

IN SPORTS, D1 LAKE STATE BLANKS MAVS

IN LOCAL & STATE, B1 COP AND PARAMEDIC ROLLED INTO ONE

IN CURRENTS, E1 DOCUMENTING BUDDY HOLLY



Photo by Pat Christman

Blue Earth County License Center employee Rose Cline helps Rhonda and Mike Hasch with a car title Wednesday. The computer system for vehicle registration rolled out last summer by the state continues to have problems.

License system still glitchy

Legislature faces several decisions

By Tim Krohn tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — The statewide computer system for driver's licensing and vehicle registration is operating a bit more smoothly than in the months after it was rolled out last July, but glitches and slowdowns remain. "It is running better but it's just more time consuming," Suzanne

Jensen, supervisor of the Brown County License Bureau in New Ulm, said of the Minnesota Licensing and Registration System, more commonly known as MNLARS. Michael Stalberger, director of Taxpayer Services at Blue Earth County, said staff has adapted to the new system. "They're finding the new normal with MNLARS," he said. "We're still experiencing lines.

That's becoming our new normal. There's more work with MNLARS to complete transactions." Both said that beyond the new system requiring more staff time, one of the biggest frustrations remaining is that they can't transfer specialty plates, which include the habitat, veteran, personalized and other special plates. That problem is supposed to be fixed after the latest patch to the system is released Feb. 3. That

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TODAY'S OBITUARIES

- David Lowell Andreas
Velida Carol Lewis
Judith Rose (Keltgen) Mans
Elaine Catherine Michels
Ruth Cordelia Miller
Jason E. Slama
Debra K. (Moher) Weins
Gertrude Wright

OPINIONS

School fights
Violent incidents in schools disrupt learning and create a fearful environment for students.

LOTTERY

- Saturday's Daily 3 6-5-1
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Saturday's Powerball 5-8-41-65-66 and 20
Saturday's Lotto America 24-29-46-49-51 and 8
Saturday's Northstar Cash 1-12-15-17-31
Friday's Mega Millions 2-43-48-62-64 and 24

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Obituaries B2, B3
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Sports D-D6
Your Money C3

WEATHER, PAGE B6

Early flurry
High around 10.
Low near 0.



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Mankato, Minnesota

Recycling Woes
Markets crumble for many recyclables



Photo by Pat Christman

Al Christensen, director of the Nicollet County's Tri-County Solid Waste office, peers into a single-stream recycling bin at the St. Peter compost site. While single stream makes it easier for people to recycle, problems with contamination make it a challenge, Christensen said.

Costly technology needed for unsorted recycling

By Tim Krohn tkrohn@mankatofreepress.com

The recycling market is still in the dumps, leaving waste managers scrambling to find more markets and better ways to sort recyclables, including artificial intelligence robotics and optic scanners. "It's not getting any better, but

the good thing is it's stable. The domestic markets in the U.S. have stabilized," said Don Williamson, owner of West Central Sanitation, which collects waste and recyclables in Mankato, North Mankato and other local areas. The main problem was a decision by China, long willing to buy even our most contaminated recycling, to reject some types of plastic and

paper and to reduce its acceptable contamination levels for other material to half a percent. "They haven't let up. They want .005 impurity or less to accept any baled stocks. That is achievable but not without high costs," Williamson said. The horrible recycling market is

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Trump proposal quickly rejected

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a bid to break the shutdown stalemate, President Donald Trump on Saturday offered to extend temporary protections for young people brought to the U.S. illegally as children and those fleeing disaster zones in exchange for his long-promised border wall.

While Trump cast the move as a "common-sense compromise," Democrats were quick to dismiss it at a "non-starter." It also quickly drew criticism from the right.

With polls showing a majority of Americans blaming him and Republicans for the impasse, Trump said from the White House that he was there "to break the log-jam and provide Congress with a path forward to end the government shutdown and solve the crisis on the southern border."

Hoping to put pressure on Democrats, the White House billed the announcement as a major step forward. But Trump did

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Housing project in doubt

Deadline looms for former Public Works site

By Mark Fischenich mfishenich@mankatofreepress.com

MANKATO — With financing in doubt, the future of one of the biggest redevelopment proposals in Mankato history is uncertain going into a meeting next week between city

officials and the project developer. "We're meeting with the Southern Minnesota Housing Partnership to see where they are at," said Mankato Community Development Director Paul Vogel. SMHP's \$23 million proposal was the winner in a competitive process to transform a five-acre

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Rendering courtesy of ISG

Construction was expected to begin this year on a sweeping transformation of the former city public works site near Cub Foods West. Financing issues have put that in doubt and could result in the city restarting the process.

