

The Caledonia Argus

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Jordan Gerard/The Caledonia Argus

Spring Grove celebrates Syttende Mai

The 2021 Syttende Mai Royalty Court waves from their viking ship float in the parade on Saturday, May 15. Queen Jordian Leahy, 1st Attendant Cierra Blaskowski and Little Miss Syttende Mai Lynden Morken were crowned at the Blast Off Banquet on Friday, May 14. The weekend followed with many events under partly sunny skies and fair weather. See page 8 for more photos.

Public hearing supports Sprague Woods

By Craig Moorhead
The Caledonia Argus

The Caledonia city council got an earful on Monday, May 10. That's when members convened a public hearing on the future of city-owned Sprague Woods.

Approximately 75-80 persons showed up for the hearing, with over a dozen speaking on whether the property near highway 44 should be kept as a park/natural area or re-zoned commercial and sold.

Basically, all who spoke asked the council to keep the 8.1 acre property as a park for future generations. LaVon Felton of Sleepy Hollow Chevrolet Buick did not directly address whether the city should keep the park or not, but did assure attendees that his business has no plans to move from its downtown location in the next couple of years, if not longer.

"There's some spectacular trees there," retired state forester Randy Mell said, adding that it was in the city's best interest to "try to keep it as a woods..."

Records indicate that the Sprague property was donated to Caledonia Green, then offered to the City of Caledonia in the 1990's for use as a park and outdoor classroom. Resident Kari Neumann told the council that "My concern is, if you don't honor things that people

donate to the city - that previous councils have agreed to - you're going to lose credibility with anybody that wants to donate to the city."

Fred Kruckow agreed with that, as did others. "Sprague Woods was donated by Bob Sprague for a park," he said. "What gives us the right to turn it into a commercial property?"

"... I think that it's clear that the community would like to keep the woods and require the city to be better stewards of it. I think we should honor the original agreement."

Caledonia Councilor
Amanda Ninneman

More than one speaker also insisted that restrictions on the use of the property which were somehow never recorded on the deed should be added to that document. Another topic that was repeatedly mentioned was the need for better signage at the park, which some said would result in more people using the walking trails. Sprague Woods is just not well-known, several speakers said.

"The location of Sprague Woods isn't even listed on the map as a park..." Holly Becker said. "Caledonia needs commercial development, but not at this location..."

"We have tonight 554 signatures that were gathered in the last week, asking for the council to continue

on with the original agreement that Sprague Woods would never be used for commercial development and would remain a nature preserve for all history in memory of Bob and Marge (Sprague)."

Susanne Roesler (owner of Caledonia Bakery) said that "People come to Caledonia from out of town... And the more that we can do to get people to stop, to slow people down as they're coming along the highway (the better). Maybe they stop for doughnuts and coffee, and 'Oh, we saw a really cool woods on the way in, why don't we take our coffee and doughnuts and go over there?'"

The hearing lasted for about an hour, followed by some discussions by council members, all of whom thanked community members for attending.

Councilwoman Amanda Ninneman said commercial space is needed in Caledonia. "I've done a lot of thinking about this issue for the last month, and for me, I don't think it's an issue of whether or not Caledonia would benefit from additional commercial space..." she stated. "But in this case it boils down to whether or not the council should correct a mistake that was made 15 years ago. It was given, not as a gift for the city to do with

CALEDONIA COUNCIL

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Houston Council researches 'exit strategy' out of proposed OHV trail

By Jordan Gerard
Editor, The Caledonia Argus

After pressure, hard decisions and a few hard feelings as well, the Houston City Council announced they were "trying to figure out an exit strategy" out of the proposed Off-Highway Vehicle trail.

Mayor Dave Olson said at the May 10 meeting the noise study with OHV Acoustics LLC was on hold and the cost of exiting out of the trail process could be about \$400,000, repaid by the city. Documents also cited the land - already annexed into the city - would also have to be sold off.

The news was welcome to the group of citizens that formed in the past five months, many of whom spoke against the trail at past meetings.

Scott Wallace asked if the council was willing to do a feasibility study or a business plan on the proposed trail before the exit strategy was announced by Olson. City Administrator Michelle Quinn said the city received a quote for \$15,000 to perform a study, however, the city did not have a funding stream to cover that cost. If the city exits out of the process, the \$15,000 is added to the \$400,000. The council has not made a decision on a feasibility study.

"We talked a lot about the risk, [but] we haven't seen any tangible numbers with the reward," Wallace said. "A lot of people want the community to do well, but a feasibility study is based on what you expect. We need something to base it on..."

