

Prep football

Check out our guide area high school football teams, inside.

NATION | Ohio kidnapper found dead

The man serving a life term in prison for holding three women captive is believed to have committed suicide. **A5**

SNAPSHOTS

Photos submitted by our readers. **A4**

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CITY COMMISSION

Stage fighting



Staff photo by Sarah Midgorden

With the stage in the background, a home-school volleyball team practices in the Peace Memorial Auditorium Wednesday morning. Veterans Tuesday expressed their concerns about a plan to remove the stage from the auditorium during renovations.

After 3 hours of debate, commission changes course on auditorium

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Emotions ran high during the debate over what to do with the Peace Memorial Auditorium at Tuesday night's city commission meeting.

Following more than three hours of discussion, commissioners eventually voted 3-2 against moving forward with a plan to remove the stage and build offices where the permanent seating is. Instead, they agreed to look at alternatives that would keep the auditorium intact while moving Parks and Recreation offices to City Hall.

Mayor John Matta and Commissioner Wynn Butler supplied the two votes to stick to the original plan, saying that keeping the stage and moving the offices would not be fiscally conserva-

tive. However, commissioners Rich Jankovich, Usha Reddi and Karen McCulloh opted to revisit alternatives proposed more than a year ago in order to see whether the stage could be kept and the offices moved while staying within the \$3 million cost of the planned renovations.

City officials said the auditorium was designated as a memorial to 101 Manhattan soldiers killed during World War II as part of a campaign to win voter approval of an \$800,000 bond issue.

The dedication ceremony in 1955 referenced not only the WWII soldiers, but anyone who had died from Manhattan "for democracy" and to the pioneers who first settled Manhattan. That was a heated subject during Tuesday night's commission meeting.

Several people in attendance said the auditorium was solely a memorial to the WWII soldiers who died in combat, but commissioners and city officials reiterated that the plaque on the wall outside the auditorium, the speech given by the former mayor during the dedication, and the program included more than WWII soldiers or veterans.

All parties agreed that the city did a poor job of maintaining the auditorium as a memorial. Beyond that, both current and former residents accused commissioners of not being transparent in their decision to renovate the auditorium, to which Reddi took offense. She said the commission has debated what to do with the auditorium and Parks and Rec offices for more than a

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A plaque outside the auditorium dedicates it to early settlers and "to those patriotic citizens who sacrificed their lives so that American democracy might be preserved."

Commission changes course on Peace Memorial

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year, and it is not the commissioners' or city staff members' fault that residents do not read the city's website or the paper to stay informed.

Reddi also took offense at an assertion by Greg Penfield, commander of the Manhattan VFW, that Manhattan was not a soldier-friendly city. She said the city hired professionals to partner with Fort Riley, and added that USD

383 and Kansas State University have excellent relationships with the military community.

Butler took offense at several audience members using the words "destroy" or "demolish" in reference to the remodel designs. He said the intent was to view the auditorium as a living memorial, where utility and function were important. He said city staff looked hard at the auditorium's use, and designed the remodeling

to accommodate the most common uses. He said that data showed the most use was from team sports and not stage performances, an assertion that upset several in the audience.

Matta also asked city manager Ron Fehr to react to assertions that the city was spending \$30,000 a year to hold performances in Nichols Auditorium rather than at City Hall. Fehr said that money was fully recouped through ticket sales to the perfor-

mances; and therefore cost taxpayers nothing.

Jankovich admitted the pleas from audience members changed his mind Tuesday night. He said when he walked into the meeting, he was convinced that remodeling was the right thing to do. But after hearing from the public, he was not as certain. He wanted to see whether the auditorium could be renovated and Parks and Rec offices moved to City Hall for the same price.