

The world is facing a climate crisis — it’s time to act, and fast

by **Jordan Almen**
Contributor

Last weekend, over 1200 people gathered for a three-day Climate Reality Leadership Conference at the Minneapolis Convention Center. The event was an opportunity for individuals to come together and learn from dozens of scientists and specialists about the causes, current effects and future projections of man-made climate change. This was the 42nd iteration of the event since founder Al Gore began them in 2006.

The conference itself was carbon neutral. This was done by reducing any carbon emissions that could be controlled, and compensating for the inevitable with verifiable carbon-offset projects. All of the food served during the program was vegetarian, making it more environmentally friendly than

meat-based meals, and things like water and condiments were served in a bulk format to avoid single-use packaging.

The Minneapolis Convention Center was ahead of the curve as a host site. It already offers waste disposal options that encourage people to send less to the landfill, with bins for compost, can and plastic recycling, and paper recycling, in addition to garbage.

To open, the Climate Reality program made a land and people acknowledgement. This involved hearing from a Native American woman about the history that the land where the conference center and the Twin Cities sit has with native peoples. For many, the region is the site of their creation story, and a land of bounty. She explained that the name Minnesota comes from the Dakota name for the land — Mni Sota

Makoce (Minnesota-mak-oh-che), which means ‘the land where the water reflects the skies. She noted that this name refers to Minnesota’s primary feature, its beautiful lakes, and that those same lakes which are so important to Native culture as well as to overall Minnesotan spirit are at severe risk by climate change.

A major feature of the first day of the conference was Al Gore’s presentation of “The Climate Crisis and Its Solutions.” Those who watched “An Inconvenient Truth” would be familiar with this work, though he has updated the details to include current statistics and events.

Gore’s presentation was powerful, blending scientific data with images and videos of the actual impacts of the climate crisis on the lives of humans. He included events

that have been affecting Minnesotans, such as a rain bomb that hit Minneapolis just a couple of weeks ago, resulting in massive, instantaneous flooding. Like Minnesota’s lakes, other key features of this state are also threatened by the climate crisis — before long the loon, the lynx, the moose and the walleye will no longer be able to survive here. The increase in the severity and frequency of storms just this year resulted in many farmers not being able to get their fields planted, and some even had cattle washed away and drowned.

Minnesota’s winters are iconic, but already they are not what they used to be, they are significantly warmer. Thanks to the rapid heating of the world’s oceans, the polar climate has been disrupted, resulting in massive loss of sea

ice and the breaking up of the polar vortex — sending that vortex down to us.

Because the atmosphere is warming, evaporation is increasing. This is true of our water sources, but also of our land. The result is droughts being worse and developing quicker.

There are many causes and influences of the climate crisis, and it can’t be solved without taking an intersectional approach. Each sector of society needs to be included in the effort to protect the planet or the work won’t find true success.

The current estimate is that we have only 11 years to drastically change course if we want to provide a livable world for ourselves and future generations. It is easy to make decisions based on how an action will affect yourself, but that type of short-term think-

ing is dangerous. Mindsets of ‘that won’t affect me’ leave future citizens to untangle the effects of the carelessness of their ancestors. Each of the three Native American speakers at the Climate Reality conference referenced a philosophy which gives much more hope for the future — live for the benefit of the seventh generation. The idea of seven generation stewardship encourages people to make choices based on what will lead to a sustainable, healthy life for the seventh generation into the future. If everyone used such thinking, our world would see the kind of action that it needs.

The climate crisis will be a subject of ongoing reporting in the Village Ink newspapers. If you have any areas to be focused on or explained, please send those suggestions to jordan.e.almen@gmail.com

County seeks easement over failing Spicer condo pipeline

*Editor’s note:
The following story is being re-printed due to a error in last week’s issue in which a portion of the text was unintentionally omitted.*

By **Macklin Caruso**
Reporter

A failing storm sewer causing sinkholes around a Spicer condominium is raising debate about a public and private partnership between the County and the condominium. Public Works Director Mel Odens presented the issue to the County Board during its Aug. 6 meeting.

The storm sewer for the Morgandale condominiums appears to be failing, which is causing huge concerns for the Morgandale Owners Association.

In the mid-1980s, when the

Morgandale condominiums were proposed, the builder applied for a DNR permit to take the existing waterway and enclose it in a 48”x200’ corrugated metal pipe. Though the DNR issued the permit, they are not responsible for the maintenance of the pipe. Which begs the question, who should take responsibility?

Though it is within Spicer city limits, it runs next County Road 10 and pours into Green Lake, which is public water. With no clear funding, and the need for an immediate fix, Odens believes the County is best suited to solve the problem.

Odens and County Administrator Larry Kleindl got together to discuss the problem, and came to the conclusion that if the County were to take on this endeavor, the County

should retain a clear corridor to the lake.

Any improvements made by the County will remain the property of the County, meaning, from this point forward the County will always have direct access to the pipe.

“I feel that it’s the most prudent way to handle this situation,” Odens told the Board.

Generally speaking, under the terms of the agreement with the Morgandale Owners Association, the property owners would grant the County easement to the storm sewer, meaning they will turn over ownership of the privately owned pipe to the County, at no cost.

The dilemma could prove advantageous to the County, as the County has no outlet to Green Lake. Their current storm sewer system pours into

a water quality pond that then migrates into the lake. However, securing an easement to the storm sewer, which pours directly in Green Lake, would be an asset to the County, according to Odens.

Still, the County will incur the cost of the repairs, which Odens estimates will run about \$85,000. The property owners will take responsibility of all tree and fence removal, so that the County can access the pipe, and perform subsequent landscaping. Odens estimates this will save the County approximately \$20,000.

