

KS bill changes local watershed responsibility

(KAIR)--A bill, signed last week, places the responsibility of maintenance and repair of White Clay Watershed District Number 26 on the City of Atchison.

It makes the City responsible for the maintenance and repair of all watershed lakes, dams, and other projects in the district on and after January 1, 2020.

As of that date, the district will be dissolved.

According to testimony provided to the Kansas Legislature, the City supported the measure.

In the testimony, the City said the watershed district “exists more in theory than in practice,” as City staff is already responsible for creation of the district’s budget, which triggers the levying of mills each year. The Watershed District Board’s only responsibility is giving final approval to the annual budget. Additionally, through an agreement with the District, dating back to 1966, the City of Atchison “owns, insures, and maintains the 25 dams within the district.”

The City’s testimony outlined other difficulties faced through the current arrangement, including the City being responsible to organize meetings of the board, which includes coordinating board member schedules, writing agendas, making presentations, taking minutes, and publishing annual board elections and budget hearings. The City said “over time, it has become increasingly difficult to find board members and garner consistent enough attendance at meetings to ensure a quorum.”

The City, in the testimony, also cited the district’s lack of financial capacity, saying the City’s 5-year Capital Improvement Plan allows the flexibility to pursue larger projects by utilizing revenues from multiple years at a time, which would allow for planning for watershed infrastructure improvements without increasing the mill levy substantially.

House Bill 2188 was signed April 9 by Kansas Governor Laura Kelly during an official bill signing ceremony in Topeka.

It will become effective upon its publication in the Kansas Statute Book.