

MINUTES

KIOWA COUNTY DISASTER RELIEF AND RECOVERY SPECIAL COMMITTEE

June 15, 2007
State Defense Building
2800 SW Topeka Blvd.

Members Present

Representative Lee Tafanelli, Chairperson
Senator Ruth Teichman, Vice-Chairperson
Representative Louis Ruiz, Ranking Minority
Senator Janis Lee
Senator Roger Pine
Senator Derek Schmidt
Representative Richard Carlson
Representative John Faber
Representative Dennis McKinney

Staff Present

J. G. Scott, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Amy VanHouse, Kansas Legislative Research Department
Bruce Kinzie, Revisor of Statutes Office
Gordon Self, Revisor of Statutes Office

Conferees

Dan Hay, Operations Chief, Division of Emergency Management
Col. Eric Peck, Chief of the Joint Staff
Mary Sweet, Administrator, Kiowa County Memorial Hospital
Ron Gruber, Manager, Southern Plains Coop
Darin Headrick, Superintendent, Greensburg USD 422
Mike Estes, Store Manager, BTI Greensburg John Deere
Gene West, Kiowa County Commissioner
Steve Hewitt, Greensburg City Administrator
Don Richards, Kiowa County Commissioner
Joe Palacioz, Kiowa County Administrator

Chairman Tafanelli opened the meeting of the Special Committee on Kiowa County Disaster Relief and Recovery at 8:20 a.m. in the Adjutant General's Conference Room at the State Defense Building. Chairman Tafanelli welcomed the Committee and discussed the tour scheduled for this meeting. Discussion also included the vision for the Committee's work.

Col. Eric Peck, Chief of the Joint Staff, introduced Dan Hay, Operations Chief, Kansas Division of Emergency Management (KDEM). Mr. Hay provided an overview of the storm to the Committee ([Attachment 1](#)). KDEM was still working on recovery related to the winter storm of December 2006 and January 2007 when the tornado hit Greensburg on May 4, 2007. The tornado sirens sounded about 15 minutes before the storm hit the town, and it was noted that not all counties or areas in the state have storm sirens. Mr. Hay received a call from the Southwest Region Emergency Management Coordinator soon after the storm hit. It was reported that cell phone towers were down, and there were several chemical spills from semi-trucks in the storm's path. KDEM notified the Kansas Department of Transportation, the Kansas National Guard, and the Kansas Highway Patrol. The Emergency Operations Center was activated at 10:45 p.m. on May 5, 2007.

Kiowa County officials sent out a request for help, with Finney County and Garden City being one of the first counties to respond. The Governor verbally declared a State of Disaster Emergency at 12:32 a.m. on May 5, 2007. The Civil Air Patrol was dispatched. The Courthouse was one of the few structures left standing in Greensburg following the storm. The Topeka Fire Chief, serving on the deployed Incident Management Team, signed for Kiowa County immediately after the storm. Mr. Hay reported that disaster response for Kiowa County would have failed without the deployment of the Incident Management Team.

The National Guard, the Kansas Highway Patrol, and other law enforcement sealed off the town. There were oil spills all over the region. The Courthouse became the hub of Greensburg. Assistance, including from the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, was located at the neighboring town of Haviland. Thirteen people died, with hundreds injured as a result of the storm. Over \$500 million in destroyed homes and businesses was paid by insurance companies. Thirty-two counties have over \$12 million in Public Assistance losses. There are also over \$1 million in Individual Assistance costs. Mr. Hay reported that 120 parcels in Greensburg have been "walked away from."

Mr. Hay provided the Committee with a summary of Greensburg Tornado Key Events ([Attachment 2](#)) and a Kansas Tornado Recovery and Flood Response National Guard Situation Report No. 37 ([Attachment 3](#)). Staff provided the Committee with a copy of an e-mail from Dick Koerth, Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, regarding damages at the Cheyenne Bottoms Wildlife Area ([Attachment 4](#)).

Col. Peck provided a briefing on the travel arrangements and procedures required to fly by Blackhawk helicopter to Greensburg. The Committee recessed at 9:00 a.m. to travel to Greensburg.

