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# Pioneer Weekender

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## 'WE'RE STILL HERE'



### School board discusses boundaries, class sizes

By Hannah Olson  
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**BEMIDJI** — Elementary school boundary adjustments, updated class size projections and activity fee increases were discussed during a special Bemidji Area Schools Board of Education meeting on Thursday, April 8.

During this meeting, board members heard recommendations from Superintendent Tim Lutz and other district officials regarding the impacts of the impending closure of Central School, ahead of the official school board meeting set for April 19.

"The April meeting is traditionally our most difficult meeting to have, because that's usually the deadline in terms of making any adjustments in our staffing," Lutz said ahead of the meeting.

Bemidji's school district is facing a severe budget deficit in the wake of COVID-19, falling enrollment and November's failed operating referendum. To keep the state from coming in and taking financial matters into its own hands, the district must cut \$5.6 million from its budget to fill the projected gap.

Many of the topics the board discussed at the special meeting stem from the decision to close Central Elementary School, which passed 5-1 during a board meeting on March 15, and was projected to save the district \$460,000 to \$465,000.



Lutz



### Demonstration held for racial justice, environmental protection

By Jillian Gandsey  
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**T**he RISE Coalition and the Indigenous Environmental Network hosted a community round dance on Tuesday, April 6, in Paul Bunyan Park to speak for racial justice, environmental protection and treaty rights.

The "We're Still Here" event featured dancing, speakers and local drum groups. "What honestly brings us here today, in a good way, is that our words continue to fall on deaf ears," said Nancy Beaulieu, of MN350, at the Lake Bemidji waterfront.

"We're here to remind our local governments — Bemidji City Council, the Beltrami County Commissioners — that we're

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## Opposing Line 3

Protesters block entrances to Bemidji Enbridge office

By Annalise Braught and Hannah Olson  
**BEMIDJI** — Despite cold temps and freezing rain, a group of around 40 protesters blocked off the entrances at Enbridge's Bemidji office in opposition to the oil company's Line 3 replacement project early Friday morning.

According to a statement from activist group Giniw Collective, those present were "protesting the company bulldozing through Minnesota wetlands, watersheds and Anishinaabe terri-

ty territory as lawsuits led by three Ojibwe tribes opposed to Line 3 remain pending."

When Pioneer reporters arrived on the scene at 9:30 a.m. on Friday, April 9, Bemidji police officers had blockaded the streets to all thru-traffic. A little while later, around 9:55 a.m., they warned they would issue an order for the protesters to disperse after 20 minutes, stating whoever chose not to leave by then on their own would be arrested. They then gave warnings every five minutes until the official order was given around 11:15 a.m. to disperse.



Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer  
Protesters use the "sleeping dragon" method of locking themselves together on Friday, April 9, 2021, outside of Enbridge's Bemidji office.

The roughly 30 protesters who were milling about and holding up signs left after the order was given, but another 11 who were attached together in locking devices stayed,

awaiting arrest. Of those 11, three separate groups blocked the three entrances into the office campus. Those who were locked together were wearing "sleeping drag-

on" devices, attaching themselves to one another — many lying on the ground in sleeping bags for warmth, while others were also

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# PROTESTERS

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Jillian Gandsey / Bemidji Pioneer

Minnesota State Patrol officers prepare to use a saw to disconnect protesters, who are connected to each other inside of a pipe, on Friday, April 9, 2021, at Enbridge's Bemidji office.

and felt compelled to travel to Minnesota said, "I'm happy to be here. I want to let Enbridge know we will not be leaving, we will be here for a very long time."

In a statement sent to the Pioneer on Friday morning, Enbridge spokesperson Juli Kellner said that the protest didn't hinder their morning work operations.

"Like most folks who have continued to work during the COVID-19 pandemic, Enbridge employees are well versed in moving meetings to virtual platforms, and conducting administrative work remotely, so no work was held up by the protest," Kellner said.

