

County Eyes Public Transportation Idea, Employee Insurance Costs

By Karen Gould

A bus that would provide transportation for county residents is being considered by county commissioners, who have applied for a \$50,000 federal and state grant to pay for a feasibility study. Having public transportation, say commissioners, would help those who are unable to drive get to a doctor's appointment or buy groceries.

If approved, the grant would be awarded in October. A \$10,000 match is required from the county.

Last November, the issue was brought to commissioners by Julie Waldron, a member of the Mackinac Transportation Committee of the Department of Human Services.

Commissioners reported at their Thursday, February 12, meeting on sessions they attended at the annual Michigan Association of Counties, including one on health insurance. The issue, they said, is likely to be discussed during contract negotia-

tions later this year.

Everyone should have insurance, although employees should participate in the cost, commissioners believe. Mackinac is probably one of the few counties that does not require a co-payment, said Chair Dawn Nelson.

The county pays more than \$160,000 each year in health insurance. This year, the county absorbed a 7% increase in coverage. Blue Cross and Blue Shield and the Michigan Employee Benefits Services provide coverage to the county.

"That's a lot of money for this county to put out for insurance," said Mrs. Nelson. "It really is."

A resolution supporting the redevelopment of the museum at the Father Marquette National Memorial in St. Ignace was approved by commissioners. The museum building, which was self-insured by the State of Michigan, was never rebuilt after it was

destroyed when lightning hit the building in 2000.

Just off US-2 on Boulevard Drive, the 52-acre museum site overlooks the Straits of Mackinac and is owned by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Committee members Eric Dodson, city manager of St. Ignace, and Jim Durm, supervisor of Moran Township, attended the commission meeting. The eventual goal, said Mr. Dodson, is to make the area a gateway to the Upper Peninsula. It would include a history of the area and a transportation museum.

"Even with the numbers down on the Mackinac Bridge, there is still over four million crossings a year," said Mr. Dodson. "We are a center, and I think that attraction is very important."

Chair Dawn Nelson agreed the reestablishment of the museum would be an asset to the community. "Get it done," Commissioner Calvin McPhee told Mr. Dodson

and Mr. Durm.

The Mackinac County Sheriff's Office received a \$85,000, one-year grant from the Department of Agriculture, said Undersheriff Darrell Sadler. The grant was increased by 50% compared to last year. The funds pay for Deputy Isaac Harrigan to perform livestock inspections at the Mackinac Bridge.

The board approved United Way of the Eastern Upper Peninsula to give a fundraising presentation to county employees.

The board also approved purchasing uniforms for the two-man maintenance staff. Shirts would identify them as maintenance per-

sonnel. Bill Orr holds the lead maintenance position and Frank Dumas is the assistant.

Based on the recommendation of the Mackinac Housing Commission, commissioners appointed Karen Rowan of Curtis to fill a vacancy on the housing board.

Commissioners approved a resolution in support of the state's remonumentation program. Commissioners are requesting the \$15 million that was removed from the fund in 2006 to help balance the state's budget be replaced in 2009, and an additional \$15 million be added to the program for 2010. The resolution requests the funding

come from the federal economic stimulus money.

A resolution recognizing the contributions of Dr. Herbert Hamel to health care in Mackinac County was approved by the board. Dr. Hamel, who served as a physician in the county for 32 years, died in January.

Commissioners will advertise for two openings on the Hiawatha Behavioral Health board. The terms of Dan Yake and Mary Balfour expire March 31.

County commissioners next meet Thursday, February 26, at 4 p.m. in the commissioners room at the Courthouse annex building in St. Ignace.

Mackinac Trail, Borgstrom Are Road Priorities

By Karen Gould

Completing a three-mile gap of reconstruction on Mackinac Trail and resurfacing 4.7 miles of South Borgstrom Road are top priorities for the Mackinac County Road Commission. Hoping to get federal economic stimulus money, the road commission, along with those from across the state, is setting construction priorities.

The local board agreed on its two primary projects during a

meeting Tuesday afternoon, February 17.

A three-mile stretch of Mackinac Trail in St. Ignace Township has remained unfinished since the road was last worked on in 2007. Federal funds for the project, which began in 2003, have never been enough to complete the work. The project included resurfacing, paving shoulders, cold milling, concrete joint repair, and hot mixture asphalt surfacing of

the roadway. The unfinished stretch runs from M-134 north one mile, and from M-134 south two miles.

Road Commission Manager Dirk Heckman said he also has talked with the Hiawatha National Forest Service, which has expressed an interest in helping with costs to complete work on Mackinac Trail. The road adjoins forest property.

Design work already is completed on the project, said Mr. Heckman, and it is ready to be sent out for bids as soon as funding is secured.

