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ONE DOLLAR

In Crawford Broadband effort is moving forward

By CHARLEY PREUSSER
A new broadband expansion grant proposal was presented by Richland Grant Telephone Co-op General Manager Josh Lien to the Crawford County Broadband Implementation Committee at their meeting Thursday, Feb. 10.

The proposal for a Wisconsin Public Service Commission Broadband Expansion Grant is based on installing fiber optic cable to the residences and businesses in an underserved area in the southern part of the county including the Village of Wauzeka and many rural areas.

Lien appeared virtually at the meeting to explain the proposal. As presented, the plan would include installing 170 miles of underground fiber optic cable to make broadband internet available to 720 residences at a cost of \$8,472,000.

A sticking point in the plan was a proposed funding match from the county, which would have been \$1.5 million. As proposed, RGTC would have contributed \$885,000. The PSC Grant would be for \$6,087,000 or about 70 percent of the cost of the project.

Several members of the committee, including Crawford County Board Chairperson Tom Cornford and county board supervisors Don Stirling and Gary Koch, questioned if the county could afford the size of the proposed contribution. It was pointed out by the county officials and others on the committee that there were other needs in the county that also must be addressed.

Higher matches for results
Lien emphasized the matching funds made receiving the grant more likely.

The RGTC representative said the co-op was ready to submit the grant proposal with any amount of matching funds that the county designated. He floated the idea of going to 20 percent instead of 30 percent for the matching amount and trying to get the townships, the Village of Wauzeka and affected school districts to make a contribution.

One proposal discussed was to trim the county's contribution to something like \$500,000 or less. There was some talk of trimming the county's contribution to \$350,000.

County settles on \$350,000
Following Lien finishing his presentation and leaving the meeting, the committee discussed the amount the county could contribute to the project and decided on \$350,000.

Klemme then communicated with Lien the amount of \$350,000 for the county's contribution and asked if RGTC would look to downsize the project.

On Friday, Feb. 11, Lien responded to Dale Klemme with a new PSC Broadband Expansion Grant proposal. Lien stated the Richland-Grant Telephone Co-op was ready to increase their contribution by \$500,000, bringing their total contribution \$1,385,000.

When the RGTC contribution is combined with \$350,000, it makes the PSC grant cover about \$6,737,000 or 80 percent of the cost.

Klemme realizing the timing of the Tuesday Crawford County Board meeting asked that the proposal be put onto the county board meeting agenda. On Monday, the Crawford County Broadband Implementation Committee met to receive an update on the developments.

At Tuesday's county board meeting, Klemme explained the revised RGTC PSC grant proposal, which added \$500,000 to the co-op's contribution and reduced the county's contribution to \$350,000.

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NIREA KLEMA'S POSTER was awarded first place in the Regional Conservation Poster Contest sponsored by Wisconsin State Land+Water. Klema's poster will go on to compete in the state competition with entries to be judged at the Wisconsin State Land+Water Conference scheduled for March.

In Crawford County

New zoning technician is on the job

By GILLIAN POMPLUN
Crawford County's new zoning technician was on the job at the Tuesday, Feb. 8 meeting of the Land Conservation Committee. Jon Mayer, a recent graduate of UW-Stevens Point, was hired in December and began his career in January, filling a crucial position in the department that had been vacant since September of 2021.

"I'm excited to be here," Mayer said when reached after the meeting. "I can't wait for summer, to start getting back outside and meet more people in the county."

Mayer graduated in December with a major in Water Resource Management, a minor in Soil Science, and a certificate in Wetlands Management. He has since moved to Prairie du Chien with his girlfriend

Chloe, and the two have recently adopted a cat, which they've named Ollie.

Avid fisherman

"I am an avid trout fisher, and look forward to enjoying the resource in Southwest Wisconsin, as well as duck hunting," Mayer said. "I see the work that I will be doing with the septic system project in the county as being directly related to the quality of the

county's cold water trout fishery, since inadequate septic systems can have a direct impact on both ground and surface waters."

Mayer said that the correlation between his work and his hobbies is "really cool," and that water resource management is very interesting to him.

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State officials gather in Sparta

Importance of flood insurance emphasized

By GILLIAN POMPLUN
Following Governor Tony Evers declaring the week of February 7 as 'Flood Insurance Awareness Week,' Wisconsin Insurance Commissioner Nathan Houdek, representatives from the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), and Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) Secretary-designee Cheryl Olson-Collins, met with local leaders and consumers in Sparta to encourage flood risk mitigation.

"Today's snow is tomorrow's flood, so it is never too early to prepare for potential disasters," said Commissioner Houdek.

"Just one inch of water can cause up to \$25,000 in damages which is an expense that most Wisconsin families can't afford," Houdek explained. "That's where insurance coverage comes in. Reach out to your insurance agent or visit Floodsmart.gov to get enrolled in a National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) policy today."

Houdek cautioned homeowners not to wait as it takes 30 days from the date of application for a policy to be approved. He said that NFIP representatives can work with homeowners to find the policy that is right for them.