The Committee arrived in Greensburg at 11:00 a.m. The Committee was given a tour of the Kiowa County Memorial Hospital by Mary Sweet, Administrator. The hospital reopened on May 21, 2007 with the use of the EMEDS (a mobile hospital) provided by the Kansas Air National Guard. The hospital also has a day care opened at the site for use by hospital employees. There also is a rural health center located at Haviland which they are currently using. The hospital was able to recover about 98 percent of their records after the storm. Some needs the hospital identified and addressed included dietary needs, showers, and restrooms. The hospital now has a shower and restrooms located at the facility, with meals provided by the Salvation Army. It is estimated to take between 18 months to two years to have a new hospital built and operational.

The Committee then was given a tour of the Southern Plains Coop by Ron Gruber, Manager. The Coop lost all buildings at the site, except for the elevator. Of the \$5 million in damage, insurance covered \$4 million of the Coop's losses. There are 14 jobs at this location. The elevator currently is being powered by its own generator. A member of the Committee asked how many livestock were lost by the storm. Mr. Gruber did not know the total livestock lost, but estimated a loss of between 100 and 150 head at one feedlot near St. John.

Lunch was provided by United Methodist Church Disaster Relief.

Mr. Darin Headrick, Superintendent of Greensburg USD 422, spoke with the Committee regarding provision for the school district. Mr. Headrick reported that within the first week following the storm, the district began making provisions for closure of the current school year and began considering the 2007-08 school year. The district was very close to meeting the state required attendance days, and the Legislature allowed the district to end the school year immediately after the storm. Provisions were made for things such as student records and attendance at activities.

The USD 422 school board and Mr. Headrick determined that the district would need school facilities in Greensburg for the 2007-08 school year. The district has made plans to use temporary, modular facilities until a new, permanent facility can be built. They have made provision for 28 temporary classrooms, four temporary offices, a shop classroom, a cafeteria, and a gymnasium which should be delivered in early July. The district has insurance coverage which will help provide for the temporary facilities and for the new permanent buildings. A map of the proposed temporary elementary site was provided to the Committee (Attachment 5). Other concerns include curriculum, technology, and transportation. Arrangements have been made or are near completion for the Greensburg district to take school buses into neighboring towns where Greensburg residents are currently staying to transport Greensburg students to school. This transportation would only be available for the children in families currently displaced because of the tornado. One district also has offered to help pick up children as part of its bus routes in order to get the Greensburg children to a central location to travel to the Greensburg school.

The Committee next visited the Greensburg John Deere dealership. Mike Estes, Store Manager, spoke to the Committee regarding redevelopment of the Greensburg business community. The community has established the Kiowa County Redevelopment Board. The Board has been working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which attends all of the meetings. The Board has been working with Greensburg business owners to determine who has made a commitment to reestablish a business in the town. Mr. Estes noted that the Greensburg business community will need help from the state and federal governments to rebuild businesses in the town. The local tax base also was addressed as an issue. It is anticipated that the younger population is more likely to return to Greensburg, and that most of the community was underinsured. The Board also anticipates that incentives will be needed to help rebuild the economic base in the town. There appears to be wide acceptance of the "green" idea in rebuilding. Mr. Estes distributed copies of the Kiowa County Redevelopment Board June 19, 2007 agenda and June 12, 2007 minutes (Attachment 6).

The Committee met with Kiowa County Commissioners, Gene West and Don Richards and Kiowa County Administrator Joe Palacios and Greensburg City Administrator Steve Hewitt. It was reported that 80 percent of the debris has been removed. In regard to utilities, 20 percent of temporary electricity capacity is available. Also available is 80 percent of the water capacity, which is all drinkable water. There was not much sewer system damage from the storm. It also was

reported that staffing is a main concern regarding items such as building permits, code compliance, and financial planners.

There is a timeframe for completion of the comprehensive master plan. This is a ten-week process with FEMA. The utilities plan must be completed in two weeks. The next four weeks are critical with regard to things such as community layout, utilities, and city and county facilities. They do not want to slow anyone down with rebuilding.

They are still waiting for decisions from major businesses, such as Dillon's grocery store, if it will rebuild in the town. Other decisions, like having a pharmacy in town, are important to the community.

Discussions also have occurred regarding the possible merger of government functions. Greensburg is a third class city which currently has the needs of a first class city. Cash flow has been a major issue, since FEMA only reimburses for expenses. The city and county currently do not have the funds to make the initial payment.

The Chairman said that the next meeting would likely be during the second week in July.

The Committee adjourned at 2:15 p.m. to return to Topeka via Blackhawk helicopter.

Prepared by Amy VanHouse
Edited by J. G. Scott

Approved by Committee on:

July 13, 2007
(Date)