

THE FORT SCOTT TRIBUNE

Serving Bourbon County since 1884



www.fstribune.com

141ST YEAR NO. 54

6 N. Main St. • Fort Scott, Kansas 66701 • 620-223-2110

INSIDE:

Fort Scott High School hosted a Career fair Wednesday. See photo on page 2.

INSIDE:

Blissful Meadows Boutique hosted a grand opening Monday. See page 2.

INSIDE:

See page 3 for photos of the winners of the Tribune's annual Easter Coloring Contest.

County Commission proceeds with forensic audit RFP

Jason E. Silvers
The Tribune

The Bourbon County Commission took action Monday regarding requests for proposals for an independent forensic audit.

According to a draft of an RFP presented during the meeting, the audit is intended to address "identified irregularities in cash receipts and disbursements; concerns raised through internal review and whistleblower allegations; procurement and vendor payment abnormalities; grant compliance and allowability concerns; payroll and timekeeping irregularities; and assertions."

In March, commissioners voted 3-2 to pass an amended motion by Motley to engage an independent firm to do a forensic audit on transactions deemed necessary by the commission. A citizen referenced accusations he saw on social media related to "waste, fraud and abuse."

The period under review is from January 2021 to the present, and the primary units or functions under review are the treasurer, clerk, public works, IT department, recorder of deeds, EMS and commissioners. Systems involved include accounting software, payroll system, bank platforms, and time/attendance records, according to the draft document.

Commissioners approved by a 4-1 vote a motion by Chairman Samuel Tran to begin the RFP process with the following dates in place: issue date of April 6; deadline for written questions, April 20; answers to questions by April 27; proposals due by May 4; and the intent to award will be May 18. Commissioner Joe Allen was the only no vote.

The motion also included removing Laura Krom, executive assistant for the commission, from the RFP as point of contact, and adding Kaety Bowers, chair of the Bourbon County Republican Party, and Tim Emerson, vice chair of the Bourbon County Republican Party, as points of contact.

Allen questioned why the sheriff's department and public safety were not included on the list of departments to be audited, according to the RFP. Tran said those departments were audited by BakerTilly a few years ago and not included in the audit to save money.

"If we don't add everybody, I want to know why we've added the ones on there," Allen said. He later said the only reason he voted no is "I think everybody should be listed."

The commission also unanimously approved a separate motion by Commissioner Gregg Motley to use Greenwood County Sheriff Heath Samuels as the outside point of contact during the RFP process, based on a recommendation by Bourbon County Sheriff Bill Martin.

Tran later confirmed there will be points of contact at the local level and outside the county. Commissioner Mika Milburn-Kee asked why Martin cannot be a point of contact.

"We're trying to keep this above board and as beyond reproach as possible," Tran said. "This is causing enough consternation. It doesn't need to be done in a fashion that tears the community apart."

Tran said he has heard



Bourbon County Commissioner Gregg Motley discusses concerns with a request for proposals for an independent forensic audit Monday evening.

Jason E. Silvers/Tribune photo

two sides of the issue from community members, in terms of whether the audit is needed.

Early in the discussion, Tran read a list of potential outside points of contact, which included several law enforcement personnel from other counties.

"I don't know any of these people," he said. "When you're ready, we'll launch to one of these and we'll get this RFP out on the street."

During a discussion on advertising the RFP, County Clerk Susan Walker said the commission must post the RFP and allow a few weeks for return. Tran asked about possible statutes regarding publishing the RFP, but Walker said she did not know of any requirements.

"My intention, if we launch this, is to have a 30-day turnaround time," Tran said. "We have one month to put together their RFP. The other part of this, is how do you want to execute the contract? Best value or sealed bids?"

Commissioners agreed "best value" is the preferred method, which Tran said is built into the RFP. He said there is a "grading matrix" in the RFP, and the method requires source selection, which he feels is the best way to obtain a contract.

"Depending on how many proposals come in, generally we sequester the source selection board," he said. "The contracts are locked. They can look at one contract at a time, grade that contract, put it back in the case, then pull another contract and do the same thing. It's very fair and above board."

At one point during the discussion, Milburn-Kee left the meeting room and later returned. Tran discussed a need to set dates for the process timeline.

In response to a question from Motley, Tran said BakerTilly drafted the RFP and "may or may not be bidding." Motley said he had issue with Baker Tilly drafting the RFP and also bidding, as the firm works with the county. Tran said if Baker Tilly bids, that can be discussed during source selection.

Motley said he also had a problem with a county employee being the point of contact, and suggested Bowers is "outside the organization." The RFP point of contact initially listed in the draft of the RFP is Laura Krom, executive assistant for the county.

