

# LOCAL

## Neighbors meet to discuss EPA cleanup proposals for CCI

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Special to The Olathe News

When Olathe resident Betty Mitchell and her husband, Byron, bought the little red house on Keeler Street 25 years ago, they had no idea what they were buying themselves into.

Their home sits along the outskirts of the former Chemical Commodities, Inc. (CCI), a chemical brokerage and recycling facility that failed to properly transport and dispose hazardous waste when it operated years ago.

Mitchell said she never fathomed her home would have a vapor system to combat the nauseating odor emitted from the waste or hazardous

soil contaminating the water in her backyard.

Frustrated yet hopeful, the couple attended an advisory meeting for residents last night at Grace United Methodist Church with more than 25 of their neighbors to discuss the Environmental Protection Agency's soil cleanup proposals, which were made known last month.

"We want to tell them exactly what we want to go on. It just seems like it's taking forever," she said.

State and city representatives answered questions and helped the advisory group formulate ideas for the best cleanup solution.

Resident input is very

important and will make a difference, said Glenn Andrews, co-leader of the group. Residents have until Sept. 15 to give the EPA suggestions. The EPA will make a final proposal after all the requests are in.

One request from residents asks the city to purchase the property to ensure the removal of the toxic chemical in the 1½-acre property at 312 S. Blake St.

This request is unlikely, said Joel Moesher, an attorney hired by the city.

Moesher said that he had dealt with many environmental cases similar to this one and that buying the property would mean the city is liable for the entire cost of the

cleanup project, an effort that costs million of dollars.

"The city isn't opposed to maintaining it, but they want to make sure there is an owner they can contact," he said.

As part of the city's promise to help residents, city spokeswoman Alice Snider said last night that Olathe would maintain the overgrown shrubs and grass surrounding the fence around the site.

"This is a federal project, so it's not in our (Olathe's) control," Snider said. "We'll look at other alternatives because we have to be responsible to all our taxpayers."

Responsible parties are current owners, former owners and any company that performed a business exchange with CCI, Moesher explained.

"These people are absolutely liable to pay for the cleanup at the site whether they were there for a day or for 10 years," he said.

But the former owners, CCI, went out of business in 1989 after 38 years of improperly handling its waste.

Boeing, an aircraft company, is one of several companies that has taken initiative with the EPA to pay for the cleanup.

For these companies and

agencies cleaning up the site, there is a long road ahead, Moesher said. The cleanup process could take 10, 20 or even 30 years, he said.

He said the process could be accelerated by pushing the state to take control. When the current residents and their heirs pass away and the companies involved with the contamination go bankrupt, the property will be given to the state.

Randy Carlson from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment said that he was aware that state would become liable for the site one day, but that the state has no interest owning the property.

"There's not a lot of money in the state for this," Carlson said. "Kansas is balancing the books just like every state in the nation."

The EPA's favored cleanup plan, which focuses on off-site disposal, costs \$4 million and could be millions more depending on how much soil is treated.

Other options presented by the EPA in July included capping, low temperature thermal desorption or no action at all. Some plans could cost as much as \$44 million.

Though costly, many residents say action must be taken.

"It's not fair for us," one woman said during the open discussion section. "My husband and I want to retire and move south, and no one will buy our home."

The woman said she is tired of seeing the signs in her backyard saying "hazard" and of the smell, which never seems to go away, she says.

"You try living with that smell," she said. "The EPA or people from the state should come live here and see what it's like."

Her family already installed 6-foot fence their yard to prevent the toxic soil from drifting to her home. She spent \$4,000 fixing her underground pipes, which she said broke as a result of the chemicals carelessly handled by CCI.

As for the Mitchells, they hope cleanup will begin soon. They have waited for a long time, they said.

Now, Mitchell said she is concerned about health risks even though the EPA concluded the site was not dangerous to human health. She said the same fumes she noticed 25 years ago still make her sick to her stomach.

"They run tests and say it's safe," she said. "But who really knows?"

**THE WEATHER**

**OLATHE 5-DAY FORECAST**

<b>WEDNESDAY</b> HIGH, 91 LOW, 69 Partly cloudy skies and hot.	<b>THURSDAY</b> HIGH, 84 LOW, 66 Chance of scattered showers and thunderstorms.	<b>FRIDAY</b> HIGH, 83 LOW, 65 Mostly cloudy skies and dry.	<b>SATURDAY</b> HIGH, 84 LOW, 65 Partly cloudy skies and warm.	<b>SUNDAY</b> HIGH, 85 LOW, 65 Partly cloudy with a chance of thunderstorms.

**THE REGION**

Partly cloudy today, with a chance of a few thunderstorms near a frontal boundary in the north and west. Chance of scattered showers and thunderstorms tonight. Mostly cloudy with scattered showers and thunderstorms likely Thursday.

**TODAY'S NATIONAL FORECAST**

Statistics through 6:00 p.m. at Johnson County Executive Airport  
 Temperature:  
 High ..... 98  
 Low ..... 68  
 Source: Mid-America Regional Council  
 Yesterday's peak: 62