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\$1⁰⁰



DEVELOPMENT

RV park proposed near resort

Part of effort to reopen BayView Lodge

by MARCUS WHITE
Cook/Orr Editor

GREENWOOD TWP— The St. Louis County Planning Commission, on Dec. 13, will hear a proposal for the creation of a 33-unit RV park on property adjacent to BayView Lodge. The meeting will be held at the county’s Virginia Public Works building. County

officials have yet to post a time for the meeting, but they typically begin at 9:30 a.m. County officials did not release the identity of the party proposing the development, although the *Timberjay* has confirmed independently that Ryan Horan is the applicant. In the application, Horan indicates that he has signed a purchase agreement for

the property that is contingent on the county’s approval of a rezoning request and the conditional use permit needed to create the RV park on forested land located between the current lodge site and County Rd. 77. The 7.91-acre parcel proposed for development is currently owned by Greenwood res-
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BayView Lodge, a popular summer destination on Lake Vermilion, was closed last summer but plans are underway to possibly reopen.
photo by J. Summit

CITY OF TOWER

City council rejects bid to ax harbor town homes

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

TOWER— An apparent attempt by Mayor Josh Carlson and City Clerk-Treasurer Linda Keith to scuttle the long-planned town home project at the city’s harbor failed on a narrow vote of the council on Monday. Less than two weeks after the council had unanimously agreed to a modified tax abatement plan with the town home developers, Keith told the council that the attorney advising the city on the project had told her that the plan isn’t legal because the investor providing the upfront capital for public infrastructure is seeking 12 percent interest given the element of risk involved. The city had originally promised to back the cost

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COUNTY SCHOOLS

SEEKING FAIR PAY

Tower’s kindly ‘lunch lady’ says district has denied her fair compensation for many years

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER
Managing Editor

TOWER— For the past 35 years, Marilyn Turnbull has been urging kids at the Tower-Soudan School to eat their vegetables. It can be a tough sell, but it’s just one of many challenges she has faced during her time as the school’s favorite “lunch lady.” While thousands of kids have passed through her lunch room over the years, Turnbull invariably found the time to learn each of their names, offering words of encouragement and support from her deep well of innate kindness. “I love the kids,” says Turnbull. “I love ‘em like crazy. They’re my little



Marilyn Turnbull has worked in the Tower-Soudan School cafeteria for 35 years. She is seeking a change in her job classification, and wage scale, to more accurately reflect her duties. photo by J. Summit

buddies.” Getting youngsters to eat right is always a challenge, but for Turnbull it has paled in comparison to her biggest challenge of all— getting the St. Louis County School District to pay her what she deserves. For years, school administrators have ignored her pleas to be compensated as a “cook manager,” which is the title and pay grade that most closely reflects her actual duties. Instead, the district has classified her as an “assistant cook,” even though she has
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ISD 696

Ely School Board studies facilities project development

by KEITH VANDERVORT
Ely Editor

Dedicated community members will be needed for planning process

ELY – School Board members here met this week with Katie Hildenbrand, of Architectural Resources, Inc., of Hibbing, to con-

sider a professional services contract for ISD 696’s facilities renovation project. The improvement plan, including the con-

nection of the three campus buildings, possible additions like a new gymnasium, and renovation of several existing areas, is under development.

While a timeline has not been determined, the state has tentatively awarded the Ely School District \$495,000 toward the connection of the three

campus buildings through a School Safety grant program, and a process for moving forward with the improvements will likely be required by the end of

the school year. The state grant amount awarded to the Ely School District is likely just one-
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LUNCH...Continued from page 1

run the school kitchen in Tower for years. The lower designation has cost tens of thousands of dollars in lost income for Turnbull, who has lived alone since her husband Ballard died 13 years ago.

"I'm the only assistant cook with a food manager's license," she said, noting that it's her certification, posted at the school, that allows the district to continue to operate the kitchen there.

That license may not be available much longer. Turnbull said her current certification expires at the end of January and she's not planning to renew it given what she sees as years of unfair treatment by the district. "If they'd be fair with me, I'd be fair and would work at least until the end of the year," she said. "I feel like I'm going to quit, because they just won't listen to me."

"I'm 66 and my ankle hurts really bad at the end of every day."

Long battle

Turnbull said she's argued repeatedly with the school district and

her Teamsters' union representative that she's done the job of a cook manager for years without getting paid the higher wage that comes with the designation. She said past superintendents had promised to address the issue, but never did. She said her union representative eventually told her to stop calling him. Most recently, she asked Superintendent Reggie Engebritson to grant her the title and pay she was due.

In response, she said, Engebritson asked her to write down each of her duties for a week in order to document her work. Turnbull did so and produced pages of handwritten notes detailing her activities. "I went through days and days and sent it to her and never heard back," she said.

Turnbull said she has considered retaining an attorney over the issue, but has, to date, tried to find other solutions.

In October, Turnbull, in frustration, asked the *Timberjay* to investigate the matter. That began a month-long battle with the

school district, including the involvement of the school district's legal counsel, to obtain a copy of the job descriptions for the position of "cook manager" and "assistant cook," both of which are public information.

The difference in the job descriptions is revealing, in that it confirms that Turnbull has, in fact, done the work of a cook manager for years. The assistant cook, according to the district's most recent job description, is exactly that— an assistant, who reports primarily to the head cook. The assistant cook's job is to provide help to the cook manager, with little responsibility beyond assisting in food preparation, removing used dishes, emptying the trash and dealing with leftovers. It's not clear who, exactly, school district officials believe Turnbull is assisting, since she handles all of the duties at the Tower-Soudan kitchen by herself.

