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Axe throwing concerns arise

Some city officials worried about axe throwing facility

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Axe throwing has become a popular activity in surrounding areas, and it could be landing in the City of Lake Geneva in the near future.

Madelyna Kelly of Bad Axe House LLC presented plans for the Bad Axe House, 253 Center St., Suite 900, to Lake Geneva aldermen during the Aug. 2 finance, licensing & regulation committee meeting.

Kelly said axe-throwing facilities have opened in communities such as Milwaukee, Chicago, West Dundee, Illinois and McHenry, Illinois, and she would like to bring such a business to Downtown

Lake Geneva.

"It's just to give the tourists and the locals another activity to do out in town," she said. "It's a new activity that's become very popular out in the cities."

Bad Axe House would feature seven indoor axe-throwing lanes, lounge and reception area. Kelly said she plans to offer some food items as part of the business.

"The food that I would like to serve would be just appetizers

like from an air fryer and maybe pizza," Kelly said. "If we do chili cook-offs or soup cook-offs, I would like to do that as well."

Bad Axe House also is set to feature beer and wine, and Kelly is seeking a fermented malt beverage "Class B" liquor license and a wine "Class C" liquor license from the city.

Alderman John Halverson said he is concerned about awarding liquor licenses to an axe-throw-

ing business because of potential safety issues.

"My son-in-laws do this, and it seems incredibly dangerous to me, especially when you mix alcohol with it," Halverson said. "It's inside, and I see a lot of problems."

Alderman Ken Howell said he also is concerned about potential safety issues regarding the proposed business.

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GUTEN TAG

A group of German-style dancers entertain the crowd during opening day of Das Fest USA on Aug. 5, 2022 at the fairgrounds in Elkhorn. The festival was held throughout the weekend. To see more photos of the event, see page A4.

LAKE GENEVA

New sidewalk program proposed

Proposal would reimburse residents 50% of cost for repairs

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Lake Geneva residents could be reimbursed half the cost for repairing their damaged sidewalks, under a proposed plan city officials are discussing.

City officials are considering

establishing a 50/50 cost share program, in which they would reimburse residents up to half the cost for repairing their sidewalks if they are damaged.

Members of the city council's public works committee discussed the proposed program, July 25.

The City of Lake Geneva currently offers a sidewalk cost share program in which it will reimburse residents up to \$1.75 per square foot for replacing or

"You walk down the street, there's areas that are so bad."

Alderman Joan Yunker

repairing damaged sidewalks.

City officials proposed increasing that amount to \$4 per square foot last year, but the proposal was never officially adopted by the city council.

Public Works Director Tom

Earle said establishing a 50/50 cost share program may encourage more people to have their sidewalks repaired. He said he feels most residents do not participate in the current cost share program, because the amount they would be reimbursed is not worth the amount of paperwork they would have to complete.

"We have not had any participants in the program in at

Please see SIDEWALK, Page A7

A plea to stop South Street trail

Residents again ask city to slow or stop plans for wide trail

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Several Lake Geneva residents are asking city officials to "slow their roll" when it comes to a proposed trail extension project.

City officials plan to extend the South Street bicycle trail, which runs near Badger High School and Lake Geneva Middle School, by about 1.5 miles.

The trail extension would lead to the future site of a new Geneva Lakes Family YMCA campus, located near the intersection of Highway H and Highway 120. The trail also is set to be extended west along South Street and end at Lake Shore Drive, leading to Big Foot Beach State Park.

The City of Lake Geneva has received a \$835,316 transportation alternatives program grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to help fund the project.

Several residents who live near South Street have expressed concerns related to the project including tree removal, potential water runoff, possible traffic concerns and the width of the trail, which is set to be about 40 feet.

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Friends of the Lake Gala to be held Aug. 26

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An evening of friends, food and entertainment can be enjoyed while helping out a local organization.

The first-ever “Friends of the Lake Gala” is scheduled to be held from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m., Aug. 26 at the Riviera ballroom, 821 Wrigley Drive in Lake Geneva.

