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To exit or not to exit? Houston stalls on OHV trail project

By Jordan Gerard
Editor, The Caledonia Argus

In a large contrast from May's council meeting, the Houston City Council made no mention of the exit strategy for the OHV trail project, but instead, presented a history of the trail process so far at its regular meeting on Monday, June 14.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Planner Joe Unger, Amateur Riders Motorcycle Association member Karen Umphress (also a member of Twin Cities Trail Riders) and Parks and Trails Regional Manager Kelli Bruns presented information on the trail.

Since no one on the council or city staff has been involved with the project from the start to the present, the DNR agreed to provide a history of the project and process for the benefit of the council, City Administrator Michelle Quinn clarified.

The presentation was a summary of the history and process of the project that council members inherited from their predecessors.

The information did point out facts such as the Grant-In-Aid public review was completed in spring 2020. The DNR received 123 comments, of which 2/3 expressed support for the project.

Of the top concerns, 19 comments mentioned bluff lands/erosion concerns and the DNR contracted with a U.S. Forest Service enterprise team, Trails Unlimited LLC, to properly design the trails. They could be hired again to construct the trails. They also pointed out that "proper drainage along the trail is important to shed water off the trail and reduce erosion potential."

Noise concerns brought 14 comments and the noise study was completed for the Federal Environmental Assessment (EA) and found no significant noise impacts, but as it has been pointed out before, that study only measured ambient noise, and did not use OHVs to measure the noise from the proposed area. OHVs were not required because the EA only examined the "change in use." A noise study with OHV Acoustics LLC from Random Lake, Wisconsin was scheduled for this spring, but has not taken place yet.

Maintenance concerns brought 11 comments and the DNR assured costs are reimbursed up to 90% through the GIA process. The DNR periodically inspects the trails and may assist in heavy maintenance, Unger said.

HOUSTON COUNCIL

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Bubbly fun at Caledonia Founder's Day

Jordan Gerard/The Caledonia Argus

Kids enjoyed creating huge bubbles in the park, thanks to ICAN LLC, which sponsored kids' activities.

In addition to bubbles, they enjoyed crafts, ring toss and other games, a kiddie train ride and live reptile show.

Other activities throughout the day included music on Main Street, a Robotic Warriors demonstration, car show, bean bag tournament and more.

See page 12 for more photos!



Spring Grove extends weekend pool hours, no change on weekly hours

By Jordan Gerard
Editor, The Caledonia Argus

It was a tough conversation to have in the middle of summer, but the Spring Grove Swim Center will keep the majority of its current hours for July and August.

The exception being that the pool will be open 1 to 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays, dependent on need.

Managers Alyssa Johnson and Mariah Edgington were present at the regular meeting on Tuesday, June 15 to answer questions and explain their reasoning.

Johnson clarified the survey would have been sent out upon receiving employee availability, however only five responses were received and out of those five, only a few said they were willing to work. Since that was the only response received, both managers felt it was not worthy of surveying the community.

Johnson also mentioned that parents have said they're willing to learn how to lifeguard and work at the pool. However, that is a common phrase every year and the they fail to see applications from parents, she said.

Edgington said in order to have night swim, the pool would need to cancel many evening lessons.

"Night slots are the best time to do lessons," she said. "We're too far into the season to let families down."

Edgington added that when applying, workers had to be available a minimum of 15 hours a week and able to work at least two weekends a month.

The 5 to 6 p.m. time is not an hour that was greatly utilized at the

SPRING GROVE COUNCIL

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Jordan Gerard/The Caledonia Argus

Spring Grove's Swim Center has enjoyed the warm weather of summer, bringing in kids from town, Caledonia, Houston and Mabel. Swim Center hours were discussed at two recent city council meetings, with parents asking for more night swim opportunities. Pool hours for July and August will be weekdays 1 to 5 p.m. and a 6-8 p.m. night swim on Fridays and weekends 1 to 6 p.m.

Brownsville Days return

By Craig Moorhead
The Caledonia Argus

Brownsville Days are back! And the hosts of the celebration – the Brownsville Lions Club – are ready to put on a great celebration once again.

"After everything being shut down, I think everyone is just anxious to get out and enjoy everybody's company now," Lions Club member Jeff LeJeune said last week. "When we started planning the (2021) Brownsville Days, we still didn't know if COVID was going to inhibit us quite a bit or not. So what we ended up doing was instead of going with the three days – Friday night through the full weekend – we thought we would pare it down because we're coming back from an off year, and so we're moving everything that was on Sunday in prior years to Saturday, and we're hoping that's going to work out well for us."