The cook manager, by contrast, must maintain a current Minnesota Food Manager Certification,

which Turnbull has done for years. The job description includes more than twice as many activities as an assistant, including dealing with students' food service accounts, checking and signing off on food shipments, and determining the quantities of food to be prepared daily. The cook manager also keeps records daily records for the federal food program, records all food requisitions, and reports any problems or accidents occurring in the kitchen.

Earlier this year, Turnbull provided Engebritson several pages of detailed notes documenting her activities for a week in order to demonstrate that she met the criteria for a cook manager. Engebritson had requested that Turnbull undertake the time study in response to Turnbull's request for reclassification.

In response to a request from Turnbull's union representative to implement the reclassification, Engebritson argued in January of this year that Turnbull doesn't meet all of the criteria for a cook

manager because she does not have to manage other kitchen staff. But Turnbull notes that she has managed staff at various times and does currently oversee the part-time worker who handles the lunch payment process.

Engebritson also claimed that Turnbull "does not have to cook a majority of the food as it is already brought in cooked from Northeast Range. However, she on occasion does prepare some foods on a hot plate."

Engebritson's claims are inaccurate, according to Turnbull, who notes that she is responsible for preparing virtually all of the meals at the Tower school. "Only twice a month, do they bring food from Babbitt," Turnbull said, and that is typically limited to only a portion of a meal.

Turnbull has a full kitchen range, rather than just a "hot plate" described by Engebritson.

Turnbull noted that when she recently had to take a day off for a medical appointment, the school had to order pizza from

the Vermilion Club, since Babbitt no longer provides meals to Tower-Soudan.

Engebritson also argued that Turnbull doesn't qualify as a cook manager because Tower is an elementary school only, although the district's job descriptions make no distinction between the type of school in which a cook is working. Engebritson also argued that Turnbull does not have to track or make student deposits for breakfasts or lunches since the school is what's known as a CEP school, meaning that the district does not charge for meals. The Tower-Soudan school was formerly a CEP school for a year or two, but is no longer eligible, so Turnbull is required to track student payments as well.

The *Timberjay*, on Monday, submitted several questions to Superintendent Engebritson for this story. The superintendent promised answers but did not provide them prior to the paper's Wednesday press time.

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third of the estimated \$1.5 million needed to connect the Memorial High School, Washington Elementary School, and Industrial Arts buildings. Adding a gymnasium and other proposed improvements would cost much more.

Following the board's recent decision to utilize the design services of ARI for the multi-million dollar project, Hildenbrand offered a professional services proposal to help the district navigate the many facets of the project. Hildenbrand outlined her firm's three-step process at a study session Monday night.

Phase One of the process, she called data gathering, will include the development of an existing facilities condition report, to include a review of the building envelope, finishing, mechanical, electrical, building code, accessibility and technology. "We will walk through the buildings and identify how they are currently sitting," she said.

The second piece will include the development of an Educational Adequacy Report. "We will look at how many students you are serving, what types of processes you have, how the spaces are being used, how education is being delivered today, and how you might be delivering education in 20 or 50 years and how the building relates to that. That starts to paint a picture for you on how the school is being used."

Phase Two of the process will include development of a specific Community Engagement Plan. "We will develop plan specifics for the city of Ely. What this does is help you hear from the community, teachers, staff and anyone connected to the school on what they want to see. We help guide you through to prioritize the wishes and wants that we hear from the community," she said.

Phase Three is to develop the options for consideration. "We will present opportunities for the school district, budgets associated with them, tax

implications and what it means in the big picture. In the end we hope to get you to a point where you can make some smart decisions going forward on your facilities, your community involvement, where you want to be and how the district wants get there."

Hildenbrand described the planning process as thinking outside of the box. "This forces us to go with a real big picture. We don't limit ourselves through this process. This sets you up for a good, solid direction if you were to go forward with any kind of bond referendum to look to the taxpayers to help support the school district for the future."

A four-month completion window for the process should start as soon as possible, according to Hildenbrand. "With the safe school grant money we're going to have to make some decisions in a pretty short order, by next spring, on how we want to spend that money," she said.

The state grant money was specifically awarded for the Industrial Arts building and the construction of an enclosure connecting that building to the Memorial and Washington buildings, in addition to developing a secure school-day entrance. "It is important to remember that we need to use that money for that purpose,"

she said.

Superintendent Kevin Abrahamson referred to a 10-year-old school facilities report completed by a consulting firm as a good starting point for determining the condition and status of the existing campus buildings. "We can start with that, and look at those recommendations, what has been done since then, and what still needs to be done," he said. "We want to have safe buildings. We want a secure entry. There has been talk about (another) gym, and a number of other things. But we really haven't talked about the existing infrastructure."

Another big-ticket item that Abrahamson said should be considered is a new roof for the Memorial building. "We need to look at a more global view of the options for money out there," Abrahamson said. "How can we use all of those (options), in one way or another, to come up with the best plan. We may have to phase-in some things."

School Board Chair Ray Marsnik stressed the need for community support for the facilities project. "We need to get the community involved in this planning. We need that support."

A facilities committee of 10 to 12 people, including school board members, school staff and community members, will work for at least four months, Hildenbrand said,

to develop the project. "I envision having a facilities meeting, then a community meeting, then another facilities, then another community meeting, so everyone is involved in

this process. Commitment to this process is very important."

School Board members will likely vote on approving the ARI proposal at their

Dec. 10 regular meeting. "Hopefully, we can hit the ground running at the beginning of the year," Hildenbrand said.

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