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Amber (left) and Laurie Scherf look at the damage to the Scherfs' house. Amber's wedding reception was supposed to be held on Saturday in her parents' back yard.
Photos by Hannah Davis

Wyoming changes mayoral term length

Road projects
also get a look

Amy Doeun
Wyoming Reporter

At its July 16 meeting, the Wyoming City Council voted to increase the term of mayor from two years to four.

The council chambers were filled and several residents commented on the proposed move, which changes the position's length to match the four-year terms served by council members. The change will be in effect for the next mayoral term. The next mayoral election in Wyoming is set for November 2020.

After community members commented – including former Mayor Neil Gatzow, who said keeping the term at two years allowed residents to have a voice in the path the city takes – Councilwoman Linda Nanko-Yeager criticized the proposal.

"I believe this diminishes the people's right [to choose]," she said.

Mayor Lisa Iverson ultimately abstained from the vote but said that as a mayor, "it takes a while to catch your stride. Having a four-year-term mayor allows them time. [It] gives a chance for continuity. This is one of those things that I have talked to many people about." She added that she hopes any mayor would go out and talk to residents more than just during an election cycle.

Councilman Dennis Schilling pointed out that even with the change, the council will still change regularly with the will of the people, as the staggered election cycle results in at least two seats being up for election every two years. He added that residents need to stay involved, pointing out that if the public really wants to make a change in the middle of an official's term, they can advocate.

"People can resign and can get pushed out," he said. "The people solved the problem. ... You will always be able to flip it."

Iverson abstained from the vote, and Councilman Joe Zerwas was not present. Yeager voted against the change, but Schilling and Councilwoman Claire Luger voted in favor. According to city staff, only a simple majority of those voting was required to pass the measure, as it is an ordi-

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'It happened so fast'

Tornado hits Forest Lake area

Hannah Davis
Community Editor

Fifteen seconds is all the time it took for a tornado to topple trees, toss decks and docks, and shred and warp housing structures as it roared through Forest Lake and the surrounding area on Sunday, July 28.

The tornado was initially spotted roughly 2 miles southwest of Forest Lake at 4:29 p.m. by local law enforcement. The tornado wreaked havoc on a path from Lake Keewahtin in Forest Lake and past Bone Lake in Scandia, later traveling into Chisago County, causing structural dam-

age, uprooting trees and tossing them hundreds of yards away.

Representatives from the National Weather Service were on site Monday, walking through the storm damage to assess how strong the tornado was. National Weather Service Meteorologist James Taggart confirmed an EF-1 tornado touched down just southwest of Lake Keewahtin in Forest Lake. The tornado appeared to lift up and drop down again near the corner of Highway 97 and Manning Trail in Scandia. It traveled northeast towards Lofton Avenue, where it "really intensified" as it hit homes along Bone Lake in Scandia, where wind speeds topped out at 90 mph.

'All the trees started coming down'

Bill and Jannette Wittrock were at their home on Keewahtin with their son Casey and his girlfriend Emily Hedlund. Hedlund, who was in the house with Jannette as Bill and Casey were working in the garage, saw the tornado watch alert on her phone.

"She went out to the garage to tell them, so they started shutting all the equipment off. By the time she got back from the garage to the house, it had hit," Jannette recalled. "We were on our way to the basement — didn't even make it all the

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A lawn chair is wedged in between two trees at the home of Lynne Haslach on Bone Lake.

YPA celebrates 20 years with 'Newsies'



Production crew views shows as creating community

Ryan Howard
News Editor

Youth Performing Arts is celebrating two decades engag-

ing Forest Lake children in the arts with a toe-tapping musical about the power of working together – a story not dissimilar from the ethos of YPA itself.

From Aug. 9 through 11 (with a preview show Aug. 8 featuring an American Sign Language translator), YPA will present "Newsies," the Broad-

way musical based on the Disney film of the same name depicting a fictionalized version of the Newsboys' Strike of 1899, at Forest Hills United Methodist Church. Vanessa Novak, who took part in the first YPA production in 1999, has transitioned in adulthood to a directing role, working with fel-

low alumni from that first year: Shalee Dunaski-Palmquist, Kristi Jacoway, and Novak's husband, Chad Ruter. She's excited to show the public what the youth cast of 23 kids can do.

"Newsies' is a beast of a show," she said. "We wanted a

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Tornado

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way — and it just all the sudden went ‘whoosh.’ All the trees starting coming down.” Their house remained untouched, but a tree did fall onto a Hedlund’s 1999 Honda Accord. The Wittrocks said that within minutes, the Forest Lake Fire Department and other first responders were there to help.

Keewahtin Avenue North, near Lake Keewahtin, was closed for hours as Forest Lake firefighters and public works staff removed trees and power lines draped across it.

Farther up the path, near the corner of Manning and Scandia Trail, tree branches and solar panels from the neighboring solar farm cluttered the yard of Scandia residents Dan and Nicole Kaiser, who moved there just a year ago from Minneapolis. The trees that lined the property were blown over and power lines across the street were snapped, but their house remained untouched.

“We don’t even have a single shingle I can see that’s gone,” Dan said.

The tornado came and went fast, but the family had been waiting in the basement for at least 10 minutes after seeing the reports. Dan was watching through window for the storm as it came in.

“[The sky] wasn’t all that bad — it was just white and gray. Then I could just see stuff blowing; I could hear stuff hit the roof and I could see some branches start hitting the ground, and that’s when I backed away. Then 15 to 20 seconds [later], it’s gone,” Dan said.

