

Happy New Year!

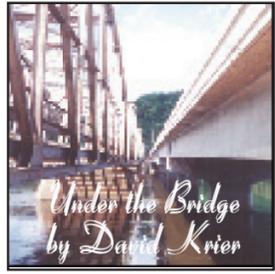
The Boscobel Dial

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BOSCOBEL, WISCONSIN

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Owner: "This is a business, not a charity."

State agencies probe Cozy Acres

By **JOE HART**

Two Wisconsin state agencies have launched investigative probes of the business practices and living conditions at Boscobel's Cozy Acres Mobile Home Park.

Spokespersons for the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection (DATCP) and the Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) confirmed the ongoing investigations last week. It is the policy of each department, according to the spokespersons, to not comment on ongoing investigations.

DATCP regulates relationships between landlords and tenants at mobile home parks, according to a memorandum prepared by the Wisconsin Legislative Council for Travis Tranel, who represents Wisconsin Assembly District 49, which includes Boscobel. The council advises legislators on legal matters.

The DSPS, the memo continues, oversees licenses at mobile home parks. As a condition of licensure, Wisconsin's administrative code, which carries the force of law, requires that "the operator of a [mobile

home] community maintain the community in a clean, orderly, and sanitary condition at all times," and charges the DSPS with enforcing the rule.

The agency has "greater enforcement power," according to the council memo, "if it finds reasonable cause to believe the construction, sanitary condition, or operation of the community creates an immediate danger to health." In such cases, according to the council, the agency may "order the removal of the immediate danger and impose monetary penalties" against the park owner, Michelle Gillette of Baraboo.

Evictions raised concern

A spokesperson for Representative Tranel said the investigations stem from concerns brought to light at eviction hearings that took place in October in Grant County Court, as reported in the Dial.

At that October 3 hearing, park resident Matthew Turner told the court that he'd been illegally charged \$2,000 to cover back rent owed by a former resident, a practice prohibited under state law. In 2016, DATCP had issued a warning

to Cozy Acres' manager, Bruce Zinkle, over a similar dispute.

Zinkle told the Dial after the October hearing that recouping back-rent from new tenants was standard practice at the park. "We're not interested in making any money on the homes," he told the Dial. "We just want to recover the back rent."

Another resident, Steve Woodside, claimed at the October hearing that he was being evicted as retaliation for complaining to the Dial about conditions in the park. State law specifically prohibits evicting tenants in retaliation for complaints.

Both men, according to court records, owed back rent;

tenants at Cozy Acres own their mobile home and rent the ground it's parked on, as well as access to power, water, and septic.

After reading about the hearing, according to his spokesman, Tranel reached out to the two state agencies and requested them to review the allegations.

"We were hoping that DSPS and DATCP could work together on this issue to clarify the extent of property management practices at Cozy Acres cited in the October 6 article," Rep. Tranel said through his spokesperson.

Owner breaks silence

Conditions at Cozy Acres were first reported by the Dial

in August. Tenants of the park, which is licensed by both Marion Township and also the State of Wisconsin, aired a long list of complaints: Deteriorated homes, some of them more than 60 years old; bone-wrenching potholes in the private road servicing the park; frequent sheriff's activity; accumulating trash, especially old electronics; unfair fees, such as a fee for dogs; and the persistent threat of eviction if they complained about conditions to management.

Operated by Zinkle, the park is one of six owned by Gillette, who also owns a wedding and event center in her adopted hometown of Baraboo. Gillette (See COZY ACRES Pg. 7, Col. 1)

Preregistration required

New rules for public comment at Council

By **JOE HART**

If you want to address Boscobel's City Council, you'd best plan ahead. That's according to new rules from Mayor Brenda Kalish announced at Tuesday night's council meeting.

In the past, anyone could show up ad hoc to address the council with concerns, complaints, or congratulations during the "Public Comment" segment of the meeting. Under the new rules, no one may address the body unless they either register the subject matter ahead of time, or are given special dispensation by the council to speak.

