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Dumpling Daze
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BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

With his cape flapping behind him, Justin Englebert delivers a rock during Sunday's semi-final game during the 16th Annual Alumni Bonspiel held at the Medford Curling Club last weekend. (Left) Skip Zac Rau keeps his eyes on second Tony Meyer and lead Jason Gardner as they sweep his rock. More than 120 curlers on 30 teams took part in the three-day bonspiel. The bonspiel was won by "Team Stan" made up of Rick Zenner, Cory Tlusty, Vince Wojcik and Curt Carbaugh.



Big leap forward

Cell service, internet to get boost with county/business partnership

BY BRIAN WILSON
NEWS EDITOR

Taylor County will use some of its excess debt capacity to assist a private business in expanding internet and cellular telephone access to virtually all parts of the county.

During the March 4 meeting of the Taylor County Board, board members approved a preliminary resolution to authorize Bug Tussel to use up to \$14 million of the county's borrowing capacity to assist in financing for a plan to construct towers and lay additional fiber optic cable.

Under the plan, the county is not actually incurring any debt, but is using its debt capacity to essentially cosign as part of Bug Tussel's financing package. The risk is if Bug Tussel were to go under, the county would be at risk for loans. To mitigate that risk, the county has collateral in the form of the towers and infrastructure being put in by the company as well as receiving annual payments from the company.

Board member Mike Bub, who heads the county's broadband committee, explained that the actual amount is projected to be less especially if the project

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Mike Bub displays the areas that will gain coverage under the deal with Bug Tussel.

City opens door to renting pool

BY BRIAN WILSON
NEWS EDITOR

Groups will be able to rent the city pool for private events under a new policy approved by the Medford City Council Tuesday night.

The city had previously not allowed private rentals, but the idea was brought forward after a local group expressed in-

terest last summer. At last week's committee of the whole meeting, aldermen supported the idea and instructed city staff to come up with a draft rental agreement including pricing.

On Tuesday, council members approved the rental agreement detailing the rental policies and fees.

Terms include:

- The pool is available for rental on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from

6:30 pm-8:30 pm, June -August.

Groups may rent either half the pool at a rate of \$215 or the whole pool at \$425 per night.

- Contact City Hall for availability. Reservations must be made in person at City Hall and are made on a first come, first served basis two weeks in advance of rental.

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PAGE 10: Medford students show talents at Red White Spotlight



SPORTS: Buzzer beater secures playoff win



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★ County approves using federal funds for new Rib Lake highway shop

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is able to secure any broadband expansion grants that are available. He said they wanted to be able to have enough to move forward with the project regardless of the outcome of the grants.

Bub explained that the project will complete a ring of fiber optic cable in the county as well as contracting 17 towers which will be used for providing wireless high speed internet to homes. He said cellular provider AT&T has already committed to putting equipment on five of the towers, which will greatly improve cellular coverage. They would continue to work with other vendors for that.

If all goes according to plan, the system will be in place and providing service to customers by the middle to end of 2024. This is a full year ahead of the county's goal of having broadband internet available all over the county by 2025.

Bub explained that the only way the county taxpayers will be on the hook for any costs from this deal is if Bug Tussel fails, its parent company (Hilbert Communications) fails, and AT&T fails. In addition, the estimated revenue for the county of allowing the company to use the borrowing capacity would be between \$750,000 and \$800,000.

"We will get all the money back plus more," Bub said of the amount the county has already borrowed for internet expansion.

County board member Gene Knoll said he was especially pleased to see the expansion in the cellular coverage in the area as part of the plan. "I think we are all going to be happy if these devices work like they should," he said holding his smartphone.

Board members unanimously approved the preliminary resolution authorizing Bug Tussel to use the county's debt capacity. The step is necessary under state law and there will be a final resolution to be acted on at the April county board meeting.

Highway shop

A new highway shop serving the northeastern part of Taylor County will have a price tag of \$3,145,654.

Huotari Construction of Medford was the low bidder on the shop and site work at \$2,225,000 beating out SD Ellenbecker at \$2,325,940. In addition to the general contractor, Comfort Systems Heating and Air Conditioning received the HVAC and fire protection bid at \$225,000, Current Technologies was awarded the electrical construction bid at \$156,900 and A to Z Plumbing of the plumbing bid at \$175,524.

The bids were rejected for the salt shed portion of the project due to irregularities in the bids received. The county took the advice of the project engineers with CBS Squared and are working with Sourcewell to hire Greystone Construction to build the salt shed for \$362,230.

Over a year ago, the county had approved borrowing up to \$1,750,000 for the project. However the cost of the project has increased greatly since then leaving the county short on funding for it. The state is contributing about \$280,000 to the overall project.

