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Silo fire contained Saturday in Rice Lake

Firefighters contained a silo fire this weekend at a Rice Lake business.

The fire at the base of a silo at American Excelsior, 831 Pioneer Ave., was reported at 8:05 a.m. Saturday.

When firefighters arrived four minutes later, moderate smoke was seen coming from the base of the silo, according to the Rice Lake Fire Department.

Using firefighting foam, crews extinguished the fire, which was emanating from equipment in the unloading area at the silo's base. The fire did not spread to material stored in the silo or any areas of the manufacturing facility.

It took about 20 minutes to extinguish the fire.

There were no firefighter or civilian injuries.

The suspected cause of the fire is under investigation and no damage estimate was available.

PUBLIC WEIGHS IN ON 'ROAD DIET'



PHOTO BY MICHELLE JENSEN

With a plan adopted to reduce the number of travel lanes on North Main Street in Rice Lake's downtown, the project took a major step forward. But plans to put the former Highway 53 on a 'road diet' is stirring up some concern with the public.

Some Rice Lake residents against reducing number of travel lanes through downtown

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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Plans to reconstruct a seven-block swath of North Main Street through downtown Rice Lake are moving forward with the decision to pursue a road design that reduces the travel lanes from four to two.

But this is churning up some controversy in the community, as many people say four travel lanes are necessary to handle the amount of traffic that flows through the downtown on a street that once was Highway 53.

One of these voices belongs to Michael Martin, who gave his opinion when a survey was conducted recently. He does not live in Rice Lake, but he owns a business in the city and travels through the downtown frequently.

"It's always busy even with the four lanes," Martin said.

The businessman said he understood part of the reason why some people want to reduce the number of lanes is because of traffic speed. But going from four to two lanes is not the answer in his opinion.

"I think there are other things that could be done," he said.

Martin hopes the city will come up with something different, as he foresees "horrible things" in the winter — especially in the event of a huge snowfall — should travel lanes be reduced.

Snowplowing and other details surrounding reconstruction also are on the mind of Community Services Director Jim Anderson as plans progress, but at least plans to pursue a concept proposal including two lanes and a wide boulevard in the center to house trees and other greenery have been adopted, he said.

Originally, the city planned to bring three design options to the City Council,

one of which left traffic lanes as they are, Anderson said. However after reading the terms of the \$3,157,057 federally-funded Neighborhood Investment Grant it received for the project, the city realized it no longer had that option.

Alternative A involved redesigning the street with a two-way left turn lane, or TWLTL for short, and Alternative B added a boulevard down the center with parking spaces. But the council gave the nod to Alternative C, the design created when the city could no longer pursue a four-lane option, and the city submitted that plan to the state when it signed the grant agreement.

If the city decides to follow another route when it comes to lanes, it would have to amend the grant agreement.

"I would recommend against it," Anderson said.

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New signs direct outdoor enthusiasts to Rice Lake Trail System

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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An amazing paved trail system winds through Rice Lake, stretching nearly 15 miles in five loops from just south of downtown to the southern edge of the city.

But it suffered from a problem. Few knew the extent of the trail system, and people who came from outside the area — if they were aware of the trails at all — had difficulty finding them or a parking area.

That's where a few members of the Rotary Club of Rice Lake decided to step in with the help of \$5,000 from a \$50,000 Foster Friess donation to spend on erecting directional signs and building awareness of what Rotarian Craig Fowler calls the city's "terrific gem."



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Volunteers, from left, Jeanne — a Rotary student from France — Jake Myre, Craig Fowler, Kevin Jacobson, Dave Wilson, Bela Myre and Rob Buehler started erecting signs on the Rice Lake Trail System on July 8.

Fowler, Bruce Markgren and Kevin Jacobson began

the Rotary project — in partnership with the city of Rice

Lake and Barron County — about a year ago to design and build signs that recently have been popping up along the trail with more to come.

