

# Facility study prioritized must-do items, so what's next?

By Sarah Nigbor

ELLSWORTH – Ellsworth Community School District Superintendent Barry Cain provided the school board with an update on priority projects for the year at its Monday, March 14 meeting. Clerk Susan Beck appeared by phone and board member Gary Kressin was absent.

A facility study conducted in 2020 prioritized items above and below \$100,000 that needed to be addressed, as far as maintenance and replacement. Of the items listed, the following are complete or approved for completion:

- EHS chiller, completed in Summer 2021, cost \$337,000
- EMS exterior (dealt with water intrusion), completed in Summer 2021, cost \$180,000
- EHS chiller, scheduled for Summer 2022, cost \$300,000 (federal ESSER/COVID-19 relief funds)
- EHS gym ceiling painting, done in Summer 2021
- EHS exterior gym door replacement, 18 doors, scheduled for Summer 2022, cost of \$80,000 to \$100,000
- Tennis court resurfacing, \$20,000, scheduled for Summer 2022
- EHS music risers (\$29,500)

The next big item on the list is replacing student furniture at the middle and high schools, estimated to cost between \$600,000 and \$800,000, Cain said. The district is working with VS Furniture to nail down final pricing, including installation. The board needs to vote on the project no later than the April board meeting. The funds would come from the district's capital projects savings account, called Fund 46. With inflation, Cain estimated the price will be "tight up to" \$800,000.

The board will have to consider and make decisions on the following items over the course of the next few months:

- EMS duct cleaning (\$140,000)
- EHS locker room refurbish (\$700,000). Cain said the locker rooms are "basically original" to the building.
- Asphalt sealing, crack filling, spray patching (\$20,000 to \$30,000) – EHS north lot, elementary playground, EMS east lot (with chip sealing), EMS loading dock and safe walkway (with culvert repair). Should be done in Summer 2022.
- Chip seal, spray patch and crack fill south EHS parking lot (\$11,000) – Summer 2022
- Roofing (\$80,000 to \$120,000) – Summer 2022, 1998 sections of building roofs (kitchen/cafeteria, front entrance overhang, totals 10,000 square feet)
- EHS track resealing (\$75,000) – Summer 2023 possibly
- Arc flash studies and labeling (EMS, EHS and pool)
- Pool house/locker room HVAC (\$20,000) – Spring 2022
- Other "life-cycle" items to be considered (not yet voted on) include:

- Carpeting in EHS choir room, main office and associated rooms, Rise Room (\$20,000) – Summer 2022
- Concrete (\$20,000)
- Music risers at EMS – 2022-2023
- Begin pool ladder replacement cycle (\$1,100 to \$1,500 per ladder) – two per year for a total of seven
- Pool dome door replacement cycle (\$10,000 with shipping) – Replace two single emergency doors in Summer 2022

"Everything we're taking care of as we go along, so it doesn't come back in a referendum down the road," Cain said.

He cautioned that wage considerations are also big right now.

"It's a whole new ballgame for us," he said. "If the referendum doesn't pass, we may have to look at not renewing some sub staff."

The district recently received a \$33,000 Food Service Commodity Assistance grant and a \$32,000 mental health grant that must be used to add more programs or staffing. As for technology, about 200 Chromebooks need to be replaced each year at about \$250-\$300 apiece.

## Math curriculum

The board approved an elementary/middle school math curriculum purchase in the amount of \$120,000, which will come from federal ESSER III funds. K-4 is going with a program called Bridges, while Grade 5 will learn from Illustrative Math.

EES Principal Mary Zimmerman explained that EES teachers have been piloting the programs. The Math Review Committee met in September, October, November and December and then surveyed all K-5 classroom and special education teachers and interventionists in January 2022 as to their preference.

"It's a little shift on the parent piece," Zimmerman said.

The idea is for students to go home and show off what they've learned and practice at home without the parent having to be a math expert/teacher. If homework is assigned, it's meant to be used strictly as practice for things they already understand.

"Math as most of us learned it is far different now," EES Principal Travis Logglett said. "It makes kids better thinkers of math, not robots."

New math standards in Wisconsin require every child to be able to do math while bringing a positive attitude to doing math, Zimmerman said.