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TRUMP: Proposal quickly rejected

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not budge on his \$5.7 billion demand for the wall and, in essence, offered to temporarily roll-back some of his own hawkish immigration actions — actions that have been blocked by federal courts.

Following a week marked by his pointed clashes with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, it was not clear if Trump's offer would lead to serious steps to reopen the government, shut for a record 29 days. Trump's move came as hundreds of thousands of federal workers go without paychecks, with many enduring financial hardship. Many public services are unavailable to Americans during the closure.

Democrats dismissed Trump's proposal even before his formal remarks. Pelosi said the expected offer was nothing more than "a compilation of several previously rejected initiatives" and that the effort could not pass the House.

"What is original in the President's proposal is not good. What is good in the proposal is not original," she later tweeted.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer also panned the proposal as "more hostage taking," saying that it was Trump who had "single-handedly" imperiled the future of the immigrants he proposed to help.

The New York Democrat said there is only "one way out" of the shutdown. "Open up the government, Mr. President, and then Democrats and Republicans can have a civil discussion and come up with bipartisan solutions," he said.

Democrats had made their own move late Friday to try to break the impasse when they pledged to provide hundreds of millions of dollars more for border security. But Trump, who has yet to acknowledge that offer, laid out his own plan, which officials said had been in the works for days.

Seeking to cast the plan as a bipartisan way forward, Trump said Saturday he was incorporating ideas from "rank-and-file" Democrats, as top Democrats made clear they had not been consulted. He also said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell would bring the legislation to a vote this week, though Democrats appeared likely to block it. McConnell had previously stated that no vote should be held in the Senate until Trump and Democrats agreed on a bill.

Trump's remarks from the Diplomatic Room marked the second time he has addressed the nation as the partial shutdown drags on. On this occasion, he sought to strike a dip-

lomatic tone, emphasizing the need to work across the aisle. He maintained a border barrier was needed to block what he describes as the flow of drugs and crime into the country — but described "steel barriers in high-priority locations" instead of "a 2,000-mile concrete structure from sea to sea."

The proposal was met with immediate criticism from some conservative corners, including NumbersUSA, which seeks to reduce both legal and illegal immigration to the U.S. "The offer the President announced today is a loser for the forgotten American workers who were central to his campaign promises," said Roy Beck, the group's president.

At the other end of the political spectrum, Trump's offer was panned by progressive groups, with Anthony Romero, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, calling it a "one-sided proposal."

Trump embraced the shutdown in December in large part because of angry warnings from his most ardent supporters that he was passing up on his last, best shot to build the wall before Democrat took control of the House in the new year. After his announcement Saturday, some supporters appeared unhappy with his effort to bridge the divide with Democrats.

"Trump proposes amnesty," tweeted conservative firebrand Ann Coulter. "We voted for Trump and got Jeb!" she said, in a reference to Trump's 2016 rival, Jeb Bush.

In a briefing with reporters, Vice President Mike Pence defended the proposal from criticism from the right. "This is not an amnesty bill," he insisted.

White House acting chief of staff Mick Mulvaney also sought to increase the pressure on congressional Democrats in advance of Tuesday, the deadline for the next federal pay period and the day officials said McConnell would begin to move on legislation.

"If the bill is filibustered on Tuesday ... people will not get paid," he said.

Mulvaney said that Trump had not ruled out one day declaring a national emergency to circumvent Congress to get his wall money — as he has threatened — but added that Trump maintains that the "best way to fix this is through legislation."

Trump's son-in-law and senior aide, Jared Kushner, along with Vice President Mike Pence, had led the efforts build the plan Trump announced on Saturday, according to three people familiar with White House

thinking who were not authorized to speak publicly. After a heated meeting with Pelosi and Schumer that Trump stormed out of, the president directed his aides to bypass Democratic leaders and instead reach out to rank-and-file members for ideas.

To ensure wall funding, Trump said he would extend temporary protections for three years for "Dreamers," young people brought to the country illegally as children. Administration officials said the protections would apply only to the approximately 700,000 people currently enrolled in the Obama-era program shielding them from deportation, and not all those who could be eligible. The plan would offer no pathway to citizenship for those immigrants — a deal breaker for many Democrats.

Trump also proposed a three-year extension to the temporary protected status the U.S. offers to immigrants fleeing countries affected by natural disasters or violence. Officials said the exemption would apply to about 300,000 people who currently live in the U.S. under the program and have been here since 2011. That means people from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Haiti — countries that saw the status revoked since Trump took office — would get a reprieve.

