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# Banner

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A socially distanced Murdock village hall auditorium had standing room only during last Wednesday night's public hearing for a conditional use permit sought by the Asatru Folk Assembly. AFA has purchased the vacant Lutheran church in town and wants to have it re-zoned for a regional "hoff" -- or meeting place. The display of public opposition was due to the AFA being labeled a white supremacy hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. --photo by Naomi Baker

## It takes a village to raise a concern of group's intention

### Local residents accuse Asatru Folk Assembly of white supremacist dogma

by Jordan Almen

Last Wednesday night brought an unusual crowd to Murdock as the city council held a public hearing for the Asatru Folk Assembly's (AFA) conditional use permit application. Pandemic restrictions required everyone in the city hall to properly wear a face mask and have their temperature taken before entering. Chairs were set out, socially distanced, for exactly the number of people allowed in the building. Several people had to be turned away from attending the meeting.

The AFA has purchased the former Calvary Lutheran Church building on Highway 12 to be their regional "hoff" or meeting place. The group claims to be a religion for people of northern European ancestry, following the pagan traditions of early germanic people, though the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled them a white supremacist group and a hate group. Due to the city's zoning ordinances, the AFA needs to obtain a conditional use permit in order to use their building as a religious gathering place. The final decision, and any

conditions put on the permit if approved, will be made at the council's November 4 meeting.

After Mayor Craig Kavanaugh welcomed everyone and asked for a calm, peaceful meeting, AFA lawyer Allan Turnage began the conversation.

#### Question and Answer with Turnage

"I apologize for bringing the community together in this sort of way," Turnage said. "This is certainly not the kind of attention we want, and I know it's not what you want." He said that the group hadn't known when they purchased the church that it wasn't currently permitted for use for religious gatherings, and he apologized for their lack of foresight. "We are good neighbors, we understand the practical issues of parking, of noise.

We are a traditional, family-oriented faith," he said. "We have had a hoff in California for five years that also abuts a residential neighborhood and we have had zero complaints in those five years." He added that they partner with a local food bank in that town in California, where anyone who is hungry is welcome.

"Approving the conditional use permit for our church is actually going to be less intrusive than a traditional church," Turnage stated. Based on the number of pews the AFA had found in the former Calvary Church, he assumed they had significantly fewer members than local churches. They also, at least for the time being, meet about once a month instead of every week.

After Turnage's comments, anyone at the meeting was allowed to ask him questions. (Continued on page 6)



Film crews from three different television stations and reporters from three newspapers attended Murdock's public hearing on the AFA conditional use permit. Above right, AFA attorney Allan Turnage addressed the assembly. --photo by Naomi Baker



### Snow capped pumpkin

An early snow Tuesday covered fall jack-o-lantern has yet to see Halloween decorations and everything else. This and is already capped in snow.

## KMS Board of Education approves \$8.3 million in maintenance projects

by Ted Almen

Chris Ziemer has become a semi-regular face at KMS Board of Education meetings, as a project director for ICS, a consulting firm which specializes in public building construction. Ziemer has attended more KMS meetings since introducing himself to the board members in 2014 than nearly all district citizens, save for the board members themselves, administrators and the press.

Ziemer was once again joining the board at its meeting last week Monday to help pitch an idea that the board's Project Oversight Committee (board chairman Tom Walsh and members Pam Mansfield and Steve Collins) has been considering, to take advantage of two current situations. The first is an historically low interest rate on bonds; the second is Ziemer's opinion that contractors are hungry for work.

Over the past half dozen years KMS has undertaken and completed several large construction projects, beginning with the upgrade of both the elementary school at Murdock and the high school at Kerkhoven. Those two jobs were completed in 2015 at a

cost of around \$11 million. In 2017 it was decided to expand and improve the elementary school kitchen and cafeteria to the tune of over a million dollars.

But even with those major improvements, there were still several items on the list of wants and needs for the district buildings which were never done. "These just didn't fit into the pot of money of the last bond," explained Ziemer.

He started the discussion by saying board members and he were looking at a 10-year plan for maintenance, and had come to the conclusion that they just would not fit into the yearly maintenance budget. Of these, he said, some were high priority, namely the replacement of the PVC piping which feeds the geothermal heating system in the high school. It's been 26 years since that system went online, and the plastic pipes have gotten brittle. When heat exchangers are changed out, it has also led to piping issues.

Replacing the pipes is expected to cost \$1,740,000. Ziemer noted that these are only estimates at this point.

Also necessary sooner rather than later is replacing a large section of the high school roof -- basically everything east of

the commons area minus the new ag addition. That is estimated at \$495,000. Ziemer said that the yearly allotment of money for roofing has so far only been going toward patching, and like the piping this area of concern is also 26 years old.

At Murdock there are still sections of the heating system which are not yet converted from steam to hot water. Making that happen is tabbed at \$210,000. But by far the biggest money item at the elementary is completing the ventilation upgrade in the northwest end of the building, with a price tag of \$2,250,000.

Other tasks on the to-do list are renovating the art/computer and music spaces (\$554,000), resurfacing the hard surface on the former tennis court (\$165,000) and paving work (\$450,000), all at Murdock; and re-paving the parking lot at Kerkhoven (\$550,000).

Professional and other fees, plus a contingency fund, will add about \$1.9 million for a total project cost of just over \$8.3 million. Ziemer said all this could be approved without going to the voters. Instead KMS would sell bonds against future long term maintenance. (Continued on page 11)

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