The work started on July 8 as volunteers Rob Buehler, Craig Fowler, Jake and Bela Myre, Kevin Jacobson, Dave Wilson and Jeanne, an exchange student from France, met to place large signs at the trails major intersections.

The project was billed as a way to draw awareness to the Cedar Side Loop, possibly the best know of the five loops as a majority of it runs along the east side of Red Cedar River from Allen Street at the north to a loop on its southern edge. But the trail system extends well beyond this.

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Rice Lake City Council chooses downtown street design to pursue

Proposal includes concrete boulevard with greenery but no center parking

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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The transformation of downtown Rice Lake may include a two-way street with a wide concrete boulevard that could have room for greenery but not leave space for center parking. However, the design is not final, and citizens may continue to give the city their opinions as to the future of North Main Street.

The City Council decided on July 12 to pursue Alternative C, one of three design proposals presented by SEH, the city's civil engineering firm. But the choice did not come without discussion about the value of added parking made available in Alternative B.

Councilmember Gina Sookiayak, who visited downtown River Falls which sports a similar design with center parking, said the

More Information

Read more of this story online at tinyurl.com/neyybr6d.

online survey shows people value parking and Alternative B would be more in line with their wishes.

But Councilmember Todd Larson wondered if parking was really an issue and said the city needed to balance parking with larger sidewalks.

Community Services Director Jim Anderson said there some parking congestion arose from downtown tenants, and that could be addressed through directing them to parking lots or use TID money.

Alternative B also came with less room for adding greenery, although it's possible to put trees in pots or install fake lighted trees, Anderson said.

Regardless of the debate between Alternatives B

and C, Councilman Harlan Dodge questioned the wisdom of reducing the number of lanes from four to two and wanted people to know there is a fourth option that leaves it the way it is, but then the city wouldn't get the grant.

"It's beautify your city, take it from four down to two, improve what you have there, but it's a decision I'd like people to know that it's 40 to 50 years down the road you're going to have to live with this if it doesn't work," Dodge said.

"I have a high degree of confidence that it's going to work because we've looked at the River Falls model, we've looked at our own traffic count native from Knapp Street, we've looked at our Main Street traffic count data, and a part of this design

for whichever one you pick is going to include a traffic study," City Administrator Curt Snyder responded.

All three designs result in a slower traffic pattern, dedicated left turn lanes at intersections, and bump-outs to make shorter pedestrian crossings, thus improving safety.

The council split down the middle when the vote came to pick Alternative C, with Dodge, Sookiayak, Marlene Dirkes and Keith Moffatt voting no to the yes votes of Mark O'Brien, Doug Edwardsen, Jim Resac and Larson.

Mayor Justin Fonfara broke the tie by giving his nod to Alternative C.

The decision gives SEH direction for pursuing a design based on Alternative C. However, some alterations could be possible as the process moves forward and the public continues to provide input.

County Board votes to prohibit dark money

BY RUTH ERICKSON
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By a 26-3 vote, the Barron County Board of Supervisors approved both a resolution and ordinance that prohibits the county clerk from accepting any donation or grant "from any person or non-governmental entity for the purpose of election administration, including but not limited to collection of ballots or voter registrations."

Voting against the so-called "dark money" measures were Supervisors Peter Olson, John Banks and Bob Rogers.

In a discussion before the vote, Supervisor Randy Cook made a motion to amend the resolution and ordinance to add "by the county clerk" to the wording, seconded by Supervisor Kathy Krug. County Chair Louie Okey reminded the supervisors that the county cannot tell towns, villages and cities what to do but it can set guidelines on the county.

Rogers said "election administration" was unclear and said it could prevent partisan officials in elected offices from accepting funds from their own party.

"This could be interpreted that this prohibits all partisan offices from accepting all donations," Rogers said.

Olson repeated the remarks he made to the Executive Committee, that money is tight and it was irresponsible not to consider all sources of revenue on a case-by-case basis.