On Friday, June 25, the traditional co-ed softball tournament kicks off at 7 p.m. "We didn't know how many ball teams we were going to be having," LeJeune noted. "Our people went out and we were able to get seven teams lined up... we're hoping with good weather we'll wrap it up on Saturday night."

The Classic Car Show always draws a lot of attention. That event will take place on Saturday morning



Argus File Photo

Kids enjoy a game of kickball at a previous Brownsville Days celebration.

from 8 a.m. until noon. "We moved the car show from the Community Center over to the ballfield," LeJeune stated. "So from eight till noon, the cars will be on the outfield, and it will give us a lot better area for people

BROWNSVILLE DAYS

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Community
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Jenna Wiebke places 8th at state
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Obits
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CONTACT US
The Caledonia Argus
225 S. Kingston St., PO Box 227
Caledonia, MN 55921
www.hometownargus.com
Phone
507-724-3475

Email
Editor:
jordan.gerard@apgecm.com
Staff Writer:
craig.moorhead@apgecm.com
Advertising:
greg.petersen@apgecm.com
Billing:
jean.becker@apgecm.com

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HOUSTON COUNCIL

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Rattlesnake concerns brought four comments and the DNR said no rattlesnake habitat was identified. The trail can be re-routed if a den is identified.

As for the GIA process, Unger said Houston is between steps five and six. Step five is the DNR Parks and Trails Department presenting the project to the Regional Management Team for final review and support for funding. Step six is the clubs and local government units working with Parks and Trails to apply for any necessary permits and complete a final Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) review. If listed species are identified in the NHIS review, the trail

alignment may be shifted slightly, the document said.

In 2019, the DNR conducted a new Natural Resource Review and found no new concerns, Unger said.

Step seven is the last step and that includes Parks and Trails working with the club and local government units to monitor trail development.

Finally, Unger said the project has always acknowledged that the terrain is challenging, and that is why there's a high level of support and national experts with experience involved in far more challenging environments.

An open house event will be

held in July with more information available to the public.

No mention was made of the exit strategy announced in May, except for the fact that it could now cost the city over \$516,523 to exit, and the land would revert to the state. Exiting would also affect future state grants for Houston.

However, citizens opposing the trail still dug their heels in. The city council limited public comment to 15 minutes and two minutes per person.

"You left out the biggest part, the community," Jeanne Tippery said. "We don't want it."

Unger said the DNR has went through its processes and it's up to the city now.

Residents still feel that it should be put to a vote, however, state statute will not allow councils to hold special elections on questions

unless specifically authorized to do so by state law, Quinn said.

The council did act in 2009 to support the trail and reaffirmed its commitment to the trail each time it applied, accepted, awarded or spent grant funding. It moved the project closer to fruition every time.

Ron Burfield mentioned he volunteered for the OHV advisory committee, but has not heard any information about it. The council agreed to look at the current list of volunteers and see if there was a vacancy.

Other news

The council approved pay estimate 2 from Wapasha Construction for the wastewater treatment plant.

The council accepted the American Rescue Plan Act funds and will have until 2024 to use them. Guide-

lines still need to be released on what the funds can be used for, but the city must designate the funds.

Also approved was a bid for Hoskins Electric for \$8,988 to update lighting at the Cedar Street Community Building.

The council approved Latsch Gutter for \$2,100 in order to install gutters on the upper level, east side and along the building eyebrow.

The council approved the hiring of Kenny Grupe for summer recreation on an as-needed basis. They also accepted the resignation of Michaela Spear, Nature Center assistant and approved posting for her job position, which also approved an updated job description. Finally, the council approved a new Houston Nature Center brochure.

The council also approved high limb boulevard tree trimming by Ken Krumrie, along with his

machine and chipper for \$180 an hour. Public Works will provide additional assistance.

A resident also brought a complaint to the council of someone shooting and injuring squirrels on Grant St., perhaps with a pellet gun.

Terry Jergenson filed a complaint with the city about the Houston County Sheriff's Office training police dogs near his home early in the morning. Police Chief Brett Hurley will check with Erickson on training times and locations. The Sheriff's Office has been training police K9s in the city's industrial park since the office added a K9 to its services, Quinn clarified.

Next meeting

The next meeting of the Houston City Council will be July 12, at 6 p.m. at the Cedar Street Community Building.

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