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### CAMBRIDGE

## New highway TIF district would likely be successful, analysis shows

By Karyn Saemann

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The build-out of a new tax incremental finance district on Cambridge's west side would likely be "fast moving," with property values within its boundaries rising so quickly that the village could, by 2026, fully reimburse a Madison developer \$1.1 million in costs it would initially shoulder, a consultant told the village board on March 22.

The \$1.1 million in project costs that West Gate Partners, LLC, of Madison would cover

upfront, that the village would later reimburse it for, tentatively includes the construction of a roundabout or stoplight at U.S. Highway 12-18 and state Highway 134; construction of an access road; and laying utilities in preparation for a Kwik Trip gas station and convenience store now located 424 W. Main St. in Cambridge to relocate to a 5.8-acre site along U.S. Highway 12-18, within the new mixed-use TIF district.

West Gate Partners has also tentatively said it would cover administrative costs required to set up the village's new TIF

District #6, including paying all financial and engineering consultant fees invoiced to the village. The village would later reimburse West Gate Partners for those paid fees, using TIF district dollars.

Todd Schultz of West Gate Partners told village officials in October that his firm had an accepted offer from Kwik Trip to buy the 5.8 acres along U.S. Highway 12-18. Kwik Trip has owned the West Main Street site since December 2020, when it bought the former Stop N Go there.

The village board on March

22 reviewed a TIF feasibility study recently completed by Ehlers Public Finance Advisors. It was presented by Brian Roemer, a municipal advisor for Ehlers.

The board went on to vote unanimously to accept the feasibility study, setting the village up for next steps that include a tentative timeline for finalizing the TIF district's creation by fall. The TIF district creation process would include opportunities for community input, including a public hearing likely to be held this summer before the village's Plan Commission, Roemer said.

### Pay-as-you-go TIF

This would be pay-as-you-go TIF district, Roemer said.

That's a different setup, Roemer said, from a typical TIF district in which the village would initially borrow to lay infrastructure and for other project costs, in hopes that the resulting development would raise the value of property within the TIF district's boundaries and generate new tax revenue to pay off that incurred village debt.

See **PROJECT**, Page A2

### DEERFIELD

# PAWSITIVE IMPACT

## Therapy dog brings comfort at Deerfield schools



Lauren Henning

Yasha stops to visit with some middle school students on Wednesday. He is usually in the school three days a week.

By Lauren Henning

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As students arrive each day at Deerfield Middle-High School, they step into a full day of learning and sometimes are greeted by a wagging tail.

Deerfield Superintendent Michelle Jensen's office is at the middle-high school. Yasha, a four-year-old goldendoodle and the school district's therapy dog, usually accompanies Jensen to school three days a week. Yasha greets students in the morning, joins in their morning break and visits them in the classroom to "bring happiness and comfort" to their day, Jensen says.

"I started bringing him to school last spring (March of 2021) after our kids finally returned to (in-person) school in February," Jensen said. "It had been a difficult past year for our students and I knew he would bring comfort to them. The kids fell in love with him."

Jensen adopted Yasha, now a certified therapy dog with Alliance of Therapy Dogs, through Craigslist. After her first dog, whom she'd hoped would fill a therapy dog role, proved to be too anxious for the job, Jensen began to look for the right dog.

"This is really odd," Jensen said of Yasha. "I bought him off of Craigslist - I always tell people he's a Craigslist dog."

As luck would have it, a

clinical psychologist in Illinois was re-homing her dog, who had received extensive training and even visited nursing homes. After meeting Yasha, who was given the Jewish nickname by the psychologist's two young children, Jensen decided he was perfect for the job.

"When it comes to therapy work, you just want a dog with a friendly temperament, good manners and who is very well socialized. Not all dogs are interested in doing therapy work, (but) most are born with the desire to be around and comfort people," Alliance of Therapy Dogs staff said in an email. "Sometimes the owner wants to do therapy work more than the dog," and those dogs often cannot

be trained.

"The desire needs to be within the dog from the beginning."

Yasha has had that desire from the beginning, according to Jensen. She said he loves attention and has a calm demeanor as he trails her in the hallways, stopping for stray pats from students, which they frequently dole out.

Students often pause in the hallway to dote on Yasha, quickly forgetting their stresses. Jensen said Those that have somewhere to be will linger for a second to quickly run their hands across Yasha's back before they carry on.

See **DOG**, Page A2

### CAMBRIDGE

## North remembered for service to Cambridge community

By Karyn Saemann

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The Cambridge community will gather this Saturday, April 2 to honor a longtime fire and EMS department member, former Cambridge school district employee, CHS graduate and FFA Alumni member who passed away unexpectedly on March 19.

Randy North, 51, was a 1989 Cambridge High School graduate who went on to work for the school district's maintenance department, rising from building custodian to lead custodian and eventually to director of buildings and grounds. He was recognized for 25 years of service just before leaving the district in 2015.

