

The St. Ignace News

and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave



Mackinac Island Awaits Judge's Decision on Property

Mayor Appoints Committee for Landmark Status Work

By Ryan Schlehner

The City of Mackinac Island is awaiting orders from 11th Circuit Court Judge William Carmody in hopes that he will uphold a previous order that requires a Chicago couple to return its Hubbard's Annex property to its original state by November 1.

The issue involves unfinished construction of Len and Sue Webster's Island home, a project that has been stalled for almost nine years. Only a foundation has been built since 1999.

Judge Carmody clarified an order of abatement for the property at a hearing Friday, October 17, after giving the Websters seven days to object to the order that was issued October 10. The Websters did, and

according to the Circuit Court, another hearing will be scheduled for November 21 if Judge Carmody does not sign the order before November 1, the deadline for the Websters to restore their property.

Tom Evashevski, the city's attorney, filed a motion to enter the order without further hearings, meaning he would like the Websters to adhere to the original order to remove all building material from the site and restore the property to its pre-construction state by filling in the hole in the ground by November 1.

"In my opinion, their objection was not proper," said Mr. Evashevski. "The only objection would be to the form of the order but not for the substance of the

order. That would require an appeal."

The city filed a lawsuit against the Websters after they failed to either continue construction or

restore the property before an April 25, 2007 deadline.

The city contends the property is a safety hazard to roaming children and to snowmobilers and is a blight in the neighborhood.

If the judge upholds the order

and the Websters fail to meet the November 1 deadline, Judge Carmody will then determine the punishment.

"It could be anything, such as fines, a jail sentence, or he could allow the city to restore the property

and bill it on the Websters' tax bill," explained Mr. Evashevski.

Auditor Says City's Finances 'in Good Shape'

Michael Konicki of Rehmann Robson, the city's auditor, speaking at a City Council meeting Wednesday, October 22, said if he had to grade the city's financing and budgeting for the past fiscal year, he would give them an "A."

"Overall, you are in good shape," he said. "A lot of other municipalities are going the other way."

As of March 31, the city's year-end general fund balance was \$489,000, an increase of \$274,000 from last fiscal year, however, Mr. Konicki pointed out that the sale of one of the city's two Rowe House condominiums, which housed police officers, accounted for \$221,000 of that increase.

That money will be used to remodel the old medical center into police apartments. The building has been renamed St. Martin's Place.

The city's other Rowe House condominium is still for sale.

In long-term debt, the city owes \$205,000 for a fire truck, expected to be paid off in 2013, \$140,000 for the construction of the fire hall, with final payment expected next June, and \$60,000 to pave Cadotte Avenue, which is expected to be paid by August 2010.

Mr. Konicki said the Department of Public Works (DPW) has a debt of \$3.4 million, which was incurred with improvements to its water and sewer treatment plants, and includes \$300,000 of filtration equipment purchased a few years ago.

Drill Reveals County Needs More Emergency Responders

By Karen Gould

More emergency responders from outlying areas and improved communication are needed during large-scale emergencies in Mackinac County, said Mike Kasper in his report on a series of three drills held at the Straits of Mackinac in September. Mr. Kasper is the director of the county's Emergency Management department.

He is trained to work in the Emergency Operations Center to relieve commanders so they can direct efforts in the field.

During September's drill, he said, the Emergency Operations Center was staffed by people who also were needed at the disaster sites. Those people included St. Ignace Fire Chief John "Bucky" Robinson and Mark Wilk, a St. Ignace police officer and area ambulance manager. Now, with additional support from around the county, Chief Robinson and Sergeant Wilk will be able to be stationed on-site, where they are needed.

The exercises were designed to test the coordination of local, state, and federal response agencies to three emergency scenarios. They allowed more than 50 agencies and private companies to practice working together and identify shortcomings, so the county can be better prepared a real emergency.

Communications moved slowly at first between centers established north and south of the Mackinac Bridge and the Incident Command Post at Little Bear East Arena in St. Ignace, he said, but communications between responders went well.

The mock disasters in September included a terrorism threat on a freighter, a mass water rescue after a ferry boat and fuel barge collision, and the containment and clean-up of a fuel oil spill. Evaluators stood by to assess where improvements can be made on local, state, and federal levels.

He speculated communication issues were the result of a delay in the beginning of the exercise, creating a lack of synchronization between operations centers in Mackinac and Cheboygan counties and the Joint information Center set up in Mackinaw City.

On the local level, Mr. Kasper is seeking additional help from firefighters and emergency medical service workers on the east side and west side of the county to assist during emergencies. He already has recruited two volunteers. Volunteers, he said, will now

Other exercises in the past have addressed chemical spills on I-75, Mackinac Bridge damage, and large-scale tornado damage.