## Personnel

The school board approved the following personnel changes:

Hires: Savannah Caturia, school psychologist; Olin Morrison, Ellsworth Middle School principal; Oran Nehls, Ellsworth High School principal; Leah Wallace, occupational therapist assistant

Resignation: Amy Groth, fourth grade teacher



The Ellsworth High School International Club went on a tour of Italy, Monaco, France and Spain over spring break, led by Mark and Lesley Stoesz. Photo courtesy of Ellsworth Community School District

Transfer: Mara Kenall, transfer from EES special education teaching assistant to EES special education case manager for 2022-23

Extra/co-curricular: Lucas Blodgett, EHS second assistant girls varsity track coach (throws/strength); Taylor Georgakas, EHS JV assistant softball coach; Rob Heller, EHS assistant JV boys golf coach

Both new principals were on hand to meet the board. Morrison attended K-12 in Elk Mound and graduated from UW-River Falls. He served as an elementary counselor in River Falls for four years, at Meyer Middle School as a counselor for four years, then held the Dean of Students role in Hudson for three years. He and his wife have two children, ages 6 and 9. They enjoy being on the water and in the woods hunting, fishing and hiking.

"My career focus has really been around strong relationship-building and believing that this is a human business," Morrison said. "Throughout this process I've never heard a negative word about Ellsworth and have had heard much about its strong educational tradition."

Nehls, who hails from Portage, spent Monday, March 14 at Ellsworth High School meeting faculty and students. After graduating from UW-River Falls, he began his career in the private sector as a livestock nutritionist for Land O'Lakes. He also spent time dairy farming, but in his heart he wanted to be a teacher, he said. He earned a Master's degree in agricultural education, after which he held administrative roles in Campbellsport, Denmark and Portage. He has been married to his wife, who is originally from Red Wing, Minn., for 30 years.

"I always promised her at some point that we would try to get back to this area," Nehls said. "Her parents are in their mid-80s. As they say, things happen for a reason."

The couple has two children: A daughter in graduate school at Eastern Illinois University

and a son studying construction management at UW-Platteville.

"I'm very passionate about helping students find their purpose and post-secondary plans," Nehls said.

Nehls has had extensive experience working with Fox Valley Technical Colleges, Cain said.

"We know we're losing some great guys, but I'm excited to have these two guys on board," he added.

## Other business

The board appointed citizens Raynee Farrell and Sue Peterson and school board member Katie Feuerhelm to canvass school board election and referendum results at 4:30 p.m. Monday, April 11 in the EES Community Room. The date is set by state statute.

The board approved the EHS band and choir trip to Orlando for the 2023 spring break, led by band director Nick Junker and choral director Karen Korrmann. The cost is roughly \$1,700 per student, which includes meals, hotel, airfare, bus transportation, and entrance into four theme parks. The group will also perform at Disney and attend sound track sessions and workshops. Group Travel Planners of Burnsville, Minn., has planned the itinerary.

Cain reported the EES Carnival in February raised about \$12,000 in four hours.

EMS Principal Tim Conway commended teacher Isabelle Devereaux and the cast of the EMS musical, "Annie Jr.," which was held Feb. 25-27. The free-will donation raised more than \$3,000 for the Ellsworth theatre program. A total of 85 students participated.

The EHS International Club, led by Mark and Lesley Stoesz, traveled over spring break to Italy, Monaco, France and Spain. The group of 24 had "an amazing cultural experience," Mark Stoesz said. "You would have been so proud of how our students behaved. They were off-the-charts wonderful."

# BROADBAND

From Page 1

22,000 miles into space and back, there is a significant delay in any response."

An early receiver, mounted to the satellite dish, was especially sensitive to temperature and whenever it got below -12 would just stop working, Petersen said. Under high transmission rates, the router overheats and locks up, even with "supplementary cooling" installed.

Added to these inconvenient woes is the fact that they pay the equivalent of a monthly payment for a new car to ensure internet access. Many families don't have the ability to work that into their budgets.

One of her goals, if elected, is to support using American Rescue Plan Act dollars to establish reliable and affordable rural broadband throughout the county.

"Moving this critical infrastructure forward is critical to maintaining the standard of living, attracting new businesses, and ensuring children are able to effectively engage in learning at home," Petersen said.

During the pandemic, Petersen's husband, Michael Petersen (a candidate for Ellsworth School Board), started working from home as well. The already stressed internet connection was pushed to the limits with Zoom and Teams. Their children's schools closed, so learning from home became the new daily routine.

"We set up seven computers on our dining room table, and an internet crisis ensued," Petersen said. "Most days we had to run the educational virtual classes on four or five different cell phones simultaneously. The school district was supportive and gave us another hotspot to use, but we still faced severe limits on what on-line work we could complete."

"To be clear, there were times where we had to decide between doing work activities to support our family or the educational needs for our children."