The event is set to include cocktails, hors d’oeuvres, dinner, dancing and music from DJ Felix.

Fred Gahl, chairperson for the gala, said the purpose of the event is to bring residents together for an evening of entertainment and to honor the history of Geneva Lake.

“It kind of brings back a sense of community. I’m almost looking at it like a class reunion when people get together and share stories from around the lake with the community,” Gahl said. “It’s just not Lake Geneva, it’s Fontana, it’s Williams Bay, it’s the Town of Linn. It’s an opportunity for all the different groups and families to get together and share the whole lake experience.”

“Captain” Carl Bergensen, owner of Ship Shape, Inc. in Walworth and who has been involved

with several charitable organizations in Walworth County, will be honored during the event.

“Some people will speak on his behalf and share his story. It’s kind of a soft roast,” Gahl said. “He’s one of these people who knows everyone around the lake and everyone around the lake knows him. He’s sort of larger than life, so we figured he would be a good first-year honoree.”

Proceeds from the event will be donated to Children’s Oncology Services, which offers services for children with cancer.

“Each summer, for a number of years, they’ve had a camp for kids with cancer, and they have about 350 children who attend the camp each summer,” Gahl said. “We wanted to raise some money for that. It’s about Lake Geneva for Lake Geneva.”

Gahl said Bergensen has been involved with Children’s Oncology Services for about 30 years.

“He has helped them out quite a bit,” Gahl said. “So he was glad to see they were the chosen charity.”

Gahl has been planning the “Friends of the Lake Gala” for about a year. He obtained the idea for the event from the “A String



FILE PHOTO, REGIONAL NEWS

The Friends of the Lake First Annual Gala will be Aug. 26 at the Riviera Ballroom.

of Pearls Gala” that was held last year to honor the completion of the Riviera renovation project and to raise money for the Lake Geneva Fire & Police First Responders Fund.

“I got the idea of let’s use the police and fire gala as a stepping stone and formalize this entity called ‘Friends of the Lake,’” Gahl said. “So I reserved the Riviera

ballroom a year out.”

Gahl hopes to make “Friends of the Lake Gala” an annual event and to honor a different community member and raise money for a different nonprofit organization each year.

“The premise is, once a year, to have an event to get together with what we’re calling ‘Friends of the Lake,’ and celebrate the

commonality that we enjoy living here and the things we enjoy doing together,” Gahl said. “Each year, we want to honor someone who has been influential to the area over the years and use it to raise money for a local charity.”

Gahl said he would like to expand the gala next year to include an activity that features wooden, vintage boats.

“We would like to come up with some idea to include the historic boats in next year’s event and feature the people who are involved with them,” Gahl said. “We can maybe have a boat show or a boat presence at the Riviera during the day and at night have a party and celebrate the heritage and traditions of Lake Geneva.”

The cost to attend “Friends of the Lake Gala” is \$175 per person or \$1,750 for a table of 10 people. Tickets are tax deductible and can be purchased by visiting www.Onestepcrew.com.

Gahl said he expects about 200 people to attend the gala.

“It should be a fun evening,” Gahl said. “We want to have an evening that honors the history and the tradition and promotes the continued interaction among people.”

Trail

From A1

Residents expressed their concerns to city aldermen during a city council committee of the whole meeting, Aug. 1, and asked them to consider the project more closely.

Jeff Waters said even though the city received a grant to help pay for the trail extension, there would be additional costs related to the project, which would end up being the responsibility of the Lake Geneva taxpayers.

“We are asking the council to slow their roll,” Waters said. “Obviously, you need to satisfy existing invoices for completed work but please halt future planning and any and all related work pertaining to the South Street trail.”

Waters also asked the aldermen to schedule a special meeting and invite a representative from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation to discuss the best options for using the grant funding. “Please call a special meeting to draw the most optimal path as it related to the South Street trail proposal, and please slow the roll,” Waters said.

