

Northern Light Region

Wednesday, January 19, 2022

Our 105th Year • Issue 51

Baudette City Council repeals lodging tax ordinance

Robert Hopwood
Reporter

The Baudette City Council voted last week to repeal Ordinance 135, which established the city's lodging tax. The vote taken on Jan. 10 was done on the advice of Steve Anderson, the city's attorney, City Clerk/Treasurer Tina Rennemo said during last week's council meeting. It's the latest twist in the city's attempt to extricate itself from the Lake of the Woods Tourism Bureau, which was established by a joint powers agreement between the city and Lake of

the Woods County. That agreement established the Tourism Bureau and imposed a 3% lodging tax, which is collected by the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

The legal status of that tax is not known. Baudette hotels are still collecting it because no one has told them to stop, Rennemo said.

The county, meanwhile, has not repealed its lodging tax.

In a letter dated Jan. 10, the Board of Commissioners asked the City Council what their intentions were regard-

ing the lodging tax. The commissioners also put the issue on the agenda of their next meeting.

The City Council voted Dec. 31, 2020, to end their joint partnership with Lake of the Woods County and dissolve the Tourism Bureau.

One of the many reasons the city voted to end the partnership was because the Tourism Bureau moved out of the Baudette-Lake of the Woods Chamber of Commerce's building and closed the Tourism Information Center.

Last week council members discussed the future of

that building, which is located on the west edge of town. They are considering buying it from the county.

In other business, the council:

- Approved a request for proposals for banking services. The city plans to send the request to RiverWood Bank and Border Bank. The city is looking for a new bank since Wells Fargo announced it will close its Baudette branch in March.

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Ryan Zemek takes full-time reins of Economic Development Authority

Robert Hopwood
Reporter

Lake of the Woods County's new full-time Economic Development Authority director will be spending more time in Baudette, helping to guide the region's growth as he helps people take advantage of business opportunities.

Ryan Zemek, a father of three boys from Bemidji, is well known in Lake of the Woods County. He has been the county's part-time economic development director since Sep. 2018.

That changed last year when the County Board of Commissioners decided to create a full-time position for an Economic Development Authority director. Zemek thought it would be a good opportunity for him and threw his hat in the ring.

The commissioners voted to give him the job at their last meeting of the year.

County Commissioner Cody Hasbargen said officials already had a relationship with Zemek and felt he was a good fit for the new job.

"I think Ryan has a very good technical knowledge," Hasbargen said. "I think he knows the right places to look for money and to help people get on their feet in business."

Hasbargen also is the vice president of the Lake of the Woods County Economic Development Authority.

Zemek said his job is to work with businesses and entrepreneurs to get them the resources they need to grow their businesses and to work with the community to create an environment that can help those businesses.

"His knowledge of what's been going on has been fantastic, and he's been a great asset," County Commissioner Joe Grund said. "And he's been a great help to the county and brought in stuff."

Zemek, who studied political science and economics at Bemidji State University, said he takes a broad view of economic development. It's not just about getting loans for businesses.

"It's really about how do you create a community that can attract new residents?" Zemek said. "How do you find the resources to put housing together for keeping residents?"

While working part-time, Zemek helped attract the Lake of the Woods Distilling Company to downtown Baudette. He helped facilitate the expansion of Lake of the Woods Foods. And he helped businesses get the capital they needed after the COVID-19 pandemic forced them to close for months.

Last week, Zemek outlined four of his goals for the coming year at the Economic Development Authority's monthly meeting.

He wants to create an environment that attracts investment and supports people who want to start businesses; increase the capacity of the authority to provide service to the community; invest in projects that help create a diversified economy; and attract and build a strong workforce, according to a report he created.

The top challenge facing Lake of the Woods County, and all of Northern Minnesota, is attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, Zemek said. It's especially challenging to find people to work in health care or for employers like ANI Pharmaceuticals Inc.

"We're pretty confident as an organization and as a community that there's people willing to move to this community, and there's jobs for them to take," Zemek said.

But there are obstacles keeping people away. Those hurdles include a lack of affordable housing and child care, he said.

"There's guys willing to come up here and work, but there's no place for them to go," Grund said.

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photo: Northwest Angle Guest Ice Road - 2022 Facebook page

Fire destroys home in Baudette

Sarah Hull
Reporter

A house located at 404 Hamilton Avenue in Baudette was destroyed in a fire that occurred on the morning of Monday, January 10.

At approximately 7:19 a.m. on Monday, January 10, 2022, the Lake of the Woods Sheriff's Office received a call regarding a house with smoke coming out of it within the city of Baudette.

Firefighters arrived at the home shortly after the call was made, but by then the flames had engulfed the structure.

The home's occupants, one adult, two children and one dog, were able to make it out safely before First Responders arrived. The adult was transported to CHI LakeWood Hospital and treated for minor burns.

The other adult occupant of the home had already left the house for work earlier that morning.

The cause of the fire is currently under investigation by the State Fire Marshal. More information will be available at a later date.



photo: Northwest Angle Guest Ice Road - 2022 Facebook page

Julie Bergman
Editor

National news outlets, as well as many in the Upper Midwest, have been devoting air time and print space to the 2022 ice road that has been built across Lake of the Woods from the south shore to the Northwest Angle area.

An Associated Press article dated Monday, January 17, reported on the 37-mile ice highway across the lake. The road opened last week and is built and maintained by area business owners. The toll to use the road is \$250 per vehicle this year.

The news story in USA Today's travel section this week quotes Lake of the Woods Tourism Executive Director Joe Henry.

"Some people say, 'Gosh, I feel like I'm on the moon,' and some people say they think they're in Antarctica or on the tundra," Joe Henry, executive director of Lake of the Woods Tourism, said of driving the ice road. "It's big ice. Lake of the Woods is a big lake. That's all part of the novelty. That's all part of the feeling."

Other news outlets publicizing the ice road included the Pioneer Press of St. Paul, Twin Cities-based television sta-

Ice road across Lake of the Woods garners national press attention

tions KSTP, KARE 11 and WCCO as well as Minnesota Public Radio and multiple newspapers and radio stations around the Midwest and the nation.

In 2021 members of the local resort community came together to build a road across the ice to help their customers bypass Canada when traveling to the Northwest Angle since the Canadian border was closed to nonessential travelers due to COVID-19.

Although the Canadian border is somewhat open this year, the ice road was constructed to help travelers avoid the strict restrictions.

The 37 mile ice road starts at Springsteel Island near Warroad and crosses Lake of the Woods to the Northwest Angle community. The speed limit is 25 mph to help preserve the road.

A Facebook page (Northwest Angle Guest Ice Road - 2022) has more information on the guest road as well as a link for online reservations.

The page also has current notifications on the status of the road. For instance on Tuesday, January 18, the road was closed due to the snow and high winds predicted.

The road is expected to be operational into March, dependent on weather and ice conditions.



photo: Northwest Angle Guest Ice Road - 2022 Facebook page