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People using the trail — be they walkers, runners, bicyclists or skaters — can take the Main Street segment that stretches between Allen Street and the Rice Lake Chamber of Commerce across the river to the north. The Moon Lake/Rotary segment heads east at South Access Road to visit Moon Lake Park and other neighborhoods in the area. The Sunset segment turns west and concludes in the Walmart area. And the Campus Loop segment takes a jaunt around the Barron County disc golf course near UW-Eau Claire — Barron County and Northwood Technical College.

While the project started out as plans to erect a few large-scale signs at important intersections and entrances, a donation from McCain Foods allowed the Rotary Club to place signs all along the trails.

"They paid for all of the signs and all of the materials," Fowler said.

"McCain Foods is proud to be part of the Rice Lake community," said plant manager Brian Goettl. "We are excited to share in improving the trail system. It is a great asset for the area and we look forward to more families and visitors utilizing this in the years to come."

All of this is a lot of information to try to sort out in a map in the head? That's why besides erecting the signs with directions and mileage, Fowler, Jacobson and others helped to have a trail brochure with map printed up and produced a video showing the trail in all its glory.

The brochure, now available around Rice Lake, describes the trails and provides parking information. Perfect Imagery did the work and the Tourism Commission footed the bill for the first printing.

Fowler considers the investment in the trail well worth the money spent. In a presentation made at the lecture series Thursday at the U, he noted how the system boosted tourism, making an economic impact on Rice Lake.

The trail, open year-round and plowed during the winter months, also provides an avenue for exercising, an environmental buffer to the river and animal habitats.

For more information watch the video at tinyurl.com/2p92rh9m or pick up a brochure at the Chamber of Commerce.

Ambulance transport service area, fee schedule set

BY MICHELLE JENSEN
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The Rice Lake City Council adopted an ambulance service area for the Fire Department that not only included the city, but the towns of Rice Lake and Oak Grove which lie in its contracted district.

Adopting the transport service area and billing fee were included under the consent agenda, but Councilman Doug Edwardsen asked for council discussion as he had a question whether the service would operate only as mutual aid backup for Marshfield Medical Center.

"None of the docs say that," Edwardsen said.

Interim Fire Chief Mike Anderson said the subject of being a backup for MMC was addressed in the operational plan that must be submitted to the state for approval.

Councilmember and former Rice Lake Fire Chief Jim Resac said it's also addressed in the medical director agreement with MMC.

Discussions over adding the ambulance transport services in previous councils had centered on it only being operated in the city.

On July 12, Anderson provided data

on the number of first-in medical calls between Jan. 1, 2021, and July 1. The graph showed they made 246 runs to the city, representing 95% of the total. Twelve went to the town of Rice Lake, which was 4%, none traveled to the town of Oak Grove and two — or 1% — went to other non-contracted areas.

The contracted towns do contribute to the operational budget of the Fire Department.

Councilman Mark O'Brien said the sheriff told him that Barron County Dispatch will contact MMC first for runs, but if they decline, the call will go to the Rice Lake Fire Department. The councilman wondered if the city could therefore

be doing more runs, which could become expensive.

The Fire Department recommended providing the transport service to contracted areas which would enhance customer service and provide better safety and quicker transport for citizens already residing in their district. The council agreed on a 5-3 vote. Edwardsen, O'Brien and Todd Larson voted no; Marlene Dirkes, Resac, Keith Moffatt, Gina Sookiayak and Harlan Dodge voted yes.

Anderson also provided a suggested billing rate, with price comparisons

More Information

Read more from this story online at tinyurl.com/bwbeu2kb.

made with fire and rescue departments in the northern region of the state.

As one example, Rice Lake proposed billing \$1,100 for basic level of service to residents and \$1,250 for non-residents. The average of the six departments surveyed — Ashland Fire Department, Chippewa Falls Fire Emergency, Chippewa Fire Protection District, Eau Claire Fire and Rescue, Sawyer County EMS and Wausau Fire Department — came to \$1,169 and \$1,295, respectively.

