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# THE NORTHWOODS RIVER NEWS

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## City public works director resigns

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS

In the midst of a busy summer of road and utility work, the City of Rhinelander now has a vacancy at the top of the public works department.

Randy Myrum, who held the position of public works director for approximately one year, tendered his resignation in a letter dated Aug. 8.

His last day was Aug. 17, according to the letter.

According to Mayor Kris Hanus, Myrum has accepted new employment outside of this area.

"He wasn't fired. He wasn't pushed out," Hanus stressed.

With several major projects underway, city administration has had to act quickly to ensure proper supervision and oversight. To that end, the common council was asked Monday to approve a payment of \$15,000 to Town and Country Engineering, Inc. as compensation for taking over management/oversight of the Timber Drive project.

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## Stella residents question state officials about PFAS investigation

### DNR says source of contamination has not been identified

By Heather Schaefer  
OF THE RIVER NEWS

Once again, the Stella Town Hall was filled to near capacity Tuesday as residents of the eastern

Oneida County township of approximately 600 people gathered to hear an update from state officials on the ongoing investigation into PFAS contamination found in some town wells.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and state health officials last held a PFAS informational meeting in Stella on a wintry day in late January. The town was bathed in

late summer sunshine early Tuesday evening but the anxious mood inside the building was similar to that of the winter meeting.

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HEATHER SCHAEFER/RIVER NEWS

## DANCIN' AT HODAG

The Hodag Park concert series, with performances held every other Tuesday, has consistently drawn large crowds to the city's lakeside park. The Tuesday, Aug. 8 offering, Santy and Son with friends, was no exception as fans young and old hit the dance floor in front of the new amphitheater. There are two more opportunities to enjoy live music at the park yet this summer. The final two concerts are set for Aug. 22 and Sept. 5 starting at 6:30 p.m.

## Times challenges legality of Bangstad CUP hearings

### Walker: Committee actions should be declared null and void

By Richard Moore  
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

The *Lakeland Times* has filed a complaint against members of the Oneida County Planning & Development Committee and corporation counsel Mike Fugle, alleging in a letter to the county's district attorney and sheriff that the officials violated both state statutes and the county's general code in conducting recent hearings for a conditional use permit for Kirk Bangstad's Minocqua Brewing Company.

In the August 11 letter to district attorney Jillian Pfeifer and sheriff Grady Hartman, *Lakeland Times*

publisher Gregg Walker asked that appropriate citations be issued against the officials and that the hearings, held on August 2 and August 9, be declared illegal and any actions taken be stricken as null and void.

The letter was sent to Pfeifer because of her jurisdiction in pursuing violations of state statutes and to Hartman because the sheriff has the power to issue citations for violations of the county code of general ordinances.

Specifically, Walker alleges that the planning and development committee, acting on false information from Fugle, illegally adjourned the August 2 hearing in Woodruff in the middle of a vote. A motion and second had been made to deny Bangstad a CUP to have an outdoor beer garden at his Front Street properties in Minocqua.

Walker also alleges that the committee then reconvened the public

hearing a week later without following statutory noticing or open meetings requirements. Further, the complaint alleges that a closed session prior to the resumption of the hearing on August 9, at which the CUP application was discussed, also violated the state's open meetings law.

"As the complaint demonstrates, the adjournment of the August 2 meeting while a motion was on the table was illegal on its face," Walker said Friday. "It was an obvious attempt to derail the vote to deny the CUP, based on a lie that the committee had to adjourn, and the resumption of the hearing the following week was just as illegal, with the committee deliberating a pending motion behind closed doors and failing to properly inform the public of the resumption of the hearing."

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## PFAS

From page 1

The state officials announced that the number of households in Stella that have received health advisory letters due to dangerously elevated levels of PFAS in their drinking water has risen to 47. DNR officials shared the same information with members of the press Tuesday morning in an online media briefing.

As of late January, the number sat at 24. In late April, after the DNR tested additional wells, it ballooned to 39.

The PFAS readings from Stella, located just 11 miles east of Rhinelander, are some of the highest in the state. According to the Department of Health Services (DHS), PFAS levels higher than 20 PPT (parts per trillion) are considered harmful to human health.

One reading from Stella was 36,000 parts per trillion, according to the DNR.

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a group of human-made chemicals used for decades in numerous products, including non-stick cookware, fast food wrappers, stain-resistant sprays and certain types of firefighting foam. These contaminants have made their way into the environment through accidental spills of PFAS-containing materials, discharges of PFAS-containing wastewater to treatment plants and certain types of firefighting foams, according to the DNR.