Many of their younger children had no direct contact with teachers for most of the pandemic. They did their work on paper and Petersen scanned it and emailed it to their teachers. They also relied on telemedicine, "a much-needed relief to using already stressed medical facilities," Petersen said.

Rural broadband is on the same plane as Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services energizing the first electric lines in June 1938, Petersen said. Businesses, farms and residents were "energized," and it soon became impossible to imagine life without reliable electric service.

"Do you think you could live being able to either run your refrigerator or your oven but not both?" Petersen asked. "Or would it be fair to have electric service to distant customers that allowed for the use of only a single light? In the midst of the pandemic would you want to choose between washing your clothes or having the lights on, but not both?"

District 8 incumbent Dean Bergseng personally experienced electricity coming to his farm for the first time as a child, and he likened broadband expansion to that momentous occasion.

"To me it's like electricity that we got in '42. I grew up about three or four years without it," Bergseng said. "So many people have iffy broadband. It would be nice to get broadband so families, businesses and children would have access to quality broadband."

Prescott resident and District 1 candidate Ruth Gredvig remembers when her parents got internet for the first time. She grew up in a small northwestern Minnesota town and it opened up a whole new world for them.

"Back then we had dial-up internet and my parents could only afford one phone line, so if someone called, you were kicked off the internet and had to reconnect – something I'm sure many folks my age and older can relate to," Gredvig said. "There certainly was a lack of internet in the town I grew up in."

When her hometown received broadband, they had one company to choose from. If you lived on one side of town, internet wasn't available because of trees' interference. While she is thankful that her household has reliable internet, she realizes many in Pierce County still don't. It became apparent just how important reliable broadband is during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"In 2020 families were abruptly shut into their homes, having to clear the kitchen table and make it their office and schoolroom," Gredvig said. "I've heard stories of students who had to sit in parking lots of local businesses and use the guest wifi to complete e-learning assignments because reliable internet was not available to them."

Reliability is important, but so is affordability, Gredvig said. Although she is 100% for broadband expansion, she believes more public input is needed in regards to using ARPA monies to fund it.

"If the board decides to use ARPA dollars, they need to ensure the proposal is eligible under ARPA criteria," Gredvig said.

## Career needs

In 2019, District 10 candidate Crystal Mooney applied for a work-from-home job because her husband needed a kidney transplant.

"If he didn't receive a kidney, he would have had to do dialysis from home," Mooney said. "I felt it was important to be around to help him."

She trained for her new job for one year in Minneapolis, but once she was ready to transfer to home, she learned she needed to have an internet speed of 70 or higher to download. Her internet provider didn't offer that. She couldn't do her job and had to leave it, an incredible disappointment after putting a year's time in.

"Then when COVID came we had a hard time having multiple devices logged on," Mooney said. "I have heard many of these stories in Pierce County. With so many people working from home now and homework being done online, I do support the funding for high-speed broadband."

District 9 candidate Angela Mathison, a town of Gilman resident, echoed Mooney's support. Many businesses are discovering the benefits of telecommuting and want to maintain it.

"While we enjoy our rural communities and slower paced life here in Pierce County, we must keep up with technology," she said.

District 8 candidate Martin Kretzmann said



When the pandemic struck in March 2020, families learned quickly the importance of a reliable internet connection when people had to work and children had to learn from home. A shoddy internet connection spelled doom for many. Photo courtesy of Policy Options Magazine

he's ecstatic that high speed internet may soon be available to every person in the county. While he doesn't want nor expect the county to pay for the actual service to residents, he feels partnering with SwiftCurrent Connect and other local companies is a good option.

"I know the word 'infrastructure' is used a lot recently, but at the speed technology is taking us, now is the time to make this a reality," Kretzmann said. "I had three children trying to do online schooling last year and they were literally unable to do their basic school work because the satellite internet we pay about \$300 per month for is slow, unreliable and spotty."

His wife recently changed jobs and her new employer encouraged her to work from home. However, she can't because of their current internet service. Kretzmann's small business relies on the internet, and he admits he faces struggles every day.

"I personally think Pierce County is late to the game on this issue and should take every opportunity and available financial resource, including ARPA, to make it happen," Kretzmann said. "As much as I firmly believe in small and limited government, this is an example where I am in favor of the county taking action, perhaps adding additional financial resources to SwiftCurrent to greatly expand their current plan in a more expeditious timeframe."

District 17 Supervisor Mel Pittman said he's heard from a few constituents who favor spending ARPA monies on broadband expansion. He agrees the county should invest some monies in broadband.

"The last two years have shown us with both education and work from home that good broadband is important," Pittman said. "However, there are some answers I think need answering like, should installation of broadband be public or private funding or both?"