The Fire Department could not compare the proposed fees against MMC as it declined to provide its billing schedule, Anderson said.

The billing schedule passed 7-1, with O'Brien voting no.

The council also approved a resolution of commendation for former interim Fire Chief Jason R. Jasicki for serving the city for more than 32 years. The resolution said he had dedicated himself to improving the quality of life for the community as a whole. Particularly noted was his involvement with establishing the ambulance transport service.



Jasicki

Police: Woman threw scissors at husband, causing injury

A Rice Lake woman has been charged with two felonies after police say she threw scissors at her husband's back, resulting in a wound that needed stitches.

Amanda M. Kitchen, 38, was charged with second-degree recklessly endangering safety and substantial battery-intend bodily harm — both with domestic abuse

modifiers — on Friday in Barron County Circuit Court.

According to the criminal complaint:

Officer Rhylee Roen of the Rice Lake Police Department was dispatched to a report of a stabbing on Evans Street at approxi-

mately 7:08 p.m. on July 14. The 911 caller said Kitchen had stabbed him.

Rice Lake Police Officer Torey Belich and Sgt.

Garett Thon met with the victim, who was standing on the sidewalk outside the residence. The officer said he saw a large blood spot on the victim's shirt and he was pressing his hand against his back. When the man

lifted up his shirt, the officer saw the white undershirt covered in blood.

Belich also saw a laceration to the left, middle portion of the victim's back that was about one inch long and blood was coming out of it.

Roan said the man was

transported to Marshfield Medical Center. He told the officer that while he was at work, the defendant sent him messages over Snapchat about relationship issues that she was angry at him about. He said the defendant called and said she was at the house. When he got home from work, he went into the kitchen and tried to give the defendant a hug, and she pushed him away.

He said he turned to walk to the other side of the counter and this is when the defendant threw the scissors at him. He said he felt the blood immediately, so he walked outside and called the police.

Roan reported that medical staff said the man would need stitches for

the injury to his back. She also said when she talked with the defendant, Kitchen admitted throwing a pair of scissors at her husband. The scissors were located inside the residence.

If convicted of second-degree recklessly endangering safety, domestic abuse, Kitchen faces a fine of up to \$25,000, imprisonment up to 10 years, or both.

A substantial battery-intend bodily harm, domestic abuse, conviction carries a fine of up to \$10,000, imprisonment up to 3½ years, or both.

Kitchen is slated to make an adjourned initial appearance on Wednesday, July 20. A signature bond was set at \$5,000.



Kitchen

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Now SEH, the city's civil engineering firm, will begin to draft a more detailed concept based on Alternative C and conduct traffic studies. Plans will be brought back to the City Council as they evolve, Anderson said, and residents are welcome to weigh in with their opinions.

However, Anderson said he hoped the public focuses

on giving opinions based on Alternative C plans. Time is short to get the project ready for bidding out in spring to keep to schedule.

While the process plays out, Anderson will be looking into issues such as parking and snowplowing.

"We're going to look into trying to find alternative parking," he said.

Some of the buildings around the downtown that

are in disrepair or abandoned could be used as possible areas of additional parking, especially for residential tenants.

"If we can create tenant parking spots around town we'll be better off," Anderson said.

The community services director also is looking into snow removal with the two-lane and boulevard design as it could disrupt the snowplowing schedule if the downtown

street needs to be cleared before people start arriving in the morning.

Residents who wish to give input into the project can reach out to Mayor Justin Fonfara or city council members; contact information can be found at ci.rice-lake.wi.us under the tab City Officials.

The Community Services Department also will take comments, and it can be reached at 715-234-7402.

The Rice Lake Main Street Reconstruction Project survey hosted by SEH is not accepting additional responses at this time, but people can check back at website ricelakemainstreetreconstruction.com for additional opportunities to provide feedback during the design process.

The City Council's next regular meeting is at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, July 26, at City Hall, 30 E. Eau Claire St.