“It was loud, just a roar. By the time I went, ‘Should we cover our heads?’ it was over,” Nicole said.

The tornado continued through the Bone Lake area, flipping over boats,

ripping trees out of the ground and garage doors out of place.

Mark and Teri Johnson’s phones alerted them to the storm and they moved to the basement, listening to the winds howl for about 15 seconds. Their home, near the corner of Lofton Avenue and 228th Street, had minor damage: Tree branches smashed up the home’s siding and porch roof. Fifty feet away, their shed’s roof was peeled off, portions of it landing on top of a neighbor’s truck and in a nearby grove of trees. Their brand new boat, parked in front of the shed, was flipped over.

“All the sudden we looked out and the trees were down and the roof was off. We didn’t hear the sirens, and it happened quite fast,” Teri said. “It was amazing. It happened so fast, and it wasn’t like we expected. We expected the house to shake. We didn’t feel that. We didn’t believe it was going to be this bad when we came out.”

‘It put things in perspective’

On Monday morning, roughly 20 members of the Forest Lake Ranger hockey team and their coach Jon Loo showed up with chainsaws and work gloves on the south shore of Bone Lake to help local residents deal with the clean-up, which began at former Scandia City Council Member Bob Hegland’s house.

Two paddleboats that usually sit in Hegland’s back yard were blown about 50 yards away. A piece of his dock flew into his window, and the storm shattered other windows and took down large trees in the yard.

“It’s really distressing,” Hegland said.

By noon, at least half of the downed trees were chopped up and transported away by the crew.

“They’re just doing a ton of work. They do it so fast. I couldn’t have done



Photo by Hannah Davis

Jon Loo (right), a coach with Forest Lake hockey, sent out a text to his players asking those who were available to be help residents impacted by the storm. Roughly 20 players came out to assist residents along Bone Lake on Monday. See more photos at forestlaketimes.com.

this by myself,” Hegland said.

Hegland’s next door neighbor Lynne Haslach said she was driving home and saw the tornado touch down. Then she got home to see most of the trees ripped from the ground.

“That was why I loved this property, was because of the trees,” Haslach said.

Her garage’s roof had been peeled away, landing on a vehicle, which she said had just minor damage. Pieces of her Adirondack chair were found forced into the ground, and lawn furniture (including some that wasn’t hers) was tossed around the yard, including one piece that was wedged into a tree.

Across the road, a different sort of emergency management was occurring on top of the typical storm clean-up. This Saturday, Aug. 3, Amber Scherf was supposed to celebrate her wedding in her parents’ new backyard. Her parents, Mitch and Laurie, moved into their home just four months ago from Eagan and were making final preparations for their daughter’s wedding reception. Amber, who lives in New York City, planned a second reception in Minnesota for friends and family since her wedding will



The roof of the shed at Mark and Teri Johnson’s home blew off during the tornado.

be in Norway in September and her parents’ new backyard seemed like the perfect place for the low-key affair. The family was spending time prepping for the wedding before the tornado hit.

“Ten minutes before it hit, I texted my fiancé, ‘We’re under a tornado watch,’ but it was like I was taking it lightly,” Amber said. “The next thing, I’m calling him, saying, ‘The screened-in porch got ripped up.’”

The family had just made it to the basement as their lawn furniture was picked up into the air.

“All I remember is the air pressure,” Laurie said. “None of us heard the porch go down, which crashed into the window.”

They stepped outside to take a look at the damage and heard nothing

but the sound of the radio left outside, still working.

“It was eerie,” Amber said.

The tornado had ripped off a corner of the roof. Rain poured in through the walls and cracks of the house. The porch was ripped off, and a side of their house had bowed out, leaving the external beams to the house exposed.

“She was crying; I was saying we’re going to have to cancel,” Laurie said.

“I don’t want to make it about [the wedding], because of course this is really horrible,” Amber said. “Of course my brain was switching back and forth between ‘How are we going to fix the house?’ and ‘What are we going to do for the wedding reception?’”

Within minutes, their

builder and other neighbors had come to help. Randy and Robin Leiter, who live just down the road, offered to host Amber’s reception in their yard, instead, confirming to Laurie that Scandia is a special community.

“They said it in the pouring rain yesterday, so we checked with them this morning to verify, and they said ‘Yes, we want you to have it here,’” Laurie said.

There are still some details about the wedding reception that need to be re-arranged due to the tornado, but their attitude is one of gratefulness.

“It’s like a roller coaster, but I think the big thing is it put things in perspective,” Amber said. Laurie agreed.

“Before this, I was certainly more worried about those details. Now we’re just glad to have a place to host it, and food, and a place for people to sit,” Laurie said.

Teri Johnson said she was grateful for her neighbor that walked down the road to help with her family’s bees.

“He came in the rain after the storm, and he’s out there picking up beehives, trying to put them together so the bees know where to go when they came by,” Teri said.

“It could’ve been a lot worse,” and a general attitude of gratefulness was common among those who encountered the tornado.

“We’re so thankful to the firefighters who came so quickly,” Jannette Wittrock said.

“There’s two good things that came out of this,” Hegland said. “First is that there’s no ambulance out front. Nobody got hurt. Second is it really reinstates your faith in people when you have kids show up to help you.”

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Victoria from Australia, 17 yrs.
Enjoys spending time with her family and younger siblings. Victoria plays volleyball and is excited to learn new sports while in America.



Giorgio from Italy, 16 yrs.
Loves to play baseball and spend time with his dogs. Giorgio also plays the guitar, and his dream is to join a drama club at his American high school.

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