He questions whether each family home can afford the broadband services provided and whether or not they considered their internet needs before moving to an underserved area.

"Just like families that choose to live rural and need to figure out their transportation issues versus a city dweller, so some forethought should be with broadband," he said.

He himself has DSL from a landline that is adequate for his needs, but it doesn't allow downloading videos or streaming. His neighbor seems content with 5G internet service from a cell tower west of Plum City, but he realizes that might not work for everyone.

"I know other areas of Pierce County are underserved and private industry is moving forward to try to serve them, but it takes time and money, which is proposed to come my way in about four to five years to southeastern Pierce County," Pittman said. "Broadband is important but other issues in Pierce County are important also for our constituents."

District 9 Supervisor Paula Lugar said while she supports the use of ARPA dollars for high-speed broadband internet expansion in the county, Pierce County also has other needs that must be weighed in the decision process.

"One of those issues is affordable housing or 'workforce' housing," Lugar said. "We can't attract people to the county if they can't afford to live here."

District 15 candidate Craig Theis lives in rural Prescott and has struggled with lack of internet access. He's looked into DSL and could get 500kbs service, which is not really usable for anything, he said. The point-to-point system installed on local towers and farm silos isn't usable for him in the valley.

"This leaves me with the only option being a cellular internet service," he said. "Now while this works, the cost is very expensive."

While Theis isn't opposed to using ARPA funds to open up access for high-speed internet, the potential cost concerns him. He hopes internet companies, who will have much of the overhead installation costs possibly covered by government grants and ARPA dollars, reflect that in the prices passed on to consumers. If the customers' costs are high, so that the companies can make large profits even though much of the installation costs were covered, he's not sure using ARPA funds is the correct path for the county.

To learn more about area broadband advocacy efforts, visit Western Wisconsin Needs Broadband on Facebook or go to piercecountygro.org





Part of the paperboy.news group of HOMETOWN newspapers!



**Hines**  
Auction Service

Consignments Wanted!  
Farm Machinery,  
Vehicles, Firearms, Coins,  
Tools, Lawn & Garden

hinesauctionservice.com  
715-273-3377



Weekly Ad On Page 2!

# PIERCE COUNTY'S NEWSPAPER THE JOURNAL

\$1 WESTERN WISCONSIN'S OLDEST NEWSPAPER - SINCE 1855 MARCH 23, 2022 • VOL. 167, NO. 51

**SUBSCRIBE TODAY!**  
See Sports Page 2 or  
CALL 715-273-8078  
www.piercecountyjournal.news

## Plum City referendum is critical for staying open

If voters say no, district may have to close or consolidate

By Sarah Nigbor

PLUM CITY – Voters in the Plum City School District have a critical referendum question to consider on the April 5 ballot. If it doesn't pass, the school district may have to drastically reduce services, close, or be consolidated with another district.

The school district is asking voters to approve an operational referendum that would allow the district to exceed its revenue limit by \$1 million for the 2022-23 school year, by \$1.1 million for the 2023-24 school year, and by \$1.2 million for the 2024-school year. "The funds are required to stabilize the district's financial condition during these three years," states the district's referendum handout. Superintendent Brian



If the three-year non-recurring operational referendum doesn't pass in the Plum City School District April 5, the district may have to close or consolidate with another district. Submitted photo

Nadeau said for the 2021-22 school year, the district is operating at a deficit due to a number of factors. The five-year operational referendum expired at the end of the 2020-21 school year, so the ability to levy for those dollars went

away. The district saw a failed referendum last year and the cost of things continues to increase.

"When you're in that mode and the state doesn't put any new dollars in education, you have things happening in your

facilities that need attention and they don't always get it," Nadeau said of deferred maintenance due to budget constraints.

The referendum is non-recurring. See PLUM CITY, Page 3

## MN man dies in RF hit and run crash

By Sarah Nigbor

RIVER FALLS – A 27-year-old Ramsey, Minn. man died Wednesday, March 9 from injuries received in a vehicle vs. pedestrian crash just outside of River Falls.

At 2:10 a.m. Sunday, March 6, River Falls police and St. Croix County deputies received a call about a man allegedly running at vehicles on Highway 35, south of Radio Road in the town of Troy. They soon received another call about a man hunched over in the southbound lane of Highway 35 near the "Welcome to River Falls" sign.

When police arrived, they located Joshua Thesing in the southbound lane of traffic. According to a news release, he had suffered serious injuries from being struck by an unknown vehicle. EMS and law enforcement performed life-saving measures for 21 minutes before an ambulance transported him to Regions Hospital in St. Paul, where he died three days later.