Additionally, the mayor quashed the informal e-mail list of about 80 recipients who had previously received a "courtesy" agenda and a packet of supporting materials in advance of each council meeting.

Kalish framed the new rules as a way to streamline meetings.

"There's been times that one comment will end up in a big argument. They need to learn who their Alders are," Kalish told the council. "If it's five different people complaining about the same thing, there's an actual issue and not just one person being upset."

City Attorney Ben Wood explained the issue as a need to provide public notice, via the council agenda, about subjects to be discussed at the meetings.

"A lot of times what happens is people bring up things here, and we debate it even though it's not on the agenda," he said. "There's two ways to do it: Leave public comment on and then just not talk about any of the things that are brought up, until somebody says, 'Let's do it in a future meeting on an agenda,' or you just take it off."

Fourth Ward Alderman Brian Kendall questioned the necessity of the change.

"It's so nice to see the crowd here," he said, indicating those in attendance for the public

hearing. "We never used to have people and now we're seeing people come out."

Wood countered that the meetings are still open and accessible. "Anybody can talk at any point in time. They just have to tell you what they're going to talk about."

As far as the email list is concerned, Kalish said that from now on the agendas would be posted only in the legally proscribed manner, which typically includes a physical copy at City Hall, the public library, and the Dial office. Packets of supporting information will not be distributed.

"We've been having issues with that," she explained. "People will call later on and say, 'We didn't get the email, can you re-send it.' And then its like definitely more and more and more people getting it. So we're just going to post it in all the proper places, and it will be available on our website."

Boscobel budget passed

By **JOE HART**

Boscobel's City Council breezed through a final-hour hearing on Tuesday night to pass a \$5.5 million budget for 2023.

"There's nothing extravagant," City Administrator Patricia Smith told the council and a half-dozen members of the public. "We need to retain the people that we have, so what you're seeing in here is for salaries and benefits. There are a lot of people costs here."

Early in budget talks, city leaders had hoped to beef up both the street department,

which has operated short one worker for some years, and the City Hall staff. Instead, according to Smith, the current focus is on containing costs amidst rising inflation, building up the city's cash reserves, and shooting the rapids of state rules that strictly control local government's fundraising.

The budget passed with seven votes and no dissent. Alderman Brian Kendall had stepped out of the room at the time of the vote.

Deficit fix

As most of us know, "nothing" (See BUDGET, Pg. 7, Col. 1)

The Year in Review, Part 1 of 2

The Boscobel Dial looks back at Year 2022

January

A Boscobel man suffered injuries following a hit and run situation in the town of Marion. On New Years Eve, December 31 at approximately 7:15 p.m. the Grant County Sheriff's Office received a report of an individual who had been found on the shoulder of Highway 133 near Peer Road in the town of Marion. The caller, noted that the individual, who was later identified as Marcus A. Brown, 26 of Boscobel had a head injury of unknown origin.

The council heard an astonishing update from Boscobel Chief of Police Jaden McCullick as well. It was shared in the meeting that the Boscobel Police Department had went out on a call that they thought was initially a Domestic Violence related call. However, they quickly discovered that it had additional elements of a narcotics and methamphetamine abuse situation as well. McCullick reported that the department discovered a "large amount of fentanyl" noting that it was enough to "probably kill half of the county." It was reported that the bust was made at the home of a known drug abuser and that there were also children at the home. It was further explained that the drugs they found also contained a "designer drug" known on the streets as "Grey Death" and is something that has never

before been seen in the area.

The Boscobel school board approved adding a school resource officer back into the district and once again made changes to their COVID Matrix during Monday night's meeting. Boscobel Police Chief Jaden McCullick met with the board to express his desire to have a resource officer within the school.

UTV route connecting Crawford County to the City of Boscobel is moving toward approval. The route will run along Highway 60, from the Crawford County Highway E intersection to the intersection with Highway 61, and then along Highway 61 across the Wisconsin River bridge.