"All she does is collect," Tran said of Krom's role in the process. "She doesn't

collect until it goes through the POCs. Once the POCs get it, everything else gets wrapped up nice and neat. It's sent to Laura, she maintains those records under lock and key until we get together to do source selection."

Tran said the reason he chose Krom is she is the executive assistant for the commission.

"She's an employee," Motley said. "None of the forensic audits would involve her position then."

Allen said the commission is one of the units listed to be investigated in the audit, and Krom works for the commission.

"Once the different bids are received, all she (Krom) is doing is collecting and sealing them," Commissioner David Beerbower said. "Once we make the selection, she's out of the process."

Motley and Tran continued a discussion on Krom's involvement in the process.

Tran said the decision is ultimately up to the five commissioners. The commission took a brief recess, then Motley suggested tabling discussion on the RFP until Milburn-Kee returns. Commissioners proceeded with other agenda items, and Milburn-Kee returned later in the meeting.

Commissioners discussed potential dates for the procurement schedule, as well as a timeline for executing a contract.

Motley said he would like each commissioner to select transactions for review as part of the RFP, as he is concerned about cost of the audit.

"Three months of hourly rate is a lot of money," he said. "I don't think we want to go on a fishing expedition."

Motley said the intent is the commission has identified "some transactions" that have presented concerns.

"If we're not specific, this could get really high dollar expensive," he said.

Allen agreed, adding he is also concerned about cost as well as why certain departments were not included in the list of areas to be audited.

"I feel like it is a little bit of a fishing expedition, also," he said. "What are we looking for? If we have specific incidents, we need to look into those."

Motley said Baker Tilly cannot perform the forensic audit "because they're contracted."

SEE AUDIT ON PAGE 2

DeLaTorre retiring from FSHS

By Marti Wells-Smith
Special to the Tribune

In a career that has spanned 26 years at Fort Scott High School, Jeff DeLaTorre has been involved as both an administrator, instructor and coach, with 15 years devoted to the administrative side as he finishes his eighth year as the school's activities and athletic director.

Although he's retiring at the end of the current school year, his work as an athletic director will continue at St. Mary's Colgan in Pittsburg, a smaller school where he was recruited to help further develop its programs as well as teach Social Studies.

His wife, Angie, will remain as the Register at FSHS, with DeLaTorre commuting to his new position. Their family includes two grown sons, a daughter-in-law and two grandsons. Both sons were raised as loyal Fort Scott Tigers, and were coached by their dad in basketball.

"It's kind of a weird feeling to leave here after 26 years, and begin again with new students," DeLaTorre said. "I have a lot of great memories here, and have seen many changes and improvements over the years. There's been excellent progress made here with both athletics and academics, and it's been good to be a part of it."

DeLaTorre explained that his position as athletic director has involved scheduling with the coaches, reserving facilities and arranging transportation while coordinating events. Seasonal sports include football, basketball, wrestling, swimming, baseball, softball, soccer, track and field, golf and tennis, with both boys and girls teams for sports such as basketball, track, tennis, wrestling and golf.



Fort Scott High School Athletic/Activities Director Jeff DeLaTorre is retiring at the end of the current school year.

Submitted photo

According to DeLaTorre, the powerlifting program and new archery program are considered activities, since they are not a part of the Kansas State High School Activities Association, although they do have their own state meets. Five FSHS girls recently participated in state archery events, which are hosted at different schools at various times. Archery is a combined sports activity in which both girls and boys can participate together, with a practice area set up on school grounds. Equipment is furnished by the school if needed, and plans are to continue expanding participation.

DeLaTorre's work as activities director has included all the fine arts programs such as music, drama and debate, as well as school clubs, arranging events and making sure nothing overlaps.

"There are a lot of moving parts in these positions, working with multiple people and students to ensure that everything goes smoothly throughout the school year. Certain instructors make their own schedules, but generally speaking, it's coordinated by the director," DeLaTorre said.

Jared Martin will be replacing DeLaTorre at the beginning of the 2026-27 school year. Martin previously worked at FSHS as the physical education and strength coach, and as an assistant coach for several sports before accepting the position of assistant principal at Jayhawk-Linn High School in Mound City.

"Fort Scott will always be our hometown, and I look forward to still being a part of it, as I start a new chapter, taking all my good memories and positive experiences with me," DeLaTorre said.

Roaring river



The Marmaton River under the North National Bridge has risen after extensive rainfall in the area Wednesday night into Tuesday.

Teresa Klumpp/Tribune photo



WEATHER

Scattered thunderstorms in the morning, then cloudy skies late. Cooler. High 78F. Winds SSE at 10 to 20 mph. Chance of rain 40%.