Democrats, however, criticized Trump's proposal for failing to offer a permanent solution for the immigrants in question and because he refuses back away from his demand a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, which the party strongly opposes. Democrats have told Trump he must reopen government before talks can start.

Trump had repeatedly dismissed the idea of a deal involving Dreamers in recent weeks, saying he would prefer to see first whether the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, or DACA, survived a court challenge.

On Friday, the Supreme Court took no action on the Trump administration's request to decide by early summer whether Trump's bid to end that program was legal, meaning it probably will survive at least another year.

But during a recent trip to the U.S.-Mexico border, Trump hinted at the possibility, saying he would consider working on the wall and DACA "simultaneously."

A previous attempt to reach a compromise that addressed the status of "Dreamers" broke down a year ago as a result of escalating White House demands.



Photo by Pat Christman

St. Peter put up easier-to-read signs near its recycling containers to help residents.

WOES: Markets crumble for many recyclables

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also made worse by low oil prices.

"As long as oil is down, the price of (making) virgin plastic resin is less than buying recyclable plastic. The price of oil has always dictated the recyclables market," he said. Virgin resin is made directly from petrochemicals.

Al Christensen, director of Nicollet County's Tri-County Solid Waste office, said the advent of single-stream recycling, which allows people to drop all kinds of recyclables into one bin, has been a double-edged sword.

"Single stream does capture more materials; it's made it easier for people to recycle. But there are problems with contamination and devaluing higher-valued commodities."

He said single stream has helped push the recycled paper market down. "People used to have newspaper and office papers separated and they were clean and easy to recycle. Now with single stream we have this large mix of paper, which brought the value down."

He said there's occasionally talk of going back to having people sort more of their recyclables at home, but the discussion doesn't last long. "There's no way of turning back from single stream."

Williamson, who's been in the business for 40 years, said one recyclable market that has been the most stable is cardboard. "Prices fluctuate but there has always been a market for cardboard. That's always been stable."

What has changed is where they are picking up used cardboard. It used to mostly be collected from retail stores.

"Now we get a lot of cardboard from homes because of Amazon. During Christmas some of our trucks were filling up because of all the cardboard Amazon boxes."

Christensen said some but not all plastics still have a decent market.

"1s, 2s and 5s plastics are still in demand and have value." Those are containers such as pop bottles, yogurt

containers and ketchup bottles. The other four types of plastics generally have little to no market.

And glass has become worthless as a marketable item.

"What's sobering is that some counties are dropping glass (collection) completely," Williamson said. "Glass is the easiest and best recyclable, but it's heavy and there just isn't a market for it."

He said he's promoted another use for glass to keep it out of landfills.

"I think we should use crushed glass in building roads. We've done some and it works great, but it's hard to get people to accept the idea," Williamson said.

Better sorting

Christensen and Williamson said that sorting facilities will need to continue finding better ways to sort to produce clean recyclables at a reasonable cost.

Recyclables from area counties take a variety of different routes to several different sorting facilities, but a couple of them — Dem-Con, a Shakopee company, and a Waste Management facility in the Twin Cities — end up with a lot of the sorting duties for south-central Minnesota.

Both facilities use optic scanners that detect different colors of glass and differentiate between plastic and glass to speed sorting. And both are using artificial intelligence arms and other robotics to aid in the sorting to save on labor costs and speed the process.

"Dem-Con has a plant that's only 5 years old, but they spent \$2.5 million last year on robotics," Williamson said. "There's more robotics and optics coming."

Christensen said producing cleaner recyclables at an efficient cost will help the recyclable markets. On the demand side, he thinks manufacturers will need to be coaxed into using more recyclable material in the products they make.

"I think we'll rise to the occasion and find some answers," Christensen said.

Rural recycling

Tri-County is a waste and recycling partnership

between Nicollet, Le Sueur and Sibley counties. Waste to be landfilled and recyclables are picked up by various haulers and go to different facilities.

"We have a very high recycling rate in my three counties and in Blue Earth County. We should be proud of that," Christensen said.

He said even though the recyclables market is having some problems, people should keep recycling.

"Metals, aluminum, tin, steel all save energy recycled compared to new, so it's important people continue to recycle."

He said rural townships are increasingly interested in having easier access to recycling. Nicollet County has collection bins at all of its county highway shops so people can drop off their recycling 24/7.

"Folks love them and feel good about recycling."

