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\$700

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Jury selection continues in Curtis case

Muscatine man faces first-degree murder charge in stepfather's death in June 2014

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MUSCATINE, Iowa — Jury selection will continue Tuesday morning in the trial against Cody Ryan Curtis, charged with first-degree murder.

Jury selection began Monday morning, but court recessed for the day at 4:30 p.m. without selection complete.

Curtis, 31, was charged with the murder of his stepfather, Timothy Lane, on June 4, 2014. Lane died of fatal stab wounds the chest on Sunday, May 25, 2014.

LIVE COVERAGE

Follow Sarah Tisinger, court reporter, on Twitter @SBTisinger for live courtroom updates.

The trial began Monday with lengthy private interviews with potential jurors, which County Attorney Alan Ostergren said was an important process to ensure jurors are not familiar with case details or anyone on the long list of witnesses. The first day in court finished up with questions from both defense and prosecution to the panel of jurors inside the courtroom.

Ostergren mentioned several times the importance of completing a checklist, asking potential jurors if they understand that the state has to prove only items on the checklist to find Curtis guilty.

"If it's not on the checklist, frankly, we don't care about it," said Ostergren, who pressed that real-life courtrooms are not like TV crime

shows and not all jury questions will be answered. "You can always come up with more questions to ask or more witnesses to call in."

The checklist items, which will be provided to the jury following testimony evidence, will determine guilt and to what degree of charge.

Other issues Ostergren brought up were if these potential jurors could decide a verdict with little to no forensic evidence and if they could take seriously testimony of inmates that Curtis has contact with during his time in the Muscatine County Jail. One of the men who will testify pleaded guilty to the federal offenses of interference with commerce by threat of violence and attempted robbery. He was transferred to the Muscatine County Jail as a witness for the prosecution from a federal penitentiary in Colorado.

"He's a bad guy, I'm going no to sugar coat it," Ostergren said. "You may not have them over for dinner, but they have a story. Everyone's life

is treated equally ... most of all in a courthouse."

Although the jurors originally agreed they could hear the inmates' stories without bias, many admitted to Bell during questioning that they would be skeptical of their validity.

"Their credibility is going to be in question," said one of the potential jurors when Bell asked how he felt about "jailhouse snitches."

Generally, these inmates may be eligible to receive a reduced sentence in federal prison for providing information that aids in the conviction of another inmate. The second inmate was housed with Curtis but the charges against him were released. He is back in custody and charged on unrelated charges.

Court was dismissed for the day by 4:30 p.m. and juror interviews will continue 9 a.m. Tuesday. First-degree murder is a class A felony and, if convicted, Curtis could face life in prison without the possibility of parole.

Falcon Day of Caring cleans communities



BETH VAN ZANDT PHOTOS/MUSCATINE JOURNAL

Louisa-Muscatine High School senior Michael McCleary drags a branch as he and other students clean up the Fruitland Cemetery during Monday's Falcon Day of Caring. Other students did clean-up work in Grandview, Letts, Fruitland and Muscatine.



Louisa-Muscatine student Seth Keiser loads a garbage can onto a hay rack as he and other L-M students spent Monday morning sprucing up the Fruitland Cemetery for the annual Falcon Day of Caring.

Iowa lawmakers settle into budget work

Rod Boshart
Gazette Des Moines Bureau

DES MOINES — State lawmakers began the trench work Monday of assembling competing state budget plans that eventually they hope to merge into a spending plan they can approve, send to the governor and adjourn their 2015 session.

The House Appropriations Committee voted 14-11 to approve a higher education funding measure that would commit \$977.6 million in general fund appropriations to Iowa's regent universities and special schools, community colleges, workforce training efforts, private college tuition grants and other programs. The overall funding level would be \$8.5 million below current levels.

Rep. Cecil Dolecheck, R-Mount Ayr, chair of the education budget subcommittee, said the funding level was in line with House Republican spending targets in a tight budget which require "very painful cuts" in some budget areas and will not guarantee a third straight year of status-quo tuition for resident undergraduates attending one of Iowa's three state universities.

Before finalizing work on the spending plan, which could see full House action as early as Thursday, majority Republicans approved an amendment offered by Rep. Walt Rogers, R-Cedar Falls, which shifted \$12.9 million from the University of Iowa to fund performance-based increases of \$6.6 million for the University of Northern Iowa and \$6.3 million for Iowa State University.

MORE ON BUDGET, 2A

County approves Nichols fringe policy, hears trail updates

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MUSCATINE, Iowa — A new fringe area policy between Muscatine County and the city of Nichols earned the Muscatine County Board of Supervisors' approval Monday.

The agreement, which the board unanimously approved during its regular meeting Monday evening, allows the city of Nichols to require subdivisions within a two-mile radius of its city limits to meet all city rules regarding subdivisions. It also lays out the expected land uses for those areas agreed upon by the city and county, and how those uses will be administered jointly.

"We really want to work with the county," said Amber Freyeremuth, a Muscatine attorney representing the city of Nichols.

During a public hearing on the matter, Chairwoman Kas Kelly asked acting County Zoning

Administrator Steve Boka to elaborate on the agreement, saying the board had heard from some residents who had questions about the agreement.

"It's just a misunderstanding," Kelly said, noting that many of them were confused about the exact nature of the agreement.

Boka said that the creation of subdivisions would be mutually approved by the city and the county. While rezoning in the area would still be under county approval, the city would be informed of such changes and would allow them to give input. In addition, the policy agreement would support a preference for any future annexation of fringe area to Nichols to be voluntary in nature.

"I think this is a great proposal," Supervisor Jeff Sorensen said, noting that the county had similar agreements with Muscatine and West Liberty.

Park grants

Muscatine County Conservation Board Director Curt Weiss gave an update on several projects and grants.

Weiss reviewed plans for the extension of a trail from Musser Park in Muscatine to Wiggins Road. This trail extension is part of a \$10 million series of projects, known as the third phase of the Pearl of the Mississippi Program — a mix of both city and county recreational projects. The city and county are seeking \$3.5 million in grant funding from the Iowa Department of Economic Development's Community Attraction and Tourism (CAT) program.

Weiss said that the route of the trail has now been changed to use separated trails, not a shared road trail, and that part of the trail will now go directly through Deep Lakes Park, connecting it to the city of Muscatine. The trail goes through

both the city of Muscatine and Muscatine County.

"It's another example of the city and county working together," Muscatine City Public Works Director Randy Hill, who was present at the meeting along with Acting City Engineer Jim Edgmond.

Weiss said that he would likely bring the change in the route before the board at its meeting next week so the board can approve it in time for a meeting with the Vision Iowa Board on May 13, which awards the CAT grants.

He also noted that the MCCB did receive \$229,400 from the Roy J. Carver Charitable Trust. These funds will be used to fund additional and updated exhibits at the Environmental Learning Center, 3300 Cedar St. Weiss said that the new exhibits should be installed by this coming September.

Additionally, the MCCB does not

MORE ON COUNTY, 2A