Two witnesses told police they saw Thesing running north on Highway 35 near the Main Street exit, at which time they called 911. Visibility was poor due to sleet and snow, and the roads were ice-covered in spots. Thesing almost appeared like he was running or stumbling into traffic.

Shortly after officers cleared the accident scene, Thesing's friend called police looking for him. A group of them was in town for a rugby event. They were staying at a motel in River Falls after a night out at the downtown bars, but Thesing hadn't returned to the motel. Thesing and a friend left Shooter's Pub at about 1:30 a.m. The friend said Thesing was extremely intoxicated and took off running north on Main Street toward the hotel. The friend was tired and didn't want to run, but figured he'd catch up with him at the motel. However, he wasn't there.

The St. Croix County Sheriff's Office interviewed motorists who were at the scene of the crash, but is still looking for other vehicles that were in the area at the time of the incident. The details about those vehicles will be released in the coming days.

According to Thesing's obituary, he was a member of the Twin Cities-based Metropolitan Rugby Club.

The case remains under investigation.

**Churchill market**  
715-262-0184  
1003 Campbell St. • Prescott

SHOP CHURCHILL MARKET!  
CONVENIENT LOCATION.  
FRESH FOOD!

THIS WEEK'S Specials!  
PRICES GOOD THROUGH MARCH 29, 2022

**Ground Beef \$3.99 Lb.**

**Homemade Brats \$4.99 Lb.**

**Boneless Pork Chops and Roasts \$3.99 Lb.**

We Offer Curbside Service!

FEATURING HANISCH BAKERY

Prescott's Best Selection of Wine and Beer!

CHURCHILL MARKET IS YOUR ONE-STOP SHOP!  
WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO LIMIT QUANTITIES

## Upcoming elections: Let's ask the candidates about broadband

By Sarah Nigbor

Editor's note: This is the fourth article in a five-part series highlighting the need for broadband internet expansion in Pierce County. In this article, we asked Pierce County Board members and candidates to share their internet stories and opinions on using ARPA funds for broadband expansion. Many responded, although not all of their comments could be used due to space constraints.

As the Pierce County Board election approaches April 5, there are many topics on the



minds of candidates, ranging from workforce housing to responsible spending, to recruiting and retaining quality employees to reducing methamphetamine use and its stranglehold on county resources. However, it seems that one topic many candidates agree is important is broad-

**No Farm Left Behind**

**Bringing Rural Areas into the Digital Age**

band expansion in Pierce County's rural and/or underserved areas.

In the 15 years that she has lived in rural Ellsworth, District 14 candidate Melissa Petersen's family has used a half-dozen different methods to access the internet. As an attorney who works the majority of time from her home office, lack of reasonably priced, reliable broadband service to her home has been challenging. Working from home is important to her, because it has allowed her to raise her 10 children in Pierce County.

"Access to a regular Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) is unavailable, we are just 'too far away,' so all options require the bits to be transmitted through the 'luminous aether,'" Petersen said.

At first, the Petersens had a regular cellular hotspot, but later purchased a professional one for \$650. Mounted to a high window, it gave them one 4G connection.

"We tried to use our cell-phones for as much as we could but in bad weather, they would all resort to 3G mode which meant you could type faster than it could be transmitted," Petersen lamented. "After several years the provider changed something on the only tower we could connect to and we ended up switching to satellite service. That, of course, doesn't work at all when there are storms and even when it does work, it has 'high latency.' Since the signal is literally being transmitted

See BROADBAND, Page 9

## Newsstand price increase to \$1.50 starts April 1

Subscribe and save!

Effective April 1, the cost of the Pierce County Journal on newsstands will increase from \$1 per copy to \$1.50.

"We last increased the single copy price of our newspapers 18 years ago," said Publisher John McLoone. "We've worked to expand our newspapers, and most neighboring papers now cost \$2 or above on the newsstand. We're working hard to make this a great local newspaper, and we appreciate the support we receive from our customers and the community."

Save money by subscribing and having your newspaper delivered to your home for less than \$1 per week. The price of a one-year subscription is just \$45. A two year subscription costs just \$75. Call us to start your subscription today: 715-273-8078 ext. O.



SERVING PIERCE COUNTY & WESTERN WISCONSIN FOR OVER 30 YEARS!



**Croix Insurance Agency LLC**

Call us for a free quote today  
CROIXINSURANCE.COM • 715-262-3626  
1051 Campbell St. N. Prescott



HOME AUTO BOAT ATV SNOWMOBILES BUSINESS WORKERS COMP