

The Chetek Alert

Established 1882 | No. 6 Wednesday, May 17, 2023

Chetek, Wisconsin | One Dollar & Twenty-Five Cents

FIRSTLOOK

Support Chetek Area Veterans Memorial flyover with donations

The beautiful flyovers at the Memorial Day and Fourth of July parades are made possible by generous donations from the people of the community. For those interested in supporting the flyover, consider sending a donation to the Chetek Area Veterans Memorial at CAVM P.O. Box 23, Chetek, WI, 54728.



Local EAA chapter offering free airplane rides Saturday, June 3

The Chetek Municipal Southworth Airport will be providing free airplane rides for young people ages 8-17. The event is Saturday, June 3, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. weather permitting. Experimental Aircraft Association Chapter 631 will be offering the airplane rides free of charge as part of the EAA Young Eagles Program. A parent or guardian must accompany the individual in order to sign the permission forms for the flight. Preregistration is required online at <https://young eagles-day.org/?5784>

DEATHS

- Barbara Grandy, 95,** Chetek
- Ellen Roush, 80,** Madison
- James Skozek, 74,** Chetek
- Palmer Solberg, 96,** Chippewa Falls



KENTON TROUTMAN | THE CHETEK ALERT

CTH SS bridge under construction through June

Many around town have noticed the "bridge out" signs posted on Main Street about the Chetek River Bridge being out of commission. Construction on the bridge began Saturday, May 3 and has put a damper on many people's morning commute as they have to take detours around the bridge via CTH M, Hwy. 53 and CTH I. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has said the project will be completed in July. The project includes replacing the bridge deck and girders, repairing and patching the abutments and making minor approach improvements. The cost of the project is \$956,783.

Public comment sought for Chetek's Safe Drinking Water Loan



The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) today announced the City of Chetek is an applicant for funding through the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program (SDWLP) to improve its public drinking water system. The project includes the construction associated with watermain movement along Kleve Street.

Activities related to this project are minor actions under Chapter NR 150, Wis. Admin. Code, for which no environmental analysis is required; however, following the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program federal requirement 40 C.F.R. §35.3580, an environmental review must be conducted before funding this project.

The Safe Drinking Water Loan Program has determined that the project will not result in significant adverse environmental effects,

and no further environmental review or analysis is needed before proceeding with funding the project.

The public is encouraged to submit comments regarding this decision and the potential environmental impacts of this project. Submit comments by May 29, 2023 to: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources C/O Kevin Olson, Community Financial Assistance, CE/2 101 S Webster St. P.O. Box 7921 Madison, WI 53707

Kevin.Olson@wisconsin.gov or 608-234-2238

Based on the comments received, the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program may prepare an environmental analysis before proceeding with the funding process. The analysis would summarize the DNR's consideration of the project's impacts and reasonable alternatives.

Council members discuss housing development, new Chetek PD officer

The Chetek City Council met for its monthly meeting Tuesday, April 9. The council tackled several agenda items.

KNAPP ST. HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

City Clerk and Treasurer Carmen Newman gave the council an update about the housing development project. She explained that the project is contingent on the construction of the new water tower. Furthermore, the water tower must be in place in a timely manner for a

June 2024 construction start date.

The city requires a signed development agreement before committing to the construction of the water tower.

Newman said she would speak with staff at S.C. Swiderski about the timeline for the completion of the water tower.

Currently, S.C. Swiderski has agreed to the \$15 million assessed value, the two-year construction completion timeline, pay-

SEE COUNCIL, PAGE A7

County works to repair pothole riddled roadways

A long, snowy, icy winter has resulted in higher than average maintenance costs on Barron County roads.

The cost for winter maintenance is estimated at about \$1.5 million in December alone, county finance director Jodi Busch informed the Highway Committee at its meeting Thursday, May 4. That is the highest cost for a winter

maintenance month since 2014.

And while the record snowfall from last winter is gone, scars remain in the form of potholes.

"This is the worst I've seen," said Highway Commissioner Mark Servi. "And roads that were good roads have become horrible just like that."

He said filling potholes is a never-ending crusade, but they would prevail, eventually.



City council clucks its approval of city chickens

BY KENTON TROUTMAN

At the Chetek City Council's Tuesday, May 9, meeting, members discussed the approval of an ordinance that, if passed, would allow residents within the city limits to own chickens.