More specific details of the exit plan were not ready yet, Quinn explained. The city has requested information about the process. The city does know that there are costs for purchases, appraisal expenses and LAWCON changes through government funding. Quinn added it takes time to sort through that.

City residents were given their chance to speak on the trail Monday night. Steve Westby said he talked to many people and saw about 161 signs in town opposing the trail. He also expressed concern that the hill is going to come down in one big storm if the trail is cut in.

Jean Tippery said she wished the council would have brought a plan on the income, or something to show that would have made the

trail look positive.

"I see nothing about a plan of action ... I don't see anything about the money it's going to bring in," she said. "Is it really going to outweigh the destruction? There's really not a lot of planning on the income part of it."

Sandy Fitting asked council members how many emails, phone calls or letters they received on the topic. Numbers averaged between 15 and 25 for councilors Cody Mathers and Emily Krage, who answered the question. Most of the council members inherited the proposed trail when they joined the council after the Grant-In-Aid process had been started.

HOUSTON OHV

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Goats rescuing Brownsville prairie habitat

By Craig Moorhead
The Caledonia Argus

A wild hillside above Brownsville, Minnesota is now being restored to its former glory with the help of some four-footed friends.

"I had looked into goats," Brownsville resident/landowner Dave Hey said, "but I couldn't afford to do that on my own, so this is being paid for through the DNR, because of the habitat and the prairie easement they have. I'm really happy it's happening."

Years ago, a similar effort to remove invasive woody plant species from the hillside showed promise, but was not continued due to several reasons, Hey said.

"That was about 13 years ago. The DNR was doing a goat prairie restoration so they cut a lot of the cedar back, and did some brush burns on the hill. The plan had been that they would come back and continue to do that, to increase the quality of the habitat. And they were pretty happy with what they'd done as far as improving the habitat... We'd gotten it before it was too late. There's a lot of good native plants still up there, flowers and native grasses. But because of (a lack of) funding, and maybe a lack of enough available personnel, we haven't done much for quite a few years."

Workers not only cut invasive cedars, but other problem plants like buckthorn, Japanese barberry, and honeysuckle during the first round of work too, Hey reported. Then last fall, DNR personnel came back and walked the property with Hey and some of his neighbors. And this time, some of the heavy lifting will be done by goats.



Submitted

These goats were hired for a restoration job near Hokah, Minnesota a couple years ago. Another herd of goats has been hired for the job in Brownsville. They are busy munching away on non-native species that have populated and taken over a hill. After three landowners approached the City of Brownsville with a solution to bring back native species last fall, they partnered with the DNR to restore the habitat.

Barb Perry of MNDNR recalled the first round of work. "Over several years in the mid-2000's, the Department of Natural Resources Nongame Wildlife Program in Southeast Minnesota used grant funds to pay for the removal of red cedar trees growing on the face of the bluff on the north side of Brownsville," she said. "When red cedar trees are present, birds roost in them. Many of those birds have eaten buckthorn berries, so their droppings contain the seeds, and we then see a carpet of young buckthorn under the cedar trees. Often we can't burn a bluff right after cedar removal as there isn't enough native vegetation to carry fire. Fre-

quency of fire helps set back any encroaching woody vegetation and allows native grasses and forbs an opportunity to germinate and grow more abundantly. We are trying to set back the invasive buckthorn that is not only growing at the top of the bluff, but also on the face. We know there is glossy buckthorn growing on the site, along with a healthy population of Japanese barberry in the woods around the prairie... The hope is that by reducing the density of the buckthorn and other woody vegetation, native plants in the seed bank will have an opportunity to grow.

"We use goats as a management tool when the density of woody

vegetation impacts the native grasses and forbs or flowers. The goats eat all types of shrubs and trees, and do have their favorites. We have learned that plants taste different to them depending on the season. They may not like how some leaves taste in the spring versus later in the growing season. Depending on the density of woody vegetation, it can take multiple years of grazing before we see a reduction in canopy cover, which then allows more sunlight to the ground, and the opportunity for native seed germination.

Goats from Diversity Landworks, a Freeburg-based business, GOAT PRAIRIE

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Community Police/EMS Week

Salute to our Police & EMS personnel

See page 6

Syttende Mai

Spring Grove celebrates May 17

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Sports Softball

Softball picks up win over R-P

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Baseball

Warriors gain three big wins

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Obits

Gale M. Danielson

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CALEDONIA COUNCIL

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as it chose. It was a gift that was given to the community and left in care of the city... and I think that it's clear that the community would like to keep the woods and require the city to be better stewards of it. I think that we should honor the original agreement."