County board members on Friday voted to apply \$1.4 million of the county's federal American Rescue Plan Act funding to cover the difference. The county had previously allocated ARPA funds to go to the broadband project and will have about \$900,000 remaining to use on other



BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

County Board chairman Jim Metz (right) congratulates Gary Gretzinger for his 21 years of service in the Taylor County Highway Department as a patrolman, grader operator and operations manager. During his time with the county he planned and managed over 205 miles of resurfacing projects and more than 172 miles of reconstruction projects.

projects in the future.

ARPA funds came with restrictions on how they could be used. The county is justifying the use of the ARPA funds for the project due to COVID-19 related supply chain issues and related inflation.

County board member Dave Roiger questioned if there were any provisions that the contractors would come in on time and on budget. County highway commission Ben Stanley said there were provisions in the contracts for the work. He said none of the contractors have expressed any concerns with not meeting the project timeline to have the work



BRIAN WILSON/THE STAR NEWS

County Board chairman Jim Metz (right) congratulates Douglas Brost for his more than 30 years of service in the Taylor County Highway Department as a highway patrolman and paint crew leader. As a paint crew leader he painted more than 3,500 miles of highway each year.

completed by next winter.

In other business, board members ★ Tabled action on approving the contract for management of the county's ambulance service with Aspirus. The contract is still under negotiations.

★ Approved an ordinance updating the the amount of staff allowed to work for each county department. Roiger questioned the ordinance noting that there seemed to be a large reduction compared to the previous ordinance totals. Human Resources Director Marie Koerner said the new ordinance reflects what the county already has in place.

★ City council sets rules for groups wishing to rent the pool for events

Continued from page 1

• Groups must be out of the pool by 8:30 p.m. and leave the facility no later than 8:45 p.m.

• Cancellation Policy: Cancellations must be made no less than 7 business days in advance. Refunds will only be given if City Hall is able to re-rent the pool, minus a \$10 administrative fee.

• Inclement Weather: Rental will be rescheduled to a mutually agreed upon date based upon rental availability or a full refund will be issued.

• Beer and liquor may be consumed at the events, but anyone selling beer must get a license from the city and no glass is allowed in the pool area.

"How did we come up with the fee? Does it cover our costs?" asked alderman Greg Knight, noting that it seemed low.

City coordinator Joe Harris said they based it off the wage scale that was set for this summer to cover the costs of staffing the pool. Fewer lifeguards are needed if only half of the pool is open. Harris said the reason the rate appears low is that the rentals are only for a 2.5 hour time. "It is not a long time," he said.

Alderman Christine Weix questioned how inclement weather is to be handled and who would decide if the pool was closed. "What would we say if the renter says 'We want to swim in the rain and don't care that it is 40 degrees?'" asked Weir.

"It would be the same as in the past," Harris said, explaining that the head lifeguard would have the authority to make the decision. He noted there were some instances such as with lightning that they would have no discretion but to close the pool.

Aldermen unanimously approved the rental agreement.

In related action, aldermen approved the wage schedule for the pool and summer help staff. The new rates raise the base wage for the positions by \$1 per hour to remain competitive with other local employers.

Alderman Mike Bub questioned why the public works summer help rate was going up too. He said he had intended only for the pool staff. However, other aldermen felt the increase for public works summer help was fair.

Council members also approved increasing the pool pass cost for families by \$10 and for individuals by \$5 over the the current rates. The daily entry rate remains unchanged.

Letters will once again be sent to surrounding municipalities to invite them to make a contribution toward pool operations and in turn residents of those municipalities would qualify for the discounted city resident rate for pool use.

Annexation

Council members approved an annexation request from Mike and Linda Brandner for 957 S. Park Ave a .8-acre parcel including the home and surrounding space. The remaining property, totaling about 33 acres, will remain in the town of Medford.

The parcel being annexed surrounds the home and includes a spur connecting to the Melvin Companies property to the south. Sewer and water lines will be extended to the property from the east end of Jensen Drive and will be installed at the homeowner's expense.

Harris noted that the home had already been a separate tax parcel. Under state law he said the city will have to pay the town of Medford for three years for its portion of the property taxes on the parcel.

In other business, aldermen: ★ Approved the election contingency plans addition dealing with hazardous spills or leaks on election day.

★ Approved the purchase of a new bucket truck for the electric utility at a net price of \$164,331. The city will be trading in a 2013 bucket truck. The truck is not expected to be delivered until May 2023. Alderman Dave Brandner asked if that was the latest date or if it was ready sooner if it would be delivered before then. "With everything going on we will see if we can even get this," said Spense Titera, electric utility manager.

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Commission on Aging Board Member Recruitment

The Taylor County Commission on Aging board is recruiting applicants to replace a citizen representative whose term expires in April. Individuals interested in becoming a board member should be willing to represent and advocate for older adults in Taylor County. The Wisconsin Elders Act requires a majority of the board members to be age 60 or older. Applications and a description of the duties and expectations of board members are available at the Commission on Aging office, or can be requested by phone at (715) 748-1491. Return applications to the Commission on Aging office by Thursday, March 31, 2022.

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