PFAS do not break down in the environment and have been discovered at concentrations of concern in groundwater, surface water and drinking water. These chemicals are known to accumulate in the human body, posing several risks to human health, including certain cancers, liver damage and decreased fertility.

The contamination in

Stella was first discovered late last year as part of a testing project conducted by the DNR. The initial testing was focused on households located within a one-mile radius of the town hall. In April, the DNR announced additional testing of an expanded area — wells located within 2.5 miles of the town hall.

According to the DNR officials, 28 of the wells found to have dangerously elevated PFAS levels are located within the 1-mile testing radius and 21 are located within 2.5 mile radius.

During the informational meeting, residents asked if further testing is planned.

The DNR is still formulating next steps but additional testing will be “more targeted” than the first two rounds, the officials responded.

Testing of surface water and fish in local lakes and rivers is already underway, the officials added.

In a press release issued after the media briefing, the agency announced that water from 22 sites in lakes and rivers near the Town of Stella was collected in June and July.

Some of the sites sampled include the Moen chain of lakes, the north branch of the Pelican River and the Wisconsin River near Rhinelander. Fish were also collected from Fifth Lake and are currently at the lab for analysis, the release said.

Results from these different sampling efforts will be shared as they become available and will inform additional sampling efforts, according to the DNR.

Meanwhile, the officials recommended people not swallow or ingest lake or river water. Residents have also been advised not to use well water in gardening activities.

During the question-and-answer portion of the meeting, residents asked if the produce grown in local

fields has been tested. Stella is home to a number of potato farms and, as one resident noted, potatoes are known to have a high water concentration.

The officials said they were not aware of any such studies at this point.

A similar answer was offered when residents asked if any health studies were underway.

James Yach, secretary’s director for the Northern Region, told the crowd the source of the contamination has not been determined at this point.

“There has been no source identified at this point but we’re continuing to work on investigating that,” Yach said. “We’ll continue down that path and try to get to a conclusion as to what the potential source is and hopefully be able to cut that off in the future.”

Several questions were asked regarding the land-spreading activities of the Ahlstrom-Munksjo paper mill in Rhinelander. Last week, a group of Stella property owners filed a federal lawsuit against Ahlstrom and the 3M corporation in connection with the PFAS contamination.

The suit, filed in the United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, alleges that the application of waste from Ahlstrom’s Rhinelander mill onto farmland in Oneida County caused extensive contamination of private well water.

“Over the course of decades, Defendant Ahlstrom and its predecessors disposed of millions of pounds of waste from the Rhinelander Paper Mill by dumping and spreading the waste on farmland throughout Oneida County, and specifically in the Town of Stella,” the 35-page complaint reads. “Upon information and belief, this waste contained high levels of PFOA, PFOS, and other PFAS. It was this ‘land appli-

cation’ of waste that caused Plaintiffs’ wells to be among the most contaminated in the country for PFAS. In addition to Defendant Ahlstrom — which owns and operates the Rhinelander Paper Mill — plaintiffs also bring this action against Defendant 3M, which sold and supplied PFAS chemicals to the Ahlstrom facility.”

According to the complaint, the plaintiffs are seeking “to recover compensatory and all other damages, including but not limited to the costs of restoring and remediating contamination from their real properties and drinking water wells, costs of treating water, costs of acquiring bottled water, non-economic damages, loss of earnings and future earnings, damages for loss of use and enjoyment, lost property value, and household expenses, among others.”

Michelle BalkLudwig, DNR wastewater field supervisor for the Northern Region, advised that some land-spreading activities are continuing, under the purview of the DNR.

There are six sites where spreading is still taking place, she said.

She stressed that the DNR has obtained a sample of the biosolid/sewage sludge Ahlstrom is currently spreading and are testing to it “make sure that it’s not a contamination risk.” She noted that the company submitted the sample voluntarily and results of the testing are expected within the next few days.

It should be noted that Addie Teeters, head of marketing communications & public affairs for Ahlstrom Munksjo, previously told the River News that the company has received permits from the DNR for its “land-spreading activities.”