### Law enforcement presence

According to the Giniw Collective, Indigenous people and Minnesota locals have reported heavy surveillance, targeted pullovers and harassment by law enforcement in connection with Line 3 resistance.

In response to the law

enforcement presence, Enbridge stated, "We recognize the rights of individuals and groups to express their views legally and peacefully. We don't tolerate illegal activities of any kind, including trespassing."

The initial law enforcement officers present at the scene on Friday consisted of primarily Bemidji police officers, however as time went on, several Beltrami and Polk County sheriff deputies and State Patrol officers arrived, along with a Bemidji ambulance, resulting in emergency personnel far outnumbering the remaining protesters.

Around 11:30 a.m., the Minnesota State Patrol arrived with equipment to facilitate the removal of the protesters' locking devices. Saws were used to cut through the devices, which appeared to be made with reinforced metal bars.

The protesters were covered with tarps and provided with eye and ear protection as law enforcement began sawing at the devices.

Officers warned the protesters over their

loudspeakers, "If you do not remove the immobilization device for yourself, officials will remove the device which could cause burns, cuts or other injuries. We will also charge a fee of \$5,000."

Kellner expressed Enbridge's disappointment regarding the situation, reiterating that Line 3 is the most studied pipeline project in Minnesota history.

"We hoped all parties would come to accept the outcome of the thorough, science-based review and multiple approvals of the project," she said. "Line 3 has passed every test through six years of regulatory and permitting review including 70 public comment meetings, appellate review and reaffirmation of a 13,500-page EIS, four separate reviews by administrative law judges, 320 route modifications in response to stakeholder input, and multiple reviews and approvals on the state, federal and tribal levels."

A protester identified in the Giniw Collective release as Alex

said, "This is part of my responsibility as someone who is a guest on this land and as someone who faces the impacts of climate change. Enbridge lies."

According to Kellner, Enbridge feels they have demonstrated ongoing respect for tribal sovereignty.

"As the result of negotiations with tribal leadership, Line 3 was routed outside of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Nation and through the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa," she said. "Both Leech Lake and Fond du Lac have spoken and written repeatedly in support of project permits."

A woman identified in the Giniw Collective release as Khalea, said, "During Ferguson so many people came out and supported us, and I want to keep doing that... I am here for the liberation of all oppressed people, for the earth, for the liberation of all of our people, I am here to stand with Mother Earth and to protect the water and the wild rice and to stand with my Indigenous friends and loved ones as we all fight this collectively, we are all opposing these systems of oppression."

### Public safety costs

The Giniw Collective claimed in their statement that Beltrami County is one of the top-billing counties to the "Public Safety Escrow Trust" funded by Enbridge and overseen by Minnesota to pay police for all costs associated with Line 3 protests. It also said that law enforcement along the proposed route has billed thousands of hours of "overtime" to Enbridge, with Cass County alone billing 7,500 hours to the Enbridge escrow account in three months.

However, Kellner

explained that as a condition to the route permit for the Line 3 replacement project, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission required Enbridge to create a Public Safety Escrow Account for the reimbursement of local governments regarding costs of public safety around the project replacement.

"To receive payment from the Public Safety Escrow Account, Local Government Units submit written, itemized requests to the Public Safety Liaison, who was appointed by the Minnesota PUC," she said. "The Public Safety Liaison makes the determination on eligible expenses and then authorizes payments from the account accordingly. In other words, these requests are not made to, nor does payment come from, Enbridge."

Beltrami County was recently reimbursed more than \$170,522 for expenses related to Line 3 construction site law enforcement. This includes expenses incurred by the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office for training deputies, purchasing equipment and other expenses related to mutual aid requests from neighboring law enforcement agencies in support of the Northern Lights Task Force.

"The replacement of Line 3 is an essential maintenance and safety project that enhances environmental protection," Kellner said. "It also is creating significant economic benefits for Minnesota counties, small businesses, Native American communities, and union members including 5,200 construction jobs, millions of dollars in local spending and tax revenues at a time when the state needs it most."

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