Thunderstorm Followed by Hail October 26



Vehicles create a path through a thick layer of hail that fell on State Street and parts of St. Ignace Sunday morning, October 26. Thunder and lightning, followed by hail, strong winds, and then rain hit the area, leading a cold front that passed through the region in the afternoon. Two freighters sought shelter from wind and waves in Moran Bay, and a high wind warning was posted on the Mackinac Bridge.

Program Seeks To Bring Medical Care to Uninsured Adults

By Ellen Paquin

Hundreds of people who live in Mackinac, Luce, or Chippewa counties and who do not have health insurance may benefit from a program to bring medical care and free or low-cost prescription medicine to qualifying adults. Called the Upper Peninsula Health Access Coalition, the program in Mackinac County is operating out of temporary office space in St. Ignace, and is seeking to find affordable long-term office space and to add volunteers to the effort so it can reach more local people who need help paying for health care.

People can get discounted doctor

appointments, hospital services, and medicine for \$5, or even free of charge, if they qualify. The program is for low income adults ages 19 to 64 who do not already have access to low cost health care. Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians members are not eligible, because they already have that service through the tribe.

About 150 Mackinac County residents are already using the program, but poverty statistics show 373 more are the right age, uninsured, and would qualify, said

Andrea Osborn, program manager in the coalition's Sault Ste. Marie office. The program seeks to improve access to health care for these people.

"Without insurance, sometimes people end up waiting until the problem is larger than it could have been," Ms. Osborn said. "Our goal is preventive care. Sometimes people can pay for a doctor visit, but then can't afford a prescription, so where do we go from there? It's a wasted doctor appointment."

Mackinac Straits Hospital in St.

Ignace, War Memorial Hospital in Sault Ste. Marie, and Helen Newberry Joy Hospital in Newberry will provide half-price hospital services, such as laboratory tests, to those enrolled in this program, and will accept patients from any of the three counties. A program patient who lives in Mackinac County, for example, can go to War Memorial Hospital for treatment and still be covered.

Through partnerships with drug companies, the coalition can also provide patients with prescription medicines that are free, or cost only \$4 or \$5.

Council Trustee Hingston Steps Down From Planning Commission

By John S. DeMott

Saying "this job was not something that I sought," Jeff Hingston resigned from the Mackinac City Planning Commission Thursday, October 23, citing a potential conflict with his duties as a trustee on the Village Council.

Mr. Hingston, owner of Candy Corner-Windjammer Gifts on Central Avenue, read a letter to the commission saying, "I have a responsibility to my elected position and my appointed position as a planning commissioner to eliminate any doubt of proper voting procedure, and by not serving in both positions, any question in that regard does not exist."

He has served on the Planning Commission for four years, two as a council liaison and two as a voting member of the commission.

It has "always been my understanding that I could not, should not, vote twice," he said, on issues that come before the council and the commission. Serving on the commission, he said, was "something I was asked to do and told that it needed to be done, so I did, reluctantly. My own view is that an elected official should not sit on the Planning Commission."

Mr. Hingston read his letter dur-

ing a lengthy discussion about bylaws that the commission must adopt under Michigan law by next year.

He said he would recommend to Village President Ronald Wallin that the council consider reducing the size of the Planning Commission from nine to seven people, a move that most members welcomed.

Mr. Hingston's departure leaves the commission with seven members. Fellow commissioners applauded his efforts.

Chairman Rob Most said, "I, as chair, will regret losing Jeff Hingston's point of view on the commission. He brought many points that helped stimulate discussion. I will, of course, miss his jabs."

Mr. Most called for better communication between the village council and the planning commission. "The more we can understand the hopes and the thoughts and the knowledge of the council, the more they can understand us, and I think the climate will be better," he said.

Planning Commission members are Mr. Most, Mary Clark, Earl Taylor, Florence Tracy, Nancy Dean, Paul Allers, and Rosada Mann.

"The two big things that we bring to the table for patients is that we coordinate care, and we can arrange for medicine to be paid," Ms. Osborn said. "We provided for \$540,000 worth of donated medication to 861 patients in these three counties last year."

In Mackinac County, 219 residents took part in the program at least once over the last year, which is about 42% of the people who could be using it, but the numbers vary because people come in and out of the program as their income guidelines change. With so much seasonal work in the area, more people qualify in the winter, when they're laid off, than in summer.

People who want to participate may start by contacting coordinator Rashel Morningstar, who asks a few questions to see if they qualify, then sets up an enrollment meeting. The patient is asked to bring a Social Security card, tax return, proof of residency in the county, and a list of all prescription medicines being taken. The enrollment meeting takes about an hour. Meetings take place at the program's temporary office space at the Catholic Center on Spring Street, or at a borrowed meeting room at Mackinac Straits Hospital.

The patient will be matched with a participating physician's office.

Adopt Your New Best Friend!

Mackinac County Animal Shelter
980 Cheeseman Road, St. Ignace • 906-643-7646
Open Everyday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. & Sun. 9-11 a.m. or call for appoint.
www.petfinder.com www.mackinaccounty.org
adoptions-mcas2005@sbcglobal.net

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