A second priority project, the commission said, is work needed on South Borgstrom Road in Hudson Township. The street has been resurfaced except for a 4.7 mile stretch from H-40 to US-2. The unfinished stretch of road, said Mr. Heckman, needs to be resurfaced, including crushing, shaping, paving, and replacing shoulders.

The roadway is basically falling apart, said Commission Chair Lester Livermore. The road crosses into Luce County where it already has been resurfaced.

South Borgstrom Road also adjoins forest service property. Mr. Heckman said he would talk with forest officials about helping with



Road Commission Clerk Theresa McPherson is retiring after more than 24 years with the county. Commissioners Tom Doty (from left), Chair Lester Livermore, and Frank Luepnitz recognized her service to the commission and presented her with a plaque Tuesday, February 17.

Mackinaw City Planning Commission

Greater Flexibility Is Among Goals for Land Use

By Jonathan Eppley

The Mackinaw City Planning Commission reviewed the last five of 16 passages to be considered in the development of its future land use map and goals at its Thursday, February 12 meeting, including natural resources protection, commercial - mixed office and tourism service, institutional and business incubation, public and recreation, and high tech research and very light industry.

Commissioners read through the wording of each summary to suggest any changes to be made by Village Manager Jeff Lawson.

"They're just broad overview goals of what those districts should

be considered as," Mr. Lawson said. "We're just trying to clarify a little bit what type of uses would be in these in these particular areas."

Commissioner Rosada Mann suggested a slight modification to the wording in commercial - mixed office and tourism service, to clarify what types of development are to be allowed west of I-75 adjacent to Louvigny Street.

"I'm not sure whether that guarantees that the Holiday Inn Express would be the only hotel ever allowed in that district, but that's the way it reads, that future land uses 'should focus on tourism businesses that also serve local residents,'" she said. "I guess you

could say a hotel would serve residents, but I think that's stretching it a little."

Mr. Lawson explained the summary was worded that way not to exclude hotels, but to encourage "complementary businesses that could be tourism related or community related." All commercial-zoned districts in the village allow for hotels, he said.

He plans to edit the wording to be more clear, allowing for businesses and hotels in that particular district.

Commission Chair Rob Most said the commissioners' suggestions are guiding Mr. Lawson's

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Gros Cap Youngsters Enjoy City Hall Tour



Second grade students from Gros Cap School were given a tour of St. Ignace City Hall by Mayor Paul Grondin Friday, February 6. Also assisting with the tour were City Public Works Director Les Therrian, City Clerk Renee Vonderwerth, and Police Chief Tim Matelski. Pictured are (in front, from left) Aubree Vallier, Lucas Sayles; (second row) Kane Belonga, Sarah Doran, Lily Colegrove, Bailey Stratton; (third row) Bree Ballard, Mayor Grondin, Kennedy Musick; (fourth row) Joshua Kaiser, Gregory Paquin, and Shyanne Bird. Teacher Jaime Clark accompanied her class on the trip.

Les Cheneaux School Board Reviews Finances

By Jonathan Eppley

The Les Cheneaux Community Schools Board of Education used the Presidents Day holiday to hold an all-day finance workshop in the Cedarville High School band room.

The purpose of the Monday, February 16, workshop was to brief the school board and community with district finances for the 2009-10 school year. The workshop followed the monthly school board meeting, which was moved to 9 a.m.

The district is concerned with proposed state funding cuts for schools, and announced it may need to make program cuts in the coming year.

"The finance committee started looking at the figures and wanted to share what they saw with the whole board," Superintendent Rod Goehmann said. "It was an opportunity for everybody to sit down and look at the figures."

About 20 school staff and community members attended the workshop, which ended at 4:30 p.m.

Proposed cuts in state funding would reduce per-pupil funding in all Michigan school districts by \$59 per student. Cedarville will receive about \$18,000 less if its per-pupil funding is reduced from \$7,713 to \$7,654. The state pays a minimum of \$7,314 per pupil.

Even with the reduction in state funding, Mr. Goehmann said the majority of district funding comes from township property levies, which are voted on annually.

"We vote on it every year. We renew it every year. It's kind of the bread and butter of our budget. If

we didn't have the 18 mills, we wouldn't be open," he said.

Tuesday, May 5, Clark Township and a portion of Marquette Township will vote to renew an 18 mill tax levy, which will bring in \$2,305,459 in property taxes for district revenue.

Mr. Goehmann said the levy has been voted on every year for the past five years, instead of in multi-year increments, because property values keep rising. Rising property values, in turn, increase the district's funding.