“Since Ahlstrom acquired the Rhinelander mill in 2018, it has continued participating in a regulated biosolids landspreading program ad-

ministered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources,” Teeters told the River News in January, after the DNR confirmed that Ahlstrom (or previous owners of the mill) had spread paper mill sludge on 63 different sites in the Town of Stella between 1996 and 2021. “As part of that program, we have received and operate pursuant to permits issued by the Department. We maintain records which are provided to the Department relating to our ongoing landspreading activities.”

“Ahlstrom has led the marketplace in developing PFAS-free technology for more than a decade and utilizes our FluoroFree® technology at the Rhinelander mill,” she added.

The City of Rhinelander also spread sewage sludge/biosolids from its wastewater treatment facility on farmland in Stella between 1997 and 2011, according to DNR records.

The city is not a defendant in the lawsuit.

In response to the lawsuit, Teeters issued a statement indicating the company’s review of the complaint is ongoing but the litigation “appears to focus on activities that are alleged to have occurred prior to Ahlstrom’s acquisition of the Mill in 2018.”

The plaintiffs are seeking to have the case certified as a class action. The complaint notes there are over 100 “putative Class Members.”

A putative class action is a lawsuit filed by one or more named plaintiffs on behalf of multiple people sharing a similar claim. Lawsuits are not class actions until a court certifies them as such.

For more information and resources regarding the PFAS contamination in Stella, visit <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/PFAS/Stella.html>.

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## Digest

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“This legislation will ensure that future administrations do not abuse national security authorities to impose tariffs without clear objectives and without Congressional approval,” Beyer said. “Tariffs are a powerful tool to combat unfair trade practices, but they impose significant costs on American consumers, and Congress must have the ability to weigh in on any future 232 trade actions.”

Under this bill, members of Congress have a 60-day period following submission to review the president’s proposal. A joint resolution to approve the proposal would qualify for expedited consideration in both chambers. The requirement would apply to all future Section 232 actions, in addition to those taken within the last six years.

The bill would restore the national security intent behind Section 232 by transferring national security investigatory authority from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Defense.

In 2022, the National Taxpayer Union (NTU) named the bill one of 10 “No Brainer” bills for Congress to pass, which meant it had bipartisan support and provided a common-sense solution to a real problem facing taxpayers.

## Johnson reveals defense agency, Georgia Tech may have targeted RNC, DNC

This week, U.S. Sens. Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), the ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), the ranking member of the Committee on the Budget, wrote to Dr. Stephanie Tompkins, director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), regarding a recently uncovered email that exposed a project targeting Republican National Committee (RNC) and Democratic National Committee (DNC) networks.

The senators uncovered a Sept. 25, 2020, email between a Georgia Institute of Technology researcher and DARPA employees suggesting a plan to target the DNC and RNC networks. A DARPA employee referred to the project as “sensitive stuff . . . worth doing.”

Further, the email appears to suggest that the examination was to be conducted without the prior knowledge of the RNC or DNC, the senators wrote.

“This email exchange raises questions about the work of the [Enhanced Attribution] program and government employees responsible for it,” the senators wrote in their letter to DARPA director Tompkins. The letter follows the senators’

April 28, 2022 letter to DARPA about its reported collaboration with Georgia Tech related to the 2016 DNC server hack attribution.

DARPA has failed to fully respond to this inquiry, the senators wrote.

On May 12, 2023, special counsel John Durham referred two DARPA-related matters to the Defense Department Inspector General and the Defense Intelligence Agency for further review — one involving a Georgia Tech contract and one involving “irregular conduct in 2016 of two former employees of the Department of Defense.”

## ACLU opposes what it calls non-inclusive sports bills

The ACLU of Wisconsin has criticized a pair of bills introduced by the Wisconsin Legislature that would exclude transgender students in elementary, high schools, and public colleges and universities from participating in sports teams consistent with their identified gender.

“Transgender students participate in sports to challenge themselves and be part of a team — the same as their peers,” Dr. Melinda Brennan, executive director of the ACLU of Wisconsin, said. “The opportunity to participate in sports results in positive outcomes for students, including better grades, greater homework completion rates, higher educational and occupational aspirations, and improved self-esteem.”

Lawmakers should tackle the real issues with gender parity in sports, including unequal funding, resources, pay equity, and more, Brennan said.

“Promoting baseless fears about trans athletes does nothing to address those fundamental problems,” she said. “Excluding trans students from participating in sports teams consistent with their authentic gender identity is unfair and discriminatory. School sports should be inclusive for all students.”

Gov. Tony Evers has vowed to veto any bills passed by the legislature this session that target transgender Wisconsinites.

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