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Conflict over road signs spills into Princeton Twp. meeting A sign of the time

CONNOR CUMMISKEY
Union-Times

A conflict over road signs appears to have Princeton Township residents questioning the motives of elected officials.

The Princeton Township boardroom was filled Aug. 17 as residents came to address board members over a conflict relating to the placement of signs by a local resident.

Speakers addressed the board following an incident July 22, when ex-supervisor Greg Anderson

was charged with allegedly assaulting Township Board members and staff while they removed signs on 107th Avenue near the intersection with Highway 95.

Emily Hanson, who was the primary speaker during the meeting, demanded to know why the board members removed the signs and questioned if the board had violated open meeting laws. Hanson, who is a former Princeton resident and Anderson's niece, also accused board members of destroying property, theft

and trespassing during her speech at the meeting and asked why they removed the signs themselves, instead of calling sheriff deputies to remove them.

State statute grants the township jurisdiction over town roads, which allows the township to remove unauthorized signs, according to District Traffic Engineer Kenneth Hansen.

Hanson asked if the township performed a reflectivity test on the signs that were removed. Chairman Eugene Stoeckel said no reflectivity test has

been done, because it was too expensive. Instead, the township passed a schedule for regularly replacing signs.

The policy, passed in 2020 and available on the township's website, states that its purpose is to assure compliance with retro-reflectivity requirements by replacing the signs on a schedule based on their expected useful life. The policy also specifies the township will remove signs deemed unnecessary, stating that extra signs can reduce necessary signs'

effectiveness and pose an extra financial burden on the township.

Attached to the policy is a memo from Township Engineer Todd McLouth dated May 22, 2019, in which he explains the Minnesota Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices considers fewer signs to be more effective at controlling traffic.

Hanson also accused the board of violating Minnesota Open Meeting law, because three of the board members, constituting a quorum, were informed of

the removal of the signs prior to their removal.

State open meeting laws requires meetings of a governmental body, where a quorum of members are present, be noted publicly and open to the public to attend. The public also must be able to access relevant materials, according to a 2017 brief from the research department of the Minnesota House of Representatives. However, there

Signs

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Richard Gist

Princeton author pens new book about the Bible

CONNOR CUMMISKEY
Union-Times

Local author and retired minister Richard Gist recently published a new book, collecting his thoughts on the Bible and religious scholarship.

"Faith Without Fear: Scripture straight up, with spiritual nudges, common sense, and other good stuff (not for fundamentalists)" by Richard Gist was published at the end of June. Gist hopes it will help assuage fears some might have regarding scholarly approaches to the Bible.

The book started as an angry response to a fundamentalist, Gist said.

"I got so angry with a fundamentalist that I had to go home and type out my anger on a keyboard," Gist said.

Over a two-week period Gist was challenged by three fundamentalists: one claiming he was going to hell, another arguing over his interpretation of prophecy, and a third that challenged him with Timothy 3:16, which, to paraphrase, states that all Scripture is inspired by God and

Faith without fear

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Celebrating local talent

Homegrown music festival features Milaca musicians



Homegrown Music
More photos on pg. 16

Photo by Connor Cummiskey / Union-Times

Dram Shop Country begins their set at the band shell in Milaca's Rec Park Aug. 21 during the Milaca Homegrown Music Festival.

Mille Lacs County holds first budget planning session

T.A. LEBRUN
For the Union-Times

The Mille Lacs County Board of Commissioners met for the first of two budget planning work sessions on Friday, August 20, with the next one to be held at the Courthouse on Friday, August 27 at 8 a.m.

In July, the County stated a \$4.8 million budget shortfall, the largest shortfall in a number of years. The shortfall comes after a long year of heightened attorney fees due to the lawsuit against the County, sheriff and county attorney filed by the Mille Lacs Band

of Ojibwe over policing and the reservation boundaries. The County has spent in total over \$6 million in attorney costs to defend themselves. Boarding revenue is also down due to the jail taking less inmates due to COVID-19 restrictions, and overtime is up significantly in the jail due to the shortage of workers.

Comparatively, the budget shortfall year-to-date in 2020 was \$2.8 million, year-to-date in 2019 was \$2.3 million, and year-to-date in 2018 was \$698,884. Commissioner Phil Peterson noted in a previous meeting that the shortfall was also

a result of not raising the levy in past years to keep up with the rising wage and cost of living increases.

The 2021 levy totaled \$17,943,445 which is a 4.9% increase from 2020's levy. The total budget for the county for 2021 is \$42,056,764.

The 2022 proposed budget is \$44,699,513. A levy increase of 19.5% would be at total of \$21,483,686 resulting in approximately \$637 in payable annual property tax (the County's portion of taxes) for a \$100,000 home.

County budget

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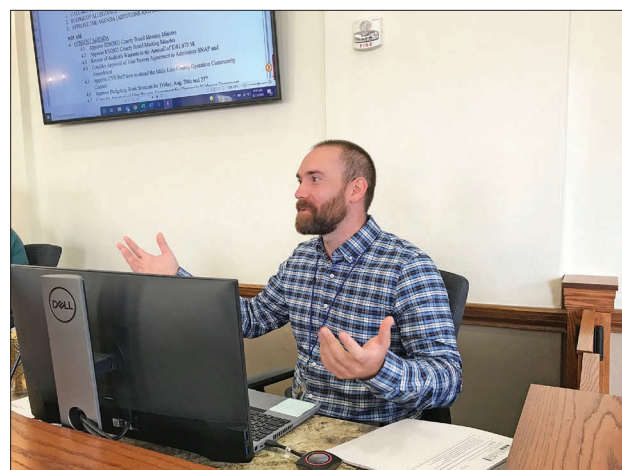


Photo by T.A. LeBrun / For the Union-Times

Dillon Hayes, current Mille Lacs County auditor-treasurer and future county coordinator, explains some nuances to the county's budget.



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