Councilman Bob Klug said that "As far as the City of Caledonia goes, we are in definite need of highway frontage for commercial development, hoping that we can keep Sprague Woods as it is, hoping we can find something else for the businesses that move to Caledonia, that they have a place to go. We're looking at jobs and businesses coming in, so, unfortunately we can't make any more highway frontage, but maybe something will pop up. Maybe businesses can find other things that will work, I guess. We have a job to do and we have to do what is best for the City of Caledonia."

Councilman Brad Rykhus said, "I think the public has spoken. I'm going to go with the public on this."

Councilman David Fitzpatrick said that he was "All about new businesses coming to town," but also praised the people who attended the public hearing. "You guys did your homework on this, and brought this to the table for us, stuff we didn't know," he stated.

"I think we're all in agreement that we want to keep it," Mayor DeWayne Schroeder said.

Klug asked for the topic to be



Craig Moorhead/The Caledonia Argus

This photo shows a portion of the community members who attended a public hearing on Sprague Woods on May 10.

tabled for a later meeting. Council members agreed.

Other news

City staff reported that a likely opening date for the Caledonia Aquatic Center is now July 12, some five weeks after the facility was originally set to open. In order to keep pool staff for the brief 2021 swim season, members voted to offer double wages for lifeguards, assistant managers, and the manager. The city will seek \$400 per day in liquidated damages from the contractor now making repairs

to pool gutters. Those late fees will begin on May 18.

A single consent agenda vote cleared up several items. The city purchased a new 2021 John Deere 544P wheel loader for the trade-in of a 2018 model plus \$19,510. Members also approved the hire of part-time firefighters Kole Skauge and William Parsons.

An amended agreement with Caledonia Township (discussed on April 26) was approved. That pact now limits township costs for a rebuild of a portion of Green Acres

Drive to 50% of 2021 construction work, excluding items such as potential engineering/design fees and work that is expected to take place in 2022 from the current agreement.

A permit for Katie O'Regan of Sacred Noise Society to place an electronic sign at 111 E. Main was approved with four conditions. Those included keeping flashing or moving objects, or lights that resemble emergency vehicles off the sign, which must be fixed flat to the front of the building.

HOUSTON OHV

Continued from page 1

Olson spoke up and said he didn't understand why people were concerned now, when the trail has been in the works for 12 years. It was also pointed out that Olson originally opposed the trail, but after learning about the trail and what it could potentially do for Houston, he supported it.

Sarah Thompson said she thought it was a dead project until the last meeting in April. She did hear about the petition in 2012.

"I am shocked at the amount of answers that you didn't have. My mind has been blown by the lack of information about this," she said. She also pointed out she sent an email to all council members, but only heard back from Mathers and Krage.

Anna Benda explained her concerns with construction if the trail were to go through. She has a retaining wall 12 ft. from her kitchen and is concerned about erosion, landslides and rocks dislodged from the top of the bluffs. She also asked if the city would have supplemental insurance for the trail, since most homeowners likely do not have insurance to cover landslides.

"It's not just my house. A lot of houses are on the border," she added. Benda also cited a construction appraiser who said houses within 700-900 ft. of a construction site can have cracked foundations due to construction.

"Houston needs more amenities, tourism to bring stuff in, we agree on that," she said. "...A DNR study in 2017 cites only 6% of Minnesotans are OHV users. For geocaching and hiking, there's 32%."

On that note, she pointed out Houston's tourism demographic includes the Root River Bike Trail, International Owl Center, Root River Triathlon, naturalists and hunters. That would conflict with OHV users, she explained, and it would conflict with Houston's international recognition for the International Owl Center.

She also explained many people thought the project was dead, and understood that the council felt as they were being ambushed, but said people were all informed about the trail.

Karla Bloem, Executive Director of the International Owl Center, clarified rumors that had been circulating on social media. She clarified she did not organize the opposition group, but that "there are many people who were also leading their own focused efforts based on their individual skills, and we all came together as a big, grassroots group." She said she focuses on the environmental and tourism aspects.

Funds for "Save the Bluffs" are for postage, printing and website fees. To provide transparency, any remaining funds will stay with the Owl Center and be used for its future facility, which is what the "Save the Bluffs" group wished.

She also said the Owl Center's board of directors voted to serve as the fiscal agent for the "Save

Our Bluffs" group because the Owl Center's mission aligns with the mission of the new group. There has not been an attempt to overfundraise in order to get more money for the Owl Center, she clarified.

Bloem is also not being paid extra to work on this effort. The Owl Center is not under any deadlines for fundraising nor land purchase agreements with the city, as an agreement has not been signed yet. After the aviary is built with the new Owl Center, no fireworks will be allowed within 250 yards, but that does not prohibit fireworks for Houston.