Pleas to slow down

Peg Esposito, member of the park board of commissioners, asked the aldermen to review the project more carefully and consider other options for the grant funding.

“We just can’t do it because we saw we can get a grant and that this is a good place to put it,” Esposito said. “I ask you to slow the roll on this. This is a great thing to stop and look at and maybe putting the money elsewhere or just think about the plans overall.”

Kelly Nickel of Lake Geneva said she likes the idea of a path or sidewalk along South Street to give people a place to walk or ride their bicycles, but she is not in favor of a 10-foot-wide trail.

Nickel said she is concerned that the trail would encroach on people’s properties.

“A 10-foot bike path, who’s using this?,” Nickel said. “Are we running the Tour de France through here? I like the idea of taking bikes off of the road, but I don’t know if we need 10 feet to do that.”

Shelley Rowell of Lake Geneva said she is concerned about the trees that would be removed as a result of the project.

“It’s a beautiful town. By what you guys are going to do, you’re going to destroy it,” Rowell said. “There’s trees that are 200 to 250 years old on South Street, and you just want to take them out. You



STEPHANIE JONES, REGIONAL NEWS

South Street is shown in this photo along the back of Big Foot Beach State Park. The City of Lake Geneva received a grant to expand the path along South Street, but the path has been controversial because of the required dimensions.

can’t replace trees that are 200 to 250 years old.”

Former Mayor Tom Hartz said the trail extension would provide another method for people to access areas of the community and give people another place to walk and to ride their bikes or skateboards.

“I don’t think access in this community should be defined by owning a car,” Hartz said. “I think in order to make it as inclusive as we possibly can, we should consider all forms of mobility and this is certainly one.”

City has limited options

Zach Simpson, project manager for Strand Associates, the company the city is working with on the project, said the city has to follow the design standards set forth by the grant.

“We have to meet the intent of the grant in order to use the funds. We have to adhere to design guidance,” Simpson said. “We can’t really bend the rules of the design study report. That’s where all our design decisions are approved and documented by the DOT, so there are guidelines we have to follow for width and clearance and clear zones.”

Simpson said the grant requires that the path be 10-feet wide; however, it does allow for areas of the trail to be eight feet wide if the city is able to prove that there is a benefit for reducing the size.

“There has to be a benefit for the DOT to give you a variance,” Simpson said. “So they will let you come down to eight feet. It’s only for intermittent portions of the corridor, and there has to be a reasonable benefit.”

Simpson said he realizes that several trees would have to be removed for the project, but the

grant requires that the trail remains on city property and if the path was rerouted it could end up on areas of private property.

He said Strand Associates representatives are trying to determine if the trail can be rerouted.

“The city as the grantee has to own the property, essentially, that the trail sits in. So that’s one of the primary objectives with this design,” Simpson said. “The challenge we’re up against is trying to fit this trail in the city’s corridor. The trees, for the most part, are in the right away, but we are certainly challenged with that and I don’t disagree with that.”

What’s next?

Simpson said the company plans to go out for bids on the project in late 2023 with construction to begin in 2024.

“We’re in the middle of the process. We’re pretty far along,” Simpson said. “The next steps would be to produce a transportation project plat, which identifies easements for grading, etc., and coordinating with utilities.”

At the end of the committee of the whole meeting, Alderwoman Mary Jo Fesenmaier voted against adjournment, because the council members had not scheduled a special meeting for the trail extension project to be discussed again in the future.

Fesenmaier was the only alderman to vote against adjournment.

“You have all these people here, and we failed to put it on an agenda,” Fesenmaier said. “I understand we can’t make an official motion, but it does say we can refer things to a committee. So now that we have everyone here, we have failed to do that, which I think is part of what they’re frustrated with.”

you wanted to replace all 20 but only three of them met the criteria of a damaged sidewalk or a non-compliant sidewalk, we would only participate in those three, not the entire 20 squares,” Earle said.

Alderwoman Joan Yunker said she would be in favor of such a program, because many sidewalks in Lake Geneva are in need of repair.