North was also an active member of the Cambridge Area Lions Club.

See **NORTH**, Page A8

### DANE COUNTY

## County Board considers removing prayer time, pledge from meeting agendas

By Karyn Saemann

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Prayer is one type of inspirational message Dane County Board members could offer at the start of each meeting, but it would no longer be a standing agenda item at every meeting under a tentative recommendation from a county committee.

The Pledge of Allegiance, meanwhile, would continue to be recited at every meeting under a tentative recommendation made March 24 by the county board's Executive Committee.

The committee expects to vote on those recommendations and a variety of other proposed rule changes on April 7 as it prepares to start a new term following the April 5 election.

See **COUNTY**, Page A2

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# Project

Continued from Page A1

With a pay-as-you-go TIF district, Roemer said, the village incurs no up-front costs. Those would all be covered by West Gate Partners.

West Gate Partners would expect to later recoup its \$1.1 million initial investment in a series of reimbursement payments from the village – but only if its development had successfully progressed, causing the value of property within the TIF district boundaries to rise and new tax revenue to flow in. If the development fails and property values in the TIF don't rise as anticipated, the village won't be obligated to make the reimbursement.

Based on its analysis, Ehlers says it's a good bet the new TIF district and development projects in it will be successful. According to its report, West Gate Partners' proposed development would likely add about \$19.2 million in new property value within the TIF district's boundaries through 2026, generating about \$1.3 million in new tax revenue by then.

Roemer noted that after paying off its \$1.1 million obligation to West Gate Partners in 2026, the village could go on to spend more newly generated tax revenue within the TIF district on other projects.

According to Ehlers, if the village left the TIF district open until 2030, it could find itself with an additional \$2.2 million in new tax revenue available to spend through 2030, for a total of \$3.3 million.

The village already has ideas for how it might spend some of that, were the TIF district to remain open. A tentative project plan identifies spending up to \$400,000 on fixes to two village wells as an additional possible use. Roemer said finalizing a project plan is a next step for the village. The village board must also in coming months negotiate a developer's plan with West Gate Partners. Roemer said if the village kept TIF District #6 open even longer, through 2041, which is a typical 20-year lifespan of TIF district, it could expect to generate a total of about \$7.6 million in new tax revenue to spend within the district's boundaries.

Or, the village could close the TIF as early as 2030, Roemer said, after paying West Gate Partners, fixing the two wells and perhaps doing some other small projects within the district's boundaries.

## TIF capacity

Roemer also noted that the village, under state law, is well within its financial means to create a new TIF district.

Roemer said state law limits a municipality to having 12 percent of its equalized value tied to TIF districts. Based on that, the village could currently have about \$24 million of its total \$200 million equalized value in TIF districts.

With the property values in its other two existing TIF districts only amounting to about \$4.1 million, the village has the capacity under the law to create a new TIF district, Roemer said.

"The base value of the two parcels we are looking to include in this new district is quite small, so we definitely have the ability to create this," Roemer said. "You are not up against your limit."

# Dog

Continued from Page A1

"We are always trying to find something that will connect with teenagers because I think it's a little bit harder, and in the end, it ends up being something simple like this," Jensen said.

Yasha is also trained as a reading buddy for elementary school students, presenting a less-stressful and more enjoyable way for students to practice their reading skills. A study by University of California-Davis Veterinary Medicine Extension researchers found that students who read aloud to a dog once a week increased their reading proficiency by 12%. This number increased to 30% for homeschooled students.

In preparation for his therapy dog certification test, Jensen brought Yasha to the elementary school, where he became good friends with third grader Annie Perucco and second grader Harper Vandergriff. Perucco and Vandergriff agreed that their favorite book they've read Yasha is "The Pigeon Wants a Puppy," but they have also enjoyed reading him books from the "Elephant and Piggie" series.

Students in the special education program have also found themselves enamored with Yasha, each in their own unique way. For Iris Pinney, this involves sitting on the floor with the dog, making him sit and even shake while peppering Jensen with questions and tales about her own dog at



Lauren Henning

Yasha, hard at work, listens to Annie Perucco (left) and Harper Vandergriff (right) read. They said their favorite book to read to Yasha is the Pigeon Wants a Puppy.

home. For Devin Bergeron, who is nonverbal, it means a keen curiosity and a close examination, but no physical contact, at least not thus far.

After meeting Yasha, students began to ask about him daily, Jensen said. Sometimes, students even seek him out when they are having a hard day.

"It's a really easy thing to have him just be about," Jensen said. "It's that one moment, where I'll have a kiddo go, 'I just needed to see him today. This is perfect. I just needed to come and see him.'"



Lauren Henning

Iris Pinney stops to dote on Yasha before she goes back to class.