Three via for Boscobel mayor position: Robin Baumeister, Kurt Hoepfer and Brenda Kalish.

February

On January 26 at approximately 3 p.m. the Boscobel Fire Department received a call that a A frame house was fully engulfed in flames. The small house brought in big force with the MABAS activated on the call, with Boscobel, Fenimore, Lancaster Richland Center, and Woodman all responding in various capacities, including fire, brush trucks, and first responders.

Former Boscobel Police Officer Jeremy Kass passed away on Monday, Feb. 1 after a courageous battle with cancer.

Jeremy began with the Boscobel Police Department in 2011, however just a few short years later, he began an ongoing battle with various health issues. Despite these issues he continued to remain well respected and admired piece of the Boscobel community.

It is with great honor that I am able to present the 2022, Boscobel citizen of the year award to Mr. Joel Leonard. City of Boscobel residents exercised their voting rights in the first stage of the race for city mayor on Tuesday, Feb. 15. The winners were announced that evening with Brenda Kalish leading at 167 votes, Robin Baumeister following with 130 votes and Kurt Hoepfer receiving 127 votes. With this count, Kalish and Baumeister were selected to go onto the ballot in the April 5 election. On Thursday, Feb. 17 City of Boscobel Administrator Misty Molzof received a petition for recount from Kurt Hoepfer and arrangements were made for a recount on Friday, Feb. 18 at 2 p.m.

March

The Boscobel City Council met last Monday, March 7 for their usual monthly meeting. One of the exciting topics covered was the announcement that with the final ordinance approving of the traffic code the ATV/UTV route across

the bridge will reach its final stage before the official grand opening.

Working with contractors engaged to support the district

in planning for needed repairs or upgrades to their buildings, the Boscobel School Board took action to secure estimates

(See REVIEW, Pg. 8, Col. 1)



Signs like this have become common place as ATV/UTV routes continue their stretch across the region. The City of Boscobel continues to pursue opening up the local bridge for ATV/UTV use as well. Maybe this spring we'll see another new sign if the city is successful.

~Dec. 31, 2009



BUDGET

Continued from Page 1

ing extravagant” costs a lot at current prices. Boscobel is no different, Smith told the council, and the 2023 budget includes a \$174,000 deficit, in part to cover the cost of a new police officer hired last year.

As previously reported in these pages, the city will plug part of that hole with a loop-hole in state laws. Wisconsin statutes strictly limit how much real estate tax any municipality can collect—but excludes payments on debts from those limits.

By reporting more of its debt to the state, the city can raise property taxes without violating these statutory limits.

COZY ACRES

Continued from Page 1

had declined to comment on her property, but responded to queries about the state investigations via email.

She pointed out that she bears no responsibility for the deteriorated homes in the park, as they are the personal property of her tenants. Under state law, this is factually accurate. She further stated that improvements, such as a more navigable road to the trailer park, are prohibitively expensive, and would increase rents at the park.

“If this park were to get shut down where would these people go?” she wrote. “We try and work with them financially. My rents are low because I’m doing the best I can for them. This is a business, not a charity. I could sell tomorrow and cash out. Do you know what that would mean to my tenants? They couldn’t afford to live there.”

Gillette pushed back on those who would characterize her as a wealthy outsider with no sympathy for her tenants, pointing to the real estate business she built with her late husband, Dan Gillette.

“My husband and I worked from nothing. One small building at a time,” she wrote. “We did the cleaning of our apartments and all the maintenance. We have been blessed, but that was due to a lot of blood, sweat, and tears, and taking some scary risks. You see us as successful, but we also failed. Then we picked ourselves up. At the end of every day, I look myself honestly in the mirror, which I will continue to do.”

As far as the impact of the investigations, Gillette pledged to abide by whatever rulings the state agencies hand down. “I will comply with all that is necessary and move on,” she wrote.

Neither DATCP nor DSPS could confirm a timeline for their investigations.

