

Mackinac Island City Council Rejects Parks' 20-year Fire Protection Agreement

Counteroffers With 2 Years

By Ryan Schlehuber

Mackinac Island City Council, at a meeting Wednesday, January 14, rejected a 20-year fire protection agreement proposed by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission and will counter with a two-year agreement.

Under the park's proposal, Council agreed to renew a property lease for the city's fire hall near Surrey Hill, extending the agreement from five years to 20 years.

It also accepted a two-year renewal of a use permit for a radio tower and shed at Fort Holmes, but hesitated to enter a long-term fire protection agreement, owing to possible impacts of a bad econ-

omy that may force the State Park Commission to restructure the agreement in the future.

"I think it'd be foolish of us to agree to 20 years. In fact, it's crazy for them [the state park] to even ask us for that," said Councilman Jason St. Onge.

Mr. St. Onge argued the State Park Commission, up until only a few years ago, helped support the city's fire department operations financially each year, up to \$2,500 a year, before suffering cuts to its budget caused by a down economy. It now offers in-kind services to the fire department.

Mr. St. Onge said he fears entering into a long-term agreement weakens Council's negotiating power if the State Park Commission were to seek to restructure the agreement again.

Council agreed to signing a two-year agreement and will send

the counter-offer back to the State Park Commission.

In the agreement, the fire department covers all fire incidents within state park property, and agrees to provide and maintain proper training for firefighters, and maintain equipment.

The Park Commission's agreements are to provide snow removal of all public roads, provide diesel fuel for the city's fire vehicles, and offer a \$1 land lease for use of a storage facility for fire equipment on park property.

The current five-year agreement ends this month.

Council sent to the Ordinance Committee a request from British Landing resident Jack Armstrong for a temporary motor vehicle permit to use a riding snowthrower. Mr. Armstrong can receive an emergency permit from Mayor Margaret Doud in the meantime.

Mr. Armstrong received a use permit to operate his garden tractor during the summer and fall to cut grass at his business, Cannonball Drive-In, across the street from his home. He now wants to use the tractor, with a snow-throwing attachment, to clear an 11-foot by 50-foot driveway and a six-foot-wide sidewalk that stretches approximately 110 feet.

Mayor Doud voiced her concerns that falling prices for commercial property on Mackinac Island are affecting the overall State Equalized Value of property on the Island. She said Mackinac County is likely to order the city to reevaluate its commercial property next year.

She also said U.S. Congressman Bart Stupak is looking for federal funding for municipal streetlights. The city council has

proposed replacing 100 street lights that "are badly in need of being replaced," said Mayor Doud. Estimated cost is \$250,000, but the design and light source has yet to be determined.

Chris Szabo was given permission to hold a Super Bowl tailgate party and a pig roast Sunday, February 1, on part of Main Street, just in front of his business, Patrick Sinclair's Irish Pub. The street will not be blocked off.

Council approved payment of up to \$3,000 to Wilcox Professional Services of Escanaba to prepare a presentation for the Mackinac Island State Park Commission about the city's plan to resurface part of Annex Road, from Park Avenue to Cadotte Avenue. The presentation, includ-

ing aerial photographs and a PowerPoint show, was made to the Mackinac Island State Park Commission at its meeting January 14.

Council approved Jamie Bynoe's request for use of Market Street to hold a street hockey tournament from 12:30 p.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, January 17, and from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, January 18. The tournament will be held in front of the post office.

The rental fee for use of City Hall was waived by Council for the annual Mark Gallagher scholarship dinner Thursday, February 19.

Mayor Doud announced that the fire department's ice rescue team will begin training with the U.S. Coast Guard in February.

Northern Michigan News Roundup

The news in brief from communities around the U.P. and northern Michigan

Compiled using information published in various community newspapers.

New Medical Office Building Planned at Downtown Sault Ste. Marie

A four-story, 40,000-square-foot medical office building will be constructed in downtown Sault Ste. Marie, according to War Memorial Hospital CEO David Jahn, which he described as "the next step" in the hospital's long-term strategic plan to advance the growth of health care services in the region.

Construction could begin as early as spring. It will be built on the eastern side of Osborn Boulevard, next to the downtown parking structure. About half of the building will be leased by the hospital from the builder, who will own the building and market the remaining space to medical professionals or closely-related businesses. The hospital plans to use its part of the building for physician office space and an ambulatory surgery center.

Construction is estimated to last from nine months to one year.

The hospital began pursuing the construction of additional medical office space several years ago, when it purchased the property where the building will be situated.

— The Evening News

Proposed 10-acre Park Seen as Economic Development Boost for Negaunee

Construction could start as early as spring 2010 for a proposed park of almost 10 acres at Negaunee.