At a previous council meeting, council member Terry Hight had said Chetek was behind the times, as other cities in the area have ordinances allowing chickens.

Hight admitted in a previous discussion with the council how surprised he was that municipalities such as Eau Claire and Rice Lake allowed chickens and yet, Chetek was still holding fast to its outlawing of poultry within the city limits.

Hight and Building Inspector/Zoning Administrator Joe Atwood worked closely the last few months gathering information, make sure the ordinance covered all of the city's bases. Atwood was praised by the council for his effort in putting together the appropriate verbiage for the proposed ordinance.

The proposed ordinance would allow chickens in



KENTON TROUTMAN | THE CHETEK ALERT

The newly adopted ordinance will permit city residents to own and maintain up to six hens on their property with a \$25 permit from the city.

single-family residential and agricultural zoned areas.

Hight said there are built-in protections for the neighbors of poultry owners including distance require-

ments for coops from property lines and the size of the coop will be determined by the number of chickens a resident has.

SEE CLUCK, PAGE A7



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Congressman Tom Tiffany hosts jobs roundtable in Barron

BY RYAN URBAN | BARRON NEWS-SHIELD

U.S. Rep. Tom Tiffany came to the Barron County Government Center on Monday, May 1, to host a roundtable discussion on jobs with local government, business and school leaders.

Tiffany opened the discussion by asking for input from employers on their workforce challenges.

"Our biggest challenge is getting people in the skilled trades," said Sydney Sherick, human resources manager at 3M in Cumberland.

Sherick said 3M needs graduates of automation technology programs, such as those at technical colleges in Eau Claire and New Richmond.

"It's difficult to draw graduates from that program to this part of the state," said Sherick, adding that they might have better luck if such a program was available locally.

"The future of manufacturing is automation," she said.

Rice Lake Weighing Systems is also moving toward more automation, said Jake Nolin, vice president of human resources at the company.

Nolin said that automation reduces the overall need for workers, but specialized workers are needed with skills in robotics and the like. He said those types of jobs require higher wages.

Jeremy Miller, human resources manager at Jennie-O Turkey Store, said the company dropped a shift in part because of a shortage of workers, but has managed to keep production numbers steady.

He mentioned three factors in the workforce shortage.

"Barron County's weaknesses have always been housing, daycare and transportation," said Miller.

Sherick agreed, say-

ing "Child care is a huge obstacle to filling second shift and overnight. That limits your pool of who can come to work."

Michael Furseth, CEO of Ardisam in Cumberland, said that child care and a lack of housing also affects their business.

"We have a woman right now, moving here from Iowa, struggling to find housing that meets her expectations," he said.

State Rep. Dave Armstrong said that recently there were only four homes listed for less than \$200,000 in Barron County. He bemoaned the fact that the Rice Lake Planning Commission recently turned away a developer proposing the building of 158 homes valued at \$175,000.

Armstrong said the shortage of workers goes hand-in-hand with housing and child care.

"Once we get more housing, we're going to have to get more child-care," said Armstrong, mentioning that there are only 650 slots for child care in all of Rice Lake.

Armstrong said that housing is a major priority in the state legislature now.

"We've got a billion dollars worth of housing bills that will drop in the next week or so," he said.

Sen. Romaine Quinn was also in attendance, and mentioned there was a recently-introduced bill that will direct the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to focus more dollars on recruiting veterans to relocate to Wisconsin after military service because they have skills and are accustomed to moving around the country.

Representing the banking industry was Mike Britton, president at Dairy State Bank. He said it's a struggle to find workers with basic people skills and a professional appearance.

Britton also mentioned

that health care costs are considerably higher in northwest Wisconsin in comparison to surrounding regions.

Several others in attendance confirmed that.

Rice Lake School District Superintendent Randy Drost said the district had saved "a couple million dollars" since going to a self-insured program.

Tiffany asked the roundtable if lowering age requirements for workers would be helpful. He mentioned that loggers can't bring their own children on the job with them. Meat processing and some restaurant work were also mentioned among jobs that have age restrictions.

But none of the employers in attendance mentioned a specific need for lower age restrictions.

Some asks that were briefly discussed included reforms for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, worker's compensation programs and some trucking regulations.

Armstrong said the state's unemployment rate remains at an all time low, but there are still people "on the sidelines."

"I don't know why they're sitting on the sidelines unless they're doing gig work," he said.