“You walk down the street, there’s areas that are so bad,” Yunker said.

Alderman Richard Hedlund said if the 50/50 cost share program is approved, city officials would have to include it in the 2023 budget.

“I wouldn’t have a problem with that, because our sidewalks are really in terrible shape,” Hedlund said. “If we could get public participating for 50%, we would have to get it in the budget though.”

Earle proposed establishing a maximum amount for how much money the city would allocate to-

Axe

From A1

“I personally find it very hard to ok a business that is involving axe throwing,” Howell said.

Kelly said alcohol would be monitored closely, and customers would not be allowed to participate if they appear to be intoxicated.

“If somebody comes in noticeably drunk, they won’t be served. Then if they’re noticeably drunk, they’re not going to be served and we will keep on eye on how many beers they have, because axe throwing is pretty intense,” Kelly said. “So we don’t want anybody who is drunk in there, and anybody who is slurring their words, looking tipsy, they also will be leaving.”

Kelly said the facility will be staffed with “axe masters” who will explain safety procedures to customers and monitor their behavior.

“The ‘axe masters’ are people who introduce themselves when a new party comes in and tells them the safety plans and how to throw an axe, where to stand, what we won’t tolerate and how to play the game,” Kelly said. “The ‘axe master’ is also the one who will oversee their table for menu ordering, and if they’re drinking, keep an eye on that and the food, as well.”

Kelly is set to present more detailed plans regarding the proposed axe-throwing facility to the plan commission members, Aug. 15. She said once she receives city approval, she will begin renovating the building for the axe-throwing business.

“If they accept it, then we will be renovating that whole spot,

because the bathrooms need to be ADA compliant,” Kelly said. “We’re going to be putting in the lanes. There will be a total of seven lanes, then there will be cages in between so nobody from neither lane is bouncing axes off of each other.”

Alderman Richard Hedlund said he would like to see more detailed plans regarding the business before granting the liquor licenses.

“I know axe throwing is becoming very popular. I know a bunch of people who have done it, and it is fun,” Hedlund said. “I just don’t feel comfortable with your business plan as it is presented in your application. I’m not sure about the facility you want to use. I think it might be small.”

Alderwoman Mary Jo Fesenmaier said she would like the business to be approved by the plan commission before voting on the liquor licenses.

“I think it’s out of order,” Fesenmaier said. “I would rather see the plan approved and a detailed map.”

Howell told Kelly he would like to view a video of axe-throwing activities to have a better idea of what it entails.

“If you can, that would help me quite a bit to see it in action,” Howell said.

After some discussion, the aldermen unanimously approved to hold off voting on the liquor licenses until the Aug. 16 finance, licensing & regulation committee meeting. The liquor licenses also have to be approved by the full city council.

“This is not a turn down,” Howell told Kelly. “This is just for coming back with a little more information.”



SUSAN ENDRES, NEWS REPUBLIC

Axe throwing is becoming a more popular activity, and an axe-throwing business is being proposed for the City of Lake Geneva.

Sidewalk

From A1

least six or seven years,” Earle said. “In my opinion, the 50/50 would hopefully encourage people to take advantage of it, and it may give them an incentive to get their sidewalks fixed.”

Earle said residents would only be reimbursed for sidewalk squares that are damaged.

“So if you would have 20 squares in front of your home and

ward the program each year.

“If we allow each property up to \$1,000 and we have \$5,000 in the budget, we would only do five properties. If you cap it at \$500 per property, then you could do 10 properties,” Earle said. “But you have to remember Stone Manor is a private residence now and they have I don’t know how many linear feet of frontage on South Lakeshore Drive, but they can come in and say, ‘We have 300 feet of sidewalks, we want half,’ and that

would tap us out.”

Earle also proposed that the program would not include sidewalks that were damaged during a non-city project.

“We would have to set rules where we don’t have someone damage a sidewalk in a building project then come to the city and say, ‘We want you to pay for half of it,’” Earle said.

The public works committee is set to discuss the cost share program again during their Aug. 22 meeting