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SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

HERMANN — Gov. Mike Parson's announcement last week that $400 million will be allocated to help finance the expansion of broadband access for rural Missouri was welcomed news to Gasconade County Presiding Commissioner Larry Miskel, R-Hermann, who has voiced concern about the high cost of extending the reach of Internet accessibility.

"That's a good thing," Miskel said Thursday of the governor’s announcement. "State and federal money is the only way, in my opinion, to get anything done," he added.

Indeed, the news of the funding came ahead of Friday's latest meeting of the Gasconade County Broadband Committee, an ad hoc group assembled by Meramec Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) to study ways to make high-speed Internet access available to the more-remote areas of the county. Miskel is participating in the work of the committee.

Internet access in rural areas is becoming more crucial for many aspects of daily life, from job searches to agricultural operations to the completion of daily homework assignments for local public school students.

In other matters at last week's session of the County Commission, administrators granted approval for the Hermann VFW and Knights of Columbus to jointly operate a food stand at the Doerr Building property adjacent to the courthouse during Octoberfest. The food stand operation will mean that during Octoberfest the employees of Fernweh Distilling will not be able to park on the Doerr Building property.

County Collector Shawn Schlot-tach recently sold a dozen parcels of property at the latest county tax sale. A total of $1,800 was received, according to her report to the Commission. Of the 12 pieces, nine sold for the exact amount of taxes owed and three sold for a surplus amount.

MRPC is working on a Community Development Bloc Grant through the Missouri Department of Economic Development on behalf of the county’s only water district — Public Water Supply District 1, which serves the Peaceful Valley lake community.

Administrators learned that the county’s insurance carrier has decided to have a Gasconade County Sheriff’s Department vehicle repaired rather than totaled out, despite the cost being nearly $27,000. The vehicle was heavily damaged when a deputy lost control on a gravel road and crashed. The deputy sheriff received some injuries, mostly from the airbag deployment, according to one report.

The decision to repair the SUV took county officials by surprise.

"Why fix it?" asked Sheriff Scott Eiler, who noted the vehicle had 48,000 miles on it. Southern District Associate Commissioner Jerry Lairmore, R-Owensville, also was surprised by the insurance carrier’s decision.

"I think you need to talk to the insurance company," Lairmore said to Eiler.

Like local farmers, county administrators were hoping for a rain as they continue to field complaints at rough county roads and the ever-present road dust. "We need some rain," Lairmore said.

County’s ‘dust season’

"We are in the middle of dust season," quipped Miskel, who earlier said the county road department has two seasons — dust season and mud season. Indeed, it seems if the roads aren’t too dry and hard to be effectively graded, they are too wet.

It was noted Thursday morning that rock now can be placed on that portion of county roads leading to Missouri Department of Conservation sites. The required paperwork finally arrived, clearing the way for rock to be put down.

Lairmore reported that conservation agency officials will consider having those access roads paved, which would reduce the need for maintenance of that portion of the roads.