Media has reached out to her or regularly attends council meetings. She did not invite media.

The International Festival of Owls banquet was held at the Houston Community Center for years until guests received half-frozen food due to ovens not working. Valley High Golf Club was too crowded and now the banquet is typically held at Cross of Christ Lutheran Church.

She encouraged city council members to get accurate information about the Owl Center from the center itself, not from Facebook posts.

Other council news

In usual May business for Houston, the council heard from Thurman Tucker with the Southeast Quail Forever Chapter, who asked to form a partnership with the Houston Nature Center and also do more activities with high school students.

The council approved the bonding plan for the wastewater treatment plant in the principal amount of \$1,198,986, at a rate of 1%. They also approved a first request from Wapasha Construction for the amount of \$78,094.75.

The Houston Fire Department will add another member to its service soon, with Dylan Schulze.

The council approved the cooperative agreement with Caledonia Ambulance Service for advanced life support intercept service if requested by Houston.

Also approved was the agreement with Houston School District to use the high school athletic fields for summer rec. Along with that, employees Nicole Beckman, Olivia Beckman, Lilly Carr, Lilly Davenport, Emma Forsythe, Priya Kingsley, Conner Porter, Becca Rostad and Sydney Torgerson were hired as summer rec staff.

Plunkett's Pest Control was approved for service in April, June, and September at City Hall, Maple Street Community Building, Houston Nature Center and City Park restrooms, which is \$135 per visit. The council voted to add the Cedar Street building, for an extra \$45 per visit.

The council approved a temporary liquor license for Houston Hoedown, July 23-25.

Next meeting

The next meeting will be June 14, at 6 p.m. at the Cedar Street Community Building.

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Houston Prom dances the night away



Submitted

Houston prom-goers had an enjoyable night with dinner, grand march, a hypnotist and dance. Pictured from left to right is the prom court: Allison Papenfuss, Odin Onsgard, Leora Smith, Kirby Clay, Katie Bartz, Curtis Chapel, Ashley Laschenski, Owen Gaustad, Queen Paige Twite, King Landon Carrier, Prince Jackson Kubistal, Princess Maci Woodard, Kenneth Grupe, Nikki Dahle, Ethan Hargrove, Jayden Serres, Tanner Kubitz, Emma Chapel, Caden Ness, Hayley Alfson.



Submitted

Prom Royalty is from left to right: Queen Paige Twite, King Landon Carrier, Prince Jackson Kubistal, and Princess Maci Woodard.

COEXIST
Have a business page on Facebook?
Love to advertise in the paper?
DO BOTH!

ATTENTION HOUSTON COUNTY RESIDENTS
HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION
SATURDAY, MAY 22, 2021 from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm
RECYCLING CENTER
105 N. GRANT ST., HOUSTON, MN

- Free disposal of qualifying household paint. Accepted from households in containers **one gallon or smaller**.
- Free disposal of qualifying residential or agricultural chemicals. Limit of 200 lbs. per household.
- Many other items accepted. See County website for complete listing or call 507-725-5800.
- <https://www.co.houston.mn.us/departments/environmental-services/>
- No e-waste, used oil, antifreeze, or batteries.
- Interested businesses and large quantity generators should contact County prior to event.

Customers are to remain in vehicles. Items must arrive in vehicle trunk, bed, or trailer. Fees may apply, no change or receipt will be provided, please bring check or smaller bills.

This collection is provided to residents of Houston County with support from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, PaintCare Inc. and La Crosse County.

The next Houston County collection date is August 14, 2021 at the La Crescent Dropsite in La Crescent, MN from 9 am to 1 pm.

*If you are unable to attend either event you may bring hazardous waste items to either of these locations throughout the year: La Crosse County Household Hazardous Materials Facility. Please call (608) 785-9999. Winona County Household Hazardous Waste Facility. Please call (507) 457-6462.

Visit us on the web
www.hometownargus.com

PUBLIC NOTICE
Flushing of Water Mains in the City of Caledonia starting on Monday, May 24.
This process may cause some temporary discoloration of your water. To remove discoloration that can be caused by the flushing of water mains, please turn on several faucets inside and outside of your home or business, until the water runs clear. The city will try to have the flushing completed by Friday, June 4 (weather permitting).
If you have any questions please contact The City's Water Department at 725-3402.

NOW OPEN IN NEW LOCATION!
BUD'S ONE STOP SHOP
206 S Kingston
NEW PRODUCTS!
GRAND OPENING 5/22-5/23
Hours: Monday-Saturday 11-5
Closed Sunday