The visit to Sparta was stimulated by events follow-

ing the August 2018 flood, where seven flood control dams breached in one night, sending record-level floodwaters into the Kickapoo and Little LaCrosse rivers and Coon Creek. Following that event, and events in 2019 and 2020, Monroe County worked with local residents on buyouts of flood-damaged properties. Some of those properties were not located in the floodplain, but with increasingly large rain events in recent years, have suffered the impacts of flooding.

Property owners in designated high-risk flood areas are required to purchase flood insurance if they have a fed-

erally insured mortgage, but anyone can enroll in flood insurance coverage. In fact, between 2015-2019, more than 40 percent of all NFIP claims came from outside of those high-risk flood areas. NFIP policies provide coverage for flood damage caused by overflowing rivers, snowmelt, or significant rainfall. Homeowners or renters insurance policies do not typically cover flood-related damages.

Marty's story

Marty Severson was one of the property owners severely affected by the August 2018 flooding in the Little LaCrosse River watershed. Severson's home is located out of the mapped floodplain of the river. Nevertheless, his home was flooded five times between July of 2017 and July of 2019. In 2018, the floodwaters were seven-and-one-half feet high in his home.

"I can't say enough how important it was for me to be able to rely on flood insurance even with my house not being in the floodplain," Severson said. "The flood of 2018 wiped me out, and I tried to go back and live in my house, while waiting for a possible FEMA buyout, but in the end, it was the mold that drove me out."

Severson said that fortunately he has purchased a flood insurance policy for his home before he experienced flooding.

Living by water

"If you live by water, you have to have flood insurance," Severson emphasized. "It's cheap - it only costs me a few hundred bucks per year, but if I hadn't had it, then I would have nothing."

Severson described the experience of entering his home during the flood, and seeing the water level outside the house above the level of the first floor windows. He described feeling his way forward with his feet, always wondering what would be underfoot. He entered his kitchen, and saw all his new appliances that had been replaced after the last flood floating around, with the refrigerator having gone through the kitchen ceiling.

See FLOODS Page 14 Col 1



FLOODING VICTIM Marty Severson of rural Sparta, left, talks with Wisconsin Commissioner of Insurance Nathan Houdek at a visit last week to highlight the importance of flood insurance. Severson expressed how grateful he was to have had flood insurance in August of 2018, even though his property was not located in a floodplain.

In Gays Mills

Old railroad bed property is being offered to village

By CHARLES PREUSSER
At their meeting Tuesday, Feb. 15, the Crawford County Delinquent Tax Committee approved the sale of a property, formerly owned by Railroad Properties LLC, to the Village of Gays Mills.

The property involved is a portion of the old railroad bed that was once used by the Stump Dodger train. The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad, the final owner, suspended operation in the summer of 1939. After operating for about 50 years between LaFarge and Wauzeka, the train took its final scheduled run on August 17, 1939.

Railroad Property LLC acquired the abandoned railroad bed at some point from CMC Heartland Partners. Railroad Property last paid the 2014 taxes on the property in 2015, according to Crawford County Treasurer Deanne Lutz. No taxes were ever paid again.

The county treasurer outlined some of the procedures the county's delinquent tax committee uses to foreclose on properties with unpaid taxes. She noted that action does not begin until there are three years of unpaid taxes.

Once the committee authorizes action to commence, it takes about a year-and-a-half to get a foreclosure injunction from the court. Along the way, there are required mailings, newspaper advertisements and court actions that must be made. When the property is foreclosed, the county will sell the property to recoup unpaid taxes and expenses.

Rail bed and the trail?

A map of the Railroad Property LLC shows portions of the old railroad bed that were under consideration for use in building the Stump Dodger Trail in Gays Mills recently. Roughly, the property runs from behind the Gays Mills Cemetery north through several other parcels and into the Robin and Mary Babb property where it terminates.

The Stump Dodger Trail was ultimately built without using any of the abandoned railroad bed being used, as had been originally envisioned. It is unclear at this point, if the village acquires the property, if it would be used for the trail or not.

The Crawford County Delinquent Tax Committee set the purchase price of the property for the Village of Gays Mills at \$3,200 at their meeting Tuesday morning. It reflects the costs of the county in concluding the foreclosure, including legal fees and advertising costs.

Crawford County Treasurer Deanne Lutz explained the county looks to sell property, like the abandoned railroad bed, first to the municipality involved, and then to adjoining neighbors if the municipality is not interested, before offering it at a public sale.

When contacted, Gays Mills Village Clerk Dawn McCann was aware a foreclosure process, triggered by unpaid taxes, was underway. However, she did not realize the county was ready to offer the property to the village at this time or what the price would be.

It is likely the matter will now come before the Gays Mills Village Board for their consideration.

In Ferryville

Eagle Day cancelled

The Ferryville Tourism Council made the decision to cancel the planned March 5 Bald Eagle Day event. The difficult choice was made when some council members expressed concerns about the prevalence and risks of COVID-19 and variants. As a result, the program presenters have all been contacted and rescheduled for 2023.

On a positive note, Prairie du Chien Tourism and Chamber of Commerce are holding their Eagle Day events on Feb. 25-26 at Hoffman Hall, and this is a great option to learn more about Eagles.



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