Funding and plans are still being developed for the new Jackson Mine Park. Features will be a farmers' market under a pavilion, bathrooms and other buildings, an outdoor ice rink, a skate park, large playground and splash park with fountains, 10 regulation horseshoe courts, and a large open space for festivals.

Construction would be completed in phases over five years.

The proposed park is part of a strategy by the city to redirect traffic into the downtown area, bringing in new businesses and new residents, according to city officials.

The 8,000-square-foot pavilion would be complete with a roof made up of live plants, and would be rented out for receptions, weddings, graduations, and reunions for up to 800 people. A public hearing yielded the suggestion of adding retractable sides so the pavilion could be used in inclement weather.

— The Mining Journal

Community Effort Helps Bring Back Food Pantry

A mobile food pantry serving needy senior citizens at Manistique is being brought back, five months after being closed when its funding ran out. Monthly distributions of food are set to resume at the Manistique Senior Citizens Center February 4.

The program began in December 2005 with a two-year, \$15,000 grant from a private foundation. The program was originally set to expire in 2007 but actually continued for nine more months with donations of time, money, and labor from residents and businesses.

About 72,000 pounds of food and goods were provided to needy senior citizens in the program's first two years. Food was distributed under a "waste not, want not" approach in which customers were encouraged to take what they needed and leave unneeded items for those less fortunate.

The foundation that originally provided start-up funds for the pantry was impressed with the local effort to continue it and has provided an additional \$5,000.

The senior citizens center is also accepting donations from local people and civic organizations to keep the program going as long as possible.

— Pioneer Tribune

Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



Drain Heads: Obscure, Potentially Powerful

In Washington last week, there was an historical presidential inaugural atop the nation's political ladder. In Michigan, assorted candidates from both parties are emerging as gubernatorial prospects to be atop the 2010 state ballot.

One of them, U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra (R-Holland), who on Friday had events in four cities along the Lake Michigan shoreline before ending up in Traverse City, told me he is "in no rush" to make a decision, but made it clear he leans toward running for governor.

Now consider an obscure local office that often looms large on sprawl and other front-burner issues, but is low on Michigan's political ladder: county drain commissioner.

It also often is the lowest-paid county office. In Delta County, the county board trimmed \$1,000 off Commissioner Don Shirley's 2008 salary of \$6,770, effective January 1.

The Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners, which cites the state as the "the fifth wettest" in the nation, said

Michigan's need for a drainage infrastructure was set by statute in 1838, when prospective settlers from the east viewed land west of Detroit as a bog, and favored easier terrain in such states as Ohio and Illinois.

The office of county drain commissioner was established for all Michigan counties in 1897.

In Michigan's 83 counties, prosecutors, sheriffs, clerks, and treasurers get more prominent attention than drain commissioners. But in some counties across our two peninsulas, drain commissioners are exercising considerable power in shaping land use and development.

"The office is pretty unique to Michigan, formed back when the state was largely a swamp," says President Bill Rustem of Lansing-based Public Sector Consultants, a former environmental adviser to 1969-82 Governor Bill Milliken and the lead staff person on the land use advisory council that Governor Jennifer Granholm formed upon taking office.

In Oakland County, Rustem said, the drain commissioner functions

essentially as the environmental agency.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Shiawassee County Drain Commissioner Robert Tisch became a well-known Democratic political figure, leading to unsuccessful bids for governor and for adoption of the Tisch Amendment to roll back property assessments and taxes.

A current rock-the-boat kind of guy is newly elected Cheboygan County Drain Commissioner Dennis Lennox, who has challenged the tax-exempt status of the UAW's golf course and retreat center on Black Lake near Onaway.

Lennox, who doesn't take the \$600 annual salary but files for expenses, says one of his first priorities is determining whether the office is even needed in his county, which, he says, has no drains.

As a Central Michigan University (CMU) student, Lennox gained media attention by protesting that ex-Lottery Commissioner Gary Peters, after selection to run a part time CMU political teaching and forum program, geared up for a successful challenge of U.S. Representative Joe Knollenberg (R-Bloomfield Hills).

Last week, as a panelist at an Oakland County GOP forum attended by Attorney General Mike Cox (a leading prospect for governor), said the party is "broken." He opined that by 2012, the age of half of the Republican candidates for the state House should be under 35.

Lennox, now 24, would qualify.

Congressional Watch

• Congressman Hoekstra, ranking Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, supports President Obama's selection of Leon Panetta to head the Central Intelligence Agency despite his lack of credentials in the field.

Mackinac Democratic Party Convention Is February 7

The Mackinac Democratic Party Convention will be Saturday, February 7, from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. at the St. Ignace Public Library.

Refreshments will be provided. New members and the public are welcome.

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Letters:

All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

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Weddings:

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.