# County

Continued from Page A1

The April 7 meeting begins at 5:30 p.m. and is virtual.

Any recommendation approved by the Executive Committee on April 7 would be brought to a final vote at the County Board's organizational meeting at 7 p.m. on April 19. That meeting will also be virtual.

County Board members and speakers from the community spent several hours on March 24 weighing whether to remove a dedicated prayer and the pledge from future meeting agendas.

The recommendations from County Board Supervisor Heidi Wegleitner, of Madison, drew two speakers to the meeting from the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Atty. Ryan Jayne and Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. They urged the committee to recommend that both prayer and the pledge be dropped from future meetings.

"The only way for government speech to be inclusive is for it to be secular," Jayne said. Removing all religious references, he said, ensures that government meetings "are open and welcoming to all."

Regarding the Pledge of Allegiance, Jayne said that "participating in a rote, automatic exercise is not patriotism. If anything, it's tribal nationalism. And with the 1950s insertion of 'God' into the pledge the exercise becomes one of Christian nationalism."

Gaylor said about 40 percent of Dane County residents are not religious and said dedicating time for prayer at the start of

every county board meeting makes "those who are not religious feel like outsiders in their community."

"The pledge is also a sticking point for many people, especially parents, because it does tie patriotism to piety," Gaylor said.

Some committee members offered a different view.

Committee member and County Board Supervisor Tim Kiefer, of Waunakee, said both the pledge and dedicated time for a prayer should remain on the agenda.

"It's important to remind ourselves at each meeting of liberty and justice for all, and why we should work toward it," Kiefer said.

On prayer, Kiefer said he's been on the county board for 10 years, "and this is the first time in 10 years that this has been controversial. No one in 10 years has ever complained to me about any prayer I have ever given."

Kiefer also noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that prayer is permissible for local government bodies to offer at the start of a meeting.

Wegleitner said both setting aside time for a prayer and reciting the pledge at meetings is controversial and people on both sides of the aisle "have very strong feelings about them."

She stressed that in her proposals there was "no intention at all to take away a supervisor's right to offer a message, including a religious one or a prayer, during that inspirational message time. But I do think it's important for us to think about the words we use in our agendas and the words we use in communicating with each other."

Wegleitner also noted

that in the days leading up to the March 24 meeting "I have received death threats," over the proposals. "I have been called every name in the book."

Some people in the community "feel threatened by this, by the fact that we would be even discussing this," Wegleitner said. "I think we should talk about it. We shouldn't decide whether or not to talk about an item because we're afraid, because there are people who use fear, who impose fear, to scare us to compel a response based on their view of America."

"I respect different opinions on this issue. It is worth considering how the pledge, and prayer too, is viewed in government meetings and for what reasons and why we have it, and how it makes different people feel," Wegleitner continued.

Executive Committee member and County Board Supervisor Yogesh Chawla, of Madison, said he agreed with removing prayer as a standing agenda item while continuing to allow it as an inspirational message option at the start of every meeting.

"Prayer can be a type of inspirational message," Chawla said.

"If people want to say a prayer they can," agreed Executive Committee member and County Board Supervisor Elena Haasl, of Madison, but "I don't want that expectation that there needs to be a prayer."

County Board Chair

Analiese Eicher said an inspirational message might be a poem or a song, adding that "if there are other things that could be inspirational, I would encourage folks to share those as well. I want to ensure that we are all encompassing."

## Pledge

Chawla said the Pledge of Allegiance should continue to be recited at county board meetings.

"As an immigrant, I reflect up on the words in the Pledge of Allegiance and I reflect upon what they mean particularly when it comes to service to community and helping all those around you and helping everyone achieve the American dream," he said, adding that "I think it's unfortunate that...the pledge can be divisive when it's used by certain factions of our country to exclude people," or to put down people "who have certain political opinions."

Haasl countered that county board members shouldn't be required to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

"I'm not against anybody saying the Pledge of Allegiance but I don't think it should be written into our rules. It's not for me and it doesn't have to be for everybody," she said. It should be something "optional, if supervisors choose say it," she said.

## Other rule changes

The Executive Committee also on March 24

declined to endorse a proposed rule change that would prohibit blanket, 3-minute time limits on public comment at county committee meetings.

The proposed rule would require committees, at the start of each meeting, to set a speaker time limit based on the number of people registered to comment.

Executive Committee member and County Board Supervisor Chuck Erickson, of Madison, said he prefers a speaker time limit that is "the same for every meeting." He said that keeps things "streamlined and efficient."

Chawla countered, however, that he supports disallowing blanket speaker time limits, arguing that would lend "more of a collaborative," atmosphere to county meetings.

The Executive Committee also declined to recommend a rule change that would require committees to let citizens comment on a matter carried over from a previous meeting, if they had already had a chance to speak at that prior meeting.

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