"We have high property values here compared to many districts in

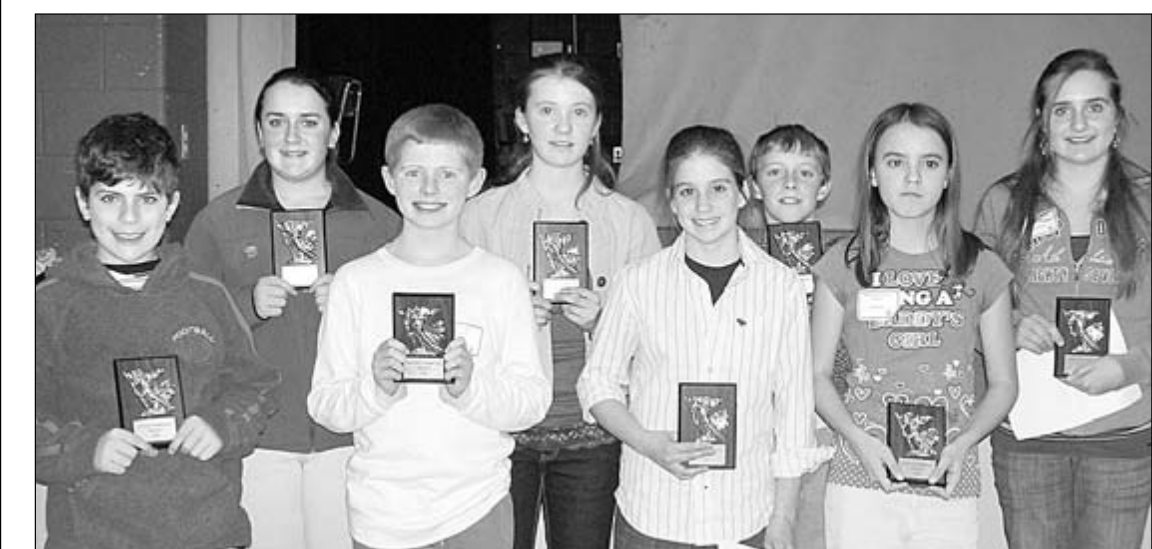
the state, so we bring in a lot of money for the 18 mills," he said. "If we don't get that \$2.3 million from our local taxes, we can't open our doors. We have to keep going back to the voters, and it has to pass."

The district expects about \$2.9 million in revenue for the 2009-10 school year. State and federal funding make up the remaining \$600,000 in budget revenue.

Projected expenditures for the coming school year are unknown, Mr. Goehmann said. The district will likely find ways to balance its budget through cuts.

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Top Local Spellers Advance to Regionals



Twenty-four top middle school spellers from Engadine, Mackinac Island, St. Ignace, and Gros Cap schools gathered for a district spelling bee at St. Ignace Thursday, February 5, and eight winners from that competition advanced to a regional spelling bee in Rudyard Tuesday, February 24. The eight top spellers in grades five through eight are (front row, from left) Lucas Gustafson of St. Ignace, grade five runner-up; Ben Freier of St. Ignace, grade 5 winner; Margo Brown of St. Ignace, grade six winner; Samantha Bennett of Engadine, grade six runner-up; (back) Hailey Bean of Mackinac Island, grade eight runner-up; Molly Paquin of St. Ignace, grade eight winner; Jacob Sjogren of St. Ignace, grade seven winner; and Savannah Seccia of Gros Cap, grade seven runner-up.

Local Man's Body Found at Straits

The body of 38-year-old Mackinac Island resident George Wellington Jr. was found on the ice on Lake Huron near the shoreline of St. Ignace Sunday morning, February 22.

Mr. Wellington, a taxi driver for Gough's Livery on Mackinac Island and was a volunteer firefighter on the Island, was found lying on the ice near the shore by the U.S. Coast Guard St. Ignace station, where Coast Guard officers spotted him around 10 a.m. Sunday.

He may have been traveling by snowmobile, but no snowmobile has been located, said St. Ignace Chief of Police Tim Matelski Monday morning, February 23.

"We had Paul Fullerton of Great Lakes Air fly over the ice three or four times to locate the snowmobile, but we have yet to find one," said Chief Matelski. "He couldn't see any tracks, either, but the wind may have wiped them out by the time he

flew over."

Mr. Wellington's father, George, had reported him missing the day before.

Mr. Wellington Jr. had trouble with his snowmobile Saturday evening as he made his way from the Island to St. Ignace, according to Island Fire Chief Dennis Bradley. He called friends from the Island by cell phone for assistance. Chief Bradley gave his radio to another firefighter to go assist him. Mr. Wellington called later to say he had made it to St. Ignace.

Mr. Matelski said the incident is still under investigation, but no foul play is expected. An autopsy will be performed to determine cause of death.

"George was a good-hearted guy," said Chief Bradley. "He was a really quiet guy and was easygoing. He'd do anything for anybody."

An obituary for Mr. Wellington is published in this issue.