Without this accounting shift, the city would have been limited to about \$3,000 in increased taxes, but by deploying it, it can raise some \$98,000, Smith told the council. That will put property owners on the hook for \$14.23 per each \$1,000 of real estate they own.

The remaining balance of the deficit will float for now, Smith said, with the hope that opportunities for savings arise to whittle away at the additional \$75,000.

Expenditure limits

The other limit imposed by the state is on the overall growth of municipal budgets, known as “expenditure restraint.” The state uses the Consumer Price Index, which measures a shopping-basket of basic expenses to determine the inflation rate, to set the maximum growth rate for Wisconsin municipalities.

Expenditure restraint rewards municipalities that keep the growth of their budget within an amount determined each year by authorities at the state level. Spend too much,

and you won’t receive additional state aid.

But since these numbers are re-calculated each year, cities that spend too little are also punished in the following year because their baseline for the calculation is too low to allow for growth.

Confused yet?

The bottom line is that Boscobel’s conservative budget would put it at a disadvantage when it comes to figuring how much it is allowed to grow in 2024.

To this end, Smith told the council, the city is deploying a strategy recommended by financial consultants from Ehlers Public Finance Advisors, who assisted the city in budget planning: \$178,413 of the total budget is set aside as a “contingency.” It’s not to be spent, it’s simply on paper to inflate the city’s budget when it comes time for the state to determine our allowable growth next year.

Delays addressed

Smith also responded at the

hearing to delays in the budget process reported in last week’s Dial, which were brought to light by a letter to the council from former City Administrator Misty Molzof.

State statutes require that tax bills be mailed the third Monday in December. When Boscobel missed that deadline, Smith had previously said that taxpayers would be required to visit City Hall to pay taxes.

At the meeting, she clarified that tax bills had in fact been sent on the twenty-first and said the delay had been necessary to include input from consultants at Ehlers.

“We didn’t get our analysis from Ehlers until November,” she said. “That engagement has been extremely critical for us for our long-term view, and they are going to give us a model that we can use year after year.”



Real Estate Transfers

Miffin Lumber Company LLC to Harold G. Reddy & Judith K. Reddy Revocable Trust, lot 2, blk. 1, Jones Estates, vlg. Livingston. Michael J. Zahalka to Dean Linneman & Angela Linneman, lots 3 & 4, blk. 144, vlg. Muscoda. Nancy Rutherford to Kyle Wayne & Letjcia Wayne, tr. sec. 18, Marion tp.

The Reynolds Trust; Raymond Reynolds & Ilyf E. Reynolds Credit Shelter Trust; The Reynolds Revocable Trust, to Living Hope Mennonite Church Inc., tr. sec. 6, Muscoda tp. Cory L. Stovey & Jennifer C. Stovey to David Lawrence & Jeri Lawrence, lot 35, Oman’s Sub., city Boscobel.

Terry Havens, guardian in the estate of Nancy Havens, to Terry Havens, tr. in blk. 16, Second Park Add., vlg. Blue River. Terry Havens to Cory L. Stovey & Jennifer C. Stovey, tr. in blk. 16, Second Park Add., city Blue River.

Mark E. Randall, as successor trustee of the Nilatangi Trust, to Rodney S. Yeomans & Kelly C. Yeomans, tr. sec. 15, Watterstown tp. Kody D. Cathman & Kayla J. Cathman to Kerry Campbell

& Robin Campbell, tr. sec. 2, Hickory Grove tp.

Michael D. Kessenich & Nharra P. Kessenich to Driftless Area Rentals LLC, lot 47, Plat of Pine-land Unit 2, Muscoda tp. Betty J. Rasmusson, by attorney-in-fact, Diane L. Rasmusson to Drake Dahms & Dawn Dahms, lot 6, blk. 2, Milvern Sub. # 2, Muscoda tp.

Ward N. Dieter & Daniel C. Dieter to Kick Family, LLC, tr. sec. 34, Castle Rock tp. Mark N. Brice to Bryan Hahn, tr. sec. 9, Muscoda tp.

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