The County will then conduct a survey and secure the DNR permit to install 48”x200’ reinforced concrete pipe. It is Odens’ opinion that concrete would be the best solution, because of its longevity.

“I believe this would be a good private-public partnership,” Kleindl told the Board.

Still, there was debate among the commissioners as to who should take responsibility. If it’s in Spicer city limits, why isn’t Spicer taking responsibility for the project? County Commissioner Steve Ahmann asked Odens. Ahmann, although unsure if the County has taken on an endeavor like this in the past, worried about setting a precedent.

“I believe the City should be responsible for helping improve on that project. Also, and I don’t know why, if they haven’t been asked, or they refuse to, but that’s part of their responsibility. It’s in the city limits,” Ahmann said.

If the County were to take on the project, they would

hook the storm sewer onto a manhole on the curb line, providing direct drainage into Green Lake.

In a follow-up phone interview Odens clarified that Spicer didn’t feel solely obligated to fix the problem because, though it is within city limits, the storm sewer was on a county road and drains into Green Lake, which is public water.

Without confirming involvement in the project, the board voted unanimously to allow negotiations to resume, promising to take Ahmann’s concerns into consideration.

If the project is to go through, Odens says it will likely be corrected in the fall. He doesn’t expect the construction to last more than a week.”

County Board discusses proposed 2020 budget, updates

By **Bev Ahlquist**
Contributor

At Tuesday’s budget work session, Larry Kleindl, Kandiyohi County Administrator, gave the board a proposed budget for 2020. He said the plan was to take \$65,900 out of reserves to pay for one-time funding events at the landfill such as the dozer, some building structure and an earth moving contract. This, he said, will be a saving reduction to the budget of 1.9 percent.

The budget would probably have come in at 3.76 percent, however by taking money out of reserves, the levy increase requested for 2020 is \$1.79 percent. We received an additional \$271,000 in county program aid. The program aid is very beneficial to local units of government, he said. “We

use it dollar for dollar to offset and reduce our property taxes. We don’t use it for anything else, we use it directly to lower property taxes for our citizens.

Also, five department heads give updates on their programs and what some of their cost drivers are. Public works talked about the increased cost of roads, about the use of the local option sales tax and about the gaps in funding.

Environmental Services talked about the landfill. Household hazardous Waste talked about the recycling crisis in the United States and that revenues for recycling are rock bottom. “We actually have a lot of areas where we’re paying to get rid of recyclables where in the past, we’ve made some revenue,” he said. They

also talked about the landfill and how they used to be able to have brush and stuff ground up and hauled to Fibrominn. “Those were revenue generating things and now with Fibrominn gone away, we now have to pay to get rid of the trees and brush and that’s a big swing.”

The sheriff talked about law enforcement, about the jail, about dispatch and some of the cost drivers he’s seen. He talked about some of the changes in how business is done, and talked about crime. He said property crime is up, and some of the more serious crime, is down.

Community Corrections Director Tami Jo Lieberg talked about the Sentence to Serve program and challenges they have in finding people who

can do community service, as well as some of the structural changes she has made within her department. She told the board that when she came here, she noticed that support for her community corrections probation officers was quite high. She added some case aids to help with paperwork so they could focus on more of the duties they do as a probation parole officer. She also talked about combining some of the internal departments and how that is going to affect how the budget looks on

paper. She’s condensing it so it will be easier and transparent.

Kleindl gave an update on behalf of Jenny Lippert who is out on leave. He also talked about the Health and Human services budget and some of the drivers that they’re seeing in that area regarding increased costs for county burials just because of baby boomers aging. He talked about some of those drivers and how its going to be addressed in the next few months, looking at putting in some new policies.

He also talked about some

changes in revenue. Public Health revenue has declined due to the reduced number of vaccines. “People are going to other places, they’re not coming to the county to get as many vaccinations as they used to.” They lost funding so that has changed, Kleindl said. “One of the ways we’re looking at is to adjust our fees on nursing program to keep up with the market.”

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in raising crop and soybeans knowing that I’m insured in a catastrophe, but in the area of hemp, there isn’t anything for those kinds of protections.”

Presently, markets are limited in the U.S., putting the industry in a Catch-22 situation. “In order to have a processing plant, you have to have the current production, or at least the interest of producers to produce the product.”

Branching out into the international market, too, is expected to be challenging.

Right now, he said, the U.S. is about 35 years behind Canada and portions of Europe and “centuries” behind China, all of whom have well-established hemp industries.

“[China] has over a million acres of hemp production, and they are exporting because of

the increased interest in hemp. They’re even exporting hemp product into Canada and have the ability to sell product at a cost that is extremely competitive, even with Canada. It’s concerning that the Chinese can produce for much less than what we can in Western countries.”

Fortunately, he said, there is potential. Recently, Larson’s subcommittee met with Todd Matthewson, a consultant from the Canadian-based company, Just BioFiber.

Just BioFiber produces a hemp-based cinder block product called “Hempcrete” that can be used for building and insulation.

According to Larson, Matthewson indicated that his company is looking for an opportunity to move into the U.S.

and would need about 10,000 acres from which to operate.

“He was very interested to see how we look at cooperative ventures in the U.S. and in Minnesota, especially in Kandiyohi County,” Larson said.

“This would be a plant that would have to be supported by farmers,” Larson said, stating that it could follow a model similar to the shared cooperative ethanol plant, Bushmills, in Atwater.

“He became very interested in that, and [a coop] is what he would like to see happen if he comes back.”

A date for further discussions with the company has not yet been set, but Larson said that if one is to occur, it would happen sometime after the upcoming September harvest.

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