

DAIRY FARMS

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2019

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Aitkin Independent Age

\$1 • WEDNESDAY, MAY 29, 2019

aitkinage.com

Board approves pickleball court construction

BY BRIELLE BREDSTEN
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Dorothy Casey represented the Aitkin Area Pickleball Association while addressing the Aitkin School Board during the public comment portion of its May 20 meeting. The association consists of more than 100 members and friends. Members of the group are trained and certified as pickleball instructors who have taught classes to dozens of residents through John Newstrom's Aitkin Community Education class.

Casey said because there are no local pickleball courts, many of the association's players travel to Crosby-Ironton, Isle, McGregor, Grand Rapids and Brainerd to compete. As a result, the players often patronize businesses in those communities instead of Aitkin, she said.

Over the past two years, the group has been searching for a site for dedicated pickleball courts in Aitkin and raised \$17,000 in cash contributions. The group requested a "meaningful contribution and definitive action by the board" by moving the new court construction forward, as well as striping one or more existing tennis courts for use early this summer.

"Our donors have waited patiently for nearly a year to hear the result of their generosity, and they are uniformly anxious for concrete and supportive action by the school board," Casey said.

Business Manager Tiffany Gustin advised that the funds were not budgeted and the money will have to come from facilities. These funds were originally allocated for the special education entry to add a ramp and overhead.

The board approved \$10,000 for the construction of the pickleball court, in addition to \$3,000 for striping of five courts. All board members were in favor with the exception of Dennis Hasskamp and John Chute.

EXPANDING COMMUNITY ED

Community Education Director Lara Parkin approached the board with a request to seek grant funding for additional space for programming. According to Parkin, there is a high demand of space for extracurricular activities, causing schedule conflicts and limiting the ability to accommodate various activities.

Currently, Community Education holds programming in available classrooms and uses the music room as an overflow space. Reserving gym space at the high school and Rippleside Elementary is a challenge as these are readily booked, she said.

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DNR issues special deer hunt permit to city

BY LYNN MIZNER
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SPECIAL DEER HUNT

At the May 20 regular meeting of the Aitkin City Council, members learned that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has issued the special deer hunt permit for the Sept 14-29 hunt planned for the city of Aitkin.

The exact area to be included in the hunt is still being defined.

"Due to the recent survey work identifying areas at risk for chronic wasting disease, DNR has defined hunting areas in such a way that the zones split the city of Aitkin in half," said Police Chief Tim Catlin.

Catlin has requested that the state designate the whole city of Aitkin in one zone or the other.

ADMINISTRATION

Administrator Kathleen Ryan reported that a contract has been signed for the Phase II street improvement project in Aitkin. Ryan stated that additional funds are still being sought to help finance the project.

Ryan is continuing to work on the Minnesota Department of Transportation project from the bridge north on Hwy. 169 in Aitkin.

The Minnesota Mainstreet cultural assessment has not made the anticipated progress on creating an inventory of the cultural assets of downtown Aitkin. Ryan, Ross Wagner and Taylor Erickson have been thinking the Aitkin Economic Development Committee could do an independent cultural assessment and expand it beyond the downtown area.

The city administration office is considering a temporary (three to five years) move until other options become available. The administration is considering options in Aitkin that are accessible and easy for the public to find. The current space at city hall is needed by the Aitkin Police Department. Voting is a function currently accommodated at city hall, so that will need to be considered.

NEW PARKS POSITION

Ryan, Amanda Lowe and Kathy Galliger (committee) reviewed the position description to be used to hire a new parks maintenance worker. At the previous meeting a question arose about a heavy equipment operation qualification. The committee made changes to the position description to clarify that the position could do tree trimming from the ground, but anything that relates to heavy equipment would remain the responsibility of the street department or Aitkin Public Utilities.

Council members approved posting the position. It will be a union job.



MIKE ARMSTRONG PHOTO

Brats on the Aitkin Courthouse Lawn
The VFW Post 1727 set up its memorial cookout on the Courthouse lawn on May 24.

Forums enhance understanding, expose issues around substance abuse

BY ERIN MELZ
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Three community forums on substance abuse were held in Aitkin County during April and May.

Hosted by Aitkin County Public Health and the University of Minnesota, the forums provided an opportunity to share statistics, provide education and talk about how individuals can make a difference. They created a space for neighbors to talk to neighbors about how opioids have affected their lives. The forums were held in Aitkin, McGregor and Malmo and were attended by a total of 130 community members.


COMMUNITY IMPACT

Opioid misuse has a wide-ranging impact on families and children, the healthcare system, the schools, and the larger community. Over the last five years, opioid overdose deaths have increased in Minnesota, with rural communities being hit especially hard.

Each forum hosted a panel of local and statewide experts on topics around opioids like addiction, recovery, mental health, and law enforcement. Local leaders including Aitkin County Sheriff Dan Guida and Sobriety Court/Correction Agent Andy Walsh offered their perspectives on how law enforcement can help someone consider their options after a run-in with the police. Others, like Dr. Spencer Page and Dr. Melissa Herbranson from Riverwood Healthcare Center and Kevin Lee from North Ambulance, were able to share their expertise and experience about what local

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