He said that while most take care to not contaminate the recycle-bin contents, some do dump in garbage. "People are pretty responsible, but there's always maybe 10 percent who like to muck things up."

He said Sibley County is working with Waste Management to create a drop-off system similar to Nicollet County's.

A few rural townships, especially those with more residents, pay for waste haulers to stop at each residence to collect garbage and recyclables, but the cost can be relatively high.

Granby and Nicollet townships teamed up to contract with LJP to have a truck set up once a week in the town of Nicollet so people from the two townships can bring in their garbage and recycling. "Those townships pay for that, they tax for it. It's a neat program."

Christensen said Tri-County also started an "ag bag" recycling pilot program with dairy farmers to collect and recycle the heavy plastic they use to cover silage feed to protect it from the elements. The program won accolades and went state-wide.

"Farmers really want to recycle and do the right thing. They felt awful having to bury or burn it," he said.

PROJECT: Housing project in doubt; deadline looms for former Public Works site

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city-owned property near downtown into affordable housing, a day care/preschool building, supportive housing and park-like green space.

The City Council picked SMHP over two other plans because, council members said, it hit the trifecta of addressing a shortage of working-class apartments, child care slots and housing with support services for families at risk of homelessness.

"Here's where we have a need, and we need to address it," Council President Mike Laven said of the three critical areas the SMHP proposal targeted during a discussion before the unanimous vote in April to offer the site to the Slayton-based developer.

Laven also suggested the project would transform the former city Public Works Department site in a way that would lead to more de-

velopment along the Sibley Parkway north of Cub Foods West. The city created the parkway through a former industrial area more than a decade ago to revitalize the area just southwest of Mankato's city center.

"... The vibrancy it's going to create along that corridor, it's a tipping point," Laven said.

By June, a detailed development agreement had been hammered out and approved by the council, including a provision that SMHP show by April 9 that it had the necessary financing to proceed with construction this spring. A critical piece of that financing fell through, however, in October when the project failed to earn federal tax credits aimed at promoting construction of affordable housing.

The Minnesota Housing Financing Agency on Nov. 1 approved \$87.5 million in tax credits for projects

around the state, but the Mankato proposal was not one of the winners. That left SMHP without \$8.4 million in equity it planned to use to cover a majority of the cost of the \$11 million first phase of the project — primarily the 48-unit apartment complex, which would have included 36 units reserved for lower-income workers.

Tax credit equity has been central to the financing of every affordable housing project built in Mankato in recent years, and it's doubtful that the project can proceed without it, according to City Manager Pat Hentges.

"It doesn't appear there will be another process, so we'll either have to extend (the proof-of-financing deadline) or start over," Hentges said.

SMHP interim-CEO George Brophy, who didn't return phone calls from The Free Press seeking comment, could make another attempt

at winning the federal tax credits this year. That would leave the project in limbo until at least late October with no guarantee that the 2019 application would be more successful.

"It's a very competitive process," Hentges said, adding that city officials will be seeking information on why the application didn't score as well as the winning applicants. "... We've got to circle back and see where they can improve."

SMHP was also expected to seek tax credits this year for the 30-unit supportive housing apartment building, which would have provided homes and other assistance to people recovering from chemical dependency, mental health issues and non-violent criminal histories — particularly women with children.

That \$8.2 million project, and possibly the \$4.5 million preschool/day care building,

would have been constructed no sooner than 2020.

The project's financing plan also depended on as much as \$367,000 in tax-increment financing from the city.

As much as the City Council liked the SMHP proposal, an extension is far from a certainty. At least two other developers offered plans for the site, and city officials could decide that fairness obligates them to reopen the process if the original winner has failed to meet the benchmarks for redeveloping the site.

"Since there was more than one entity interested in the site, that's something that would have to be considered," Vogel said.

The original request-for-proposals process brought two other ambitious visions for the site. Kansas-based Cohen Esrey Development Group proposed purchasing three acres of adjoining

property to make for an even larger eight-acre project with a 50-unit affordable housing apartment building, 24 townhouses aimed at middle-class families and a small commercial building for a restaurant, store or office space.

Tailwind Group, a local developer, had a less-defined plan that included a slightly larger retail/office building and a 68-unit workforce housing project.

Vogel said he "definitely" believes there would be strong interest among developers if the site is offered a second time.

Staff will be developing a report in coming weeks and bring it, along with a recommendation on how to proceed, to the City Council in February or March. But first will come the conference with SMHP.

"After meeting with them, we'll have a clearer picture," Vogel said.