Tiffany concluded that the best way the federal government can help is to make work requirements stricter for people to qualify for food stamps, Medicaid and other welfare programs. Congressional Republicans are currently pushing for stricter work requirements as part of negotiations on the federal debt ceiling. Democrats are pushing back on work requirements, arguing that safety net programs already have appropriate work requirements and that making them stiffer won't push more people into the workforce.

County in mediation on over-budget project

BY RYAN URBAN | BARRON NEWS-SHIELD

Barron County's appetite for litigation against the construction manager remains subdued according to comments from the Barron County Board chair on Monday, May 15.

Monday's agenda included the possibility of going into closed session to discuss the highway department project "pertaining to a potential claim regarding certain costs incurred and discussion of contractual rights and responsibilities." But County Board Chair Louie Okey said at the beginning of the meeting that the closed session was no longer needed.

"The attorneys for CBS Squared and our attorneys have been talking quite a bit and writing nice letters to each other, and we've decided we're going to mediate this matter," said Okey.

Chippewa Falls-based CBS Squared was contracted as the architecture and construction management firm for the project, which was estimated to cost \$25 million. The cost has since ballooned to more than \$30 million due to various unforeseen circumstances.

Earlier this year the County retained the services of Milwaukee-based Attolles Law, s.c., to advise on the matter.

Okey said a special committee overseeing the finances of the project has been meeting weekly, and that the County Board will be updated as the remaining \$4.6 million allocated to the project is spent.

Construction is expected

to continue through much of this summer.

Highway Commissioner Mark Servi said that cleanup of the demolition of the old shop and office buildings is continuing. He said a couple weeks of grading is needed before storm sewer and parking areas can be created.

There is also another building, known as Unheated Storage #2, going up behind the main shop. It's expected to be completed in July or August.

In other business Monday:

· Okey (District 16 — Birchwood) said that he and Supervisor Diane Vaughn (District 2 — New Auburn) had made peace over a disagreement they had over how each was conducting themselves in recent meetings. Okey filled in at the County's Department of Health & Human Services Board meeting last month, which was later found to go against County Board policy. Vaughn publicly criticized Okey, and the two had a tense exchange of words at last week's Executive Committee meeting.

Okey Monday said, "She and I met along with some other people. We had a very productive meeting and at the end of that meeting we both shook hands and asked each other to move forward."

· The Board approved wage increases for various Aging & Disability Resource Center staff positions, including Day-break assistants, cook's

helpers, dishwashers, loan closet assistants, meal delivery drivers, site managers and Ad-LIFE van drivers.

· Supervisor Bill Effertz was appointed to the Mosaic USDA Community Connections Grant Planning Committee.

· The Board approved appointments of various supervisors to the boards of six municipal libraries. Wisconsin Statutes provide that whenever a county appropriates funds for a municipal library equaling at least one-sixth of the amount appropriated by the municipality, the county may appoint a library board member to serve in addition to those appointed by the municipality.

Because the County provides significant funding to municipal libraries, the inclusion of County supervisors on the library boards will give the County more control over how funds are spent. Appointees include: Gary Nelson and Audrey Kusilek in Barron, Kathy Krug and Carol Moen in Cameron, John Banks and Stacey Neuman in Chetek, Burnett Hanson and Stacey Wenzel in Rice Lake, Craig Turcott in Cumberland, and Gary Taxdahl in Turtle Lake.

· The Board approved the appointment of Karla Potts-Schufelt to replace Laura Sauve as the Barron County Public Health Officer. Sauve is staying in the department as a public health nurse.

CLUCK: Ordinance permits hens but not roosters due to noise concerns for neighbors

FROM PAGE A1

The council agreed that a six chicken limit was best as it is a manageable number of poultry to care for while still enjoying the "eggcellant" benefits of farm fresh eggs. Hight said rooster and Guinea fowl will not be permitted, citing concerns of noise such animals would create.

Hight said upon its approval, those wishing to keep chickens could purchase a permit from the city for a cost of \$20. Hight explained that having a permit for the chickens would make it easier for the city to be apprised of how many active chicken owners live in the city limits versus a conditional use agreement.

Council member Earl Grover asked Hight if the proposed quantity of chickens would be sufficient for those who have expressed interest in owning poultry. Hight said one of the parties he had spoken with would not have an issue with the quantity

but did admit that another party who had expressed interest may struggle to remain within the bounds of the ordinance. The number of permissible hens was decided based on what other cities had considered a reasonable number, according to Hight.

