

thomas county

THE COLBY FREE PRESS

Inside Colby's power plant: how the city keeps the lights on when the grid fails

BY ALEX BARTA
HIGH PLAINS NEWS

COLBY — Feb. 4, 2024 — Four members of the Colby City Council toured the city's power plant Thursday afternoon, getting a closer look at the facility's backup generation capabilities and ongoing upgrades.

City Manager Ron Alexander said the tour was organized primarily for newly elected council members who took office in November, giving them an opportunity to better understand the city's infrastructure and long-term utility planning.

The Colby Power Plant tour was attended by Council Members: Velma Goodheart, Michelle Morris, Stan Schmidt and Bruce Hansen.

Alexander said, "We got a couple of new council members as of November and generally we try to set up opportunities for them to tour facilities," Alexander said. "As we take infrastructure needs or costs to council members, they can at least connect the dots."

The walkthrough follows a similar tour of the city's wastewater treatment

plant in recent weeks. Alexander said the goal is to help council members see firsthand what city employees do on a daily basis and what future investments may be necessary to serve a growing community.

"It's an opportunity for those council members to actually meet our staff members and see what they do in their day-to-day operation," Alexander said. "There's multiple levels here."

Power Plant Operators Josh Eisenbart, Will Smiley and Dawsen Lammer participated in the tour along with Electric Utility Director, Brad Davis, City Finance Director, Deb Zerr and City Treasurer, Megan Roemer.

Colby's power plant serves as a backup generation source for the city. While Colby receives electricity through three separate feeds from Midwest Energy, the municipal plant can be brought online if any of those feeds are disrupted.

"We have three different feeds that come in from Midwest Energy and if any of those were to go down ... we could power up," Alexander said. "So it's backup capacity."



Power Plant Operators work during the Colby Power Plant tour.

In addition to emergency use, the plant can also help stabilize costs during periods of high wholesale energy prices. Alexander pointed to a prolonged cold stretch in February when market prices spiked dramatically.

"When we're looking at those price per megawatt hours of \$300, \$400, \$500, \$600, we can actually fire up the plant and cover just enough to cover a load at that given time and drive those costs down," Alexander said.

The same strategy can be used during summer

peak demand periods. "We can kind of shave what we call a peak load and help control that day-to-day pricing as well," Alexander added. The city has been in the process of updating aging equipment at the plant. One 3-megawatt Caterpillar engine was installed in 2019, with a second added in 2024. A third unit is expected later this summer or early fall.

"You get to the point where some of those older engines aren't worth continuing repairs on," Alexander said. "So it's repairing

or replacing with newer generation."

Alexander said one of the most important takeaways for council members is understanding the plant's current capability and the need for continued investment.

"Number one is what is our capability; two, what's the status of our current power plant; and three, the needs to continue investing in

that," Alexander said. "And again, meet the staff — these are the people that are willing to come out on nights and weekends and fire up if need be."

The tour provided both historical perspective and insight into how the power plant supports reliability and cost control for Colby residents and businesses.



LEFT: The Colby Power Plant tour was attended by Council Members: Velma Goodheart, Michelle Morris, Stan Schmidt and Bruce Hansen, Power Plant Operators: Josh Eisenbart, Will Smiley and Dawsen Lammer, Electric Utility Director Brad Davis, City Finance Director Deb Zerr and City Treasurer Megan Roemer. *submitted photos*

RIGHT: The 1970 Cooper-Bessemer LSV-16 is a massive, 16-cylinder industrial engine.



PUBLIC NOTICE

Prairie Dog Creek WTAP Sign-up to Open

The Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) will conduct a Water Right Transition Assistance Program (WTAP) enrollment in the Prairie Dog Creek target area from February 15 – March 31, 2026.

WTAP is a voluntary, incentive-based water conservation program designed to manage aquifers and streams in critical need of restoration by compensating landowners for the permanent retirement of irrigation water rights. Priority in the spring 2026 enrollment will be given to retiring irrigation water rights that have the greatest impact on the local stream / aquifer system as shown below.

To be eligible, water rights must be in good standing with the KDA Division of Water Resources. Dryland farming is permitted after a water right is retired. Limited irrigation can also be temporarily allowed to establish a permanent cover on the land being transitioned from irrigation. Partial water right reductions will also be considered for retirement grants.

WTAP grants are approved on the basis of competitive bids. WTAP grants can be considered by the KDA Division of Conservation for up to \$6,000 per acre-foot of the "Historic Consumptive Water Use" value as calculated over the last 10 years of reported annual water use of the water right(s) proposed for acceptance. To help increase incentives to landowners, WTAP grants can be combined with other government or private conservation programs which also offer financial assistance.

This WTAP enrollment is part of a special water conservation project being funded by the Bureau of Reclamation.

Maps, application forms and other details are available on KDA's Division of Conservation website at www.agriculture.ks.gov/waterconservationprograms. Contact Jake Dooling at (785) 477-4339 or jacob.dooling@ks.gov for more assistance. Water right information is also available from the Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No.4 in Colby at 785-462-3915, and from the Division of Water Resources field office in Stockton at 785-425-6787.

94th Birthday Card Shower

Help us celebrate Betty Finley-Wolfe's 94th birthday with a card shower!

March 14, 2026

Cards may be sent to:
Betty Wolfe
3580 Rd. 66
Brewster, KS 67732-8906



Thomas County Transportation Van

Mon-Fri: 7 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Phone: 785-443-9208
First Come First Served Scheduling

The Thomas County transportation van is a service provided throughout Thomas County, Kansas on a call-by-call basis with availability of an approved operator. Services are available for riders of all ages! The van is handicap and wheelchair accessible.

This Project Funded in Part by the KDOT Public Transit Program



65TH ANNUAL

COLBY GUN & COIN COLLECTORS SHOW

Saturday March 21 9am - 5pm Sunday March 22 10am - 3pm

Colby Event Center Auxiliary Gym
1200 S Franklin Ave, Colby KS

Admission is \$5 (\$6 with credit card) - kids 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult

785-443-3077
www.colbyguncoinshow.com

Guards on Duty Overnight. Not responsible for Accident or Theft. All guns coming in will be checked at the door. All firearms will have the action tied for safety. All dealers and attendees must obey all FEDERAL, STATE, and LOCAL LAWS and are ultimately responsible for payment of all sales taxes due.

