gain the added space in the current street right-of-way by converting the existing center turn lane into a fence-like barrier, an ugly solution the University of Missouri and Grasslands people rightly opposed. After repeated meetings among the parties, the current plan emerged requiring demolition of eight houses in two stages to construct a new residential street between Bingham and Brandon roads and to gain enough right-of-way space on Providence to add the right-turn lane. In the process, the width of driving lanes, which had been narrowed to 9.5 feet when the center lane was built, would be restored to 12 feet.

The current plan is approved by all three parties and would be built in two stages, the first requiring demolition of two houses and the second, the remaining six. A good explanation of the plan was presented in the story by Andrew Denney in Saturday’s Tribune.

As time passes, traffic is becoming intolerable and only will get worse. Narrower interests of the parties gave way to a better overall solution. Grasslands residents would have been satisfied with
a left turn out by interfering with Providence Road traffic. MoDOT would have been satisfied with a center lane barrier similar to the ugly structure south of Stadium to make room for a longer right-turn lane on Providence north of the intersection that would have blocked left-turn-out options for the Grasslands. The university did not like the barrier and saw the need for a better right-turn solution onto Stadium. Reacting to all of this, the city developed the plan now on the table.

Chances are in most cases the city and owners of the properties will be able to negotiate sales without condemnation. Where condemnation occurs, market value will be determined by a legal process fair to both parties.

The targeted houses have become increasingly marginalized in value because of neighborhood traffic changes. Grasslands residents and drivers on the increasingly busy thoroughfare nearby will benefit from contemplated improvements. The planned demolition is based on a legitimate public purpose. As soon as financing and construction challenges can be met, the plan should be executed.

**HJW III**

Things always balance out. When someone gets something for nothing, someone else gets nothing for something.
Annual election held by extension council

Monday, January 7, 2013

The Boone County University of Missouri Extension Council is conducting its annual election, and voting is open through Jan. 22.

The council provides input and direction on MU Extension programming in Boone County. Any adult Boone County resident can vote by going to extension.missouri.edu/boone or visiting the extension office at 1012 N. Route UU to pick up a ballot. Ballots also can be requested by phone at 445-9792 or by email at andersonfr@missouri.edu.

Voters are directed to choose 10 candidates from the following list: Marie Pasley, Vicky Miserez, Marlea Caruthers, Rick Kitchen, Bill Cantin, Katherine Vanskike, Sarah Enochs Brilhante, Paul Brugmann, Clayton Lee, Nathan Beckett and Bill Thompson of Columbia; Rebecca Mott, Johnna Dudley and Julie Fleming of Rocheport; and Jennifer Grabner of Ashland.

All ballots must be received by 4:30 p.m. Jan. 22.