City Clerk and Treasurer Carmen Newman said she wanted to make sure that the cost of the permit would help the city "recoop" the cost of sending Atwood out for inspections. Newman maintained that a cost of \$20 would hardly cover the cost of Atwood's additional responsibilities. If the ordinance were approved, Atwood would be expected to conduct annual inspections of the coops in the city in order for residents to renew their permits. Therefore, council members agreed they wanted the permit's cost to reflect a portion of the time and responsibility Atwood would be assuming.

Council member Scott

Bachowski asked Atwood how long he thought it would take to conduct a coop inspection. Atwood believed the inspection and paperwork would take approximately 30-45 minutes. Hight admitted that he originally wanted to propose a permit cost to be \$25 but chose to decrease the amount. Council members agreed \$25 would be better than \$20 for the cost of the permit.

Council member Thea Hempel said she felt the proposed ordinance was well constructed and detailed. She also appreciated that poultry owners would need to notify the state about their flocks. Additionally, Hempel said this would prove to be beneficial in the case of Pathogenic Avian Influenza returning to the county since the state would be aware of who owns chickens.

Hight made a motion to approve ordinance 789a to permit chickens in the city limits with an annual permit fee of \$25. Hempel seconded and the motion was unanimously carried.

COUNCIL: Council members approved revision of treatment plant contract due to wage requirements

FROM PAGE A1

back on the incentive of \$500,000 over a five year period and the guarantee that the property will not be sold to a tax exempt organization should it be sold in the future.

WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

Council members voted to approve the revision for the contract with Market and Johnson due to the addition of Davis Bacon wage requirements in order to remain in compliance with the DNR's Clean Water Funding Program guidelines.

TEMPORARY USE AGREEMENT RENEWAL

The council approved the renewal of The Mill Event Center's temporary use agreement and approved to change the lease term to automatic annual renewal unless either party (the city or business) notifies the other party by giving a 30-day written notice.

THE CENTER RENTAL RATES

The council voted to approve revisions made to The Center's rental

rates as recommended by the community center's board. The rates are as follows: \$50 for up to four hours, \$100 for up to 8 hours, \$50 for the use of the center's kitchen and a non-resident fee of \$25.

CITY EMPLOYEE WAGE ADJUSTMENTS

The council approved a motion for retroactive pay for all employee wage adjustments for Jan. 1, 2023, through Feb. 28, 2023.

NEW CHETEK POLICE OFFICER

City council members authorized the hiring of Ryan Salzman as a full-time police officer, effective Tuesday, May 23. Council members said there were two applicants for the position and both interviewed very well, but Salzman had the upper hand due to his multi-faceted training in law enforcement and as a first responder.

REQUEST TO PAINT CITY HALL

Council members authorized city hall to request bids for painting the outside of the build-

ing. Bids will be brought to the June council meeting for consideration.

REQUEST TO UPGRADE SOFTWARE

Newman explained to the council that the city's current software used to keep things running is outdated and cannot be updated because the company the city uses is using a new version of the software. Newman noted, "I set aside monies from the general fund which comes out of tax dollars to cover the replacement cost for computers, copiers, printers, servers and software." The council approved the motion to authorize the use of \$10,000 from the city's fixed asset reserve account to pay for the utility fund's portion of the software upgrade with Civic Systems.

THE CIRCUS

The council made a motion to approve the transient entertainment permit for Culpepper & Merriweather Circus. The approval was contingent on the receipt of the liability policy. The motion was carried.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Pictured above from left to right are Sue and Mike Schmidt, Carol and Dave Burto, Sue Kadoun and Dale Burto who enjoyed a 15-day cruise aboard Viking River Cruises' Jupiter cruise ship in April. The couples visited Norway, Denmark, Germany, Poland and Sweden. The above photo was taken while the vacationers were docked in Stockholm, Sweden—approximately 4,186 miles from Chetek.

To submit a photo for Picture from the Past, bring it into the office, send to P.O. Box 5, Chetek, WI 54728, or email a scanned image and information to editor@thechetekalert.com. Photos are not harmed and can be returned in the mail.

Deadline for ads and articles **Tuesday at 10 a.m.**

The Chetek Alert 312 Knapp Street 715-924-4118