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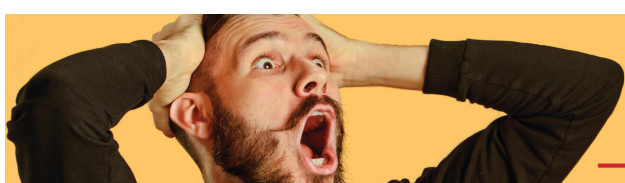
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File photo

The Little Falls Historic Preservation Commission approved a permit, June 6, to demolish Hurrle Hall, built in 1891, filed by the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls.

HPC approves permit for demolition of Hurrle Hall

By ZACH HACKER
Staff Writer

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The Little Falls Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) was put in the difficult position of having to determine the fate of one of the city's most historic structures, June 6.

After a lengthy discussion, the HPC voted unanimously to grant a demolition permit to the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls to carry out their plan to "deconstruct" Hurrle Hall. The building has served the Sisters' campus for more than 130 years, including its original use as their first convent.

"Personally, as an HPC member, I've talked to people in the state, I've talked to (the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office) SHPO, I've talked to past members, I've talked to other people, I've even talked to a contractor about this," said HPC President Gary Block. "It's just a difficult decision for us as an HPC member to make. It kind of goes against everything we try to do, but as (HPC members) Pat (Sharon) and Linda (LeMieur) said, at some point, you just can't do it anymore."

In 2003, architectural and engineering firm YHR conducted conditions assessments for the principle structures on the Little Falls Campus. After a comparison analysis was done between Hurrle Hall and Mary Hall — both which were built in the 1890s — it was determined that the better option was to move forward with a complete renovation of Mary Hall, a \$3.6 million project.

Consulting firm Plante Moran conducted a new analysis on the Sisters' Order, its space needs and financial resources in 2011. It was determined at that time that maintaining all of its physical assets would threaten the ability for the Sisters to provide perpetual care for all of its members for the remainder of their lives.

It was then the Sisters began to seriously look at the future of Hurrle Hall. It was determined the cost to adequately renovate the structure would be at least \$6 million, and there was no need to use the building for residential

purposes anymore. The Sisters' insurer also would not insure the facility for overnight guests without major and costly renovations to bring it up to code.

Since its construction in 1891, Hurrle Hall has served as a convent, a hospital, an orphanage, a high school and college campus and a health and recreation center. However, it has been empty since 2016. It was at that time the Sisters initially moved forward with plans to deconstruct the building.

But, that same year, the Friends of Hurrle Hall — a local group

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County election processes ensure security, accuracy

By ZACH HACKER
Staff Writer

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Morrison County Commissioners had several questions for Auditor/Treasurer Chelsey Robinson when she presented the county's election processes to them, May 17.

Tuesday, she — along with Elections Supervisor Joyce Kahl — came back before the Board to give them some of the answers they had that day.

"This is obviously something that has garnered a lot of interest from a lot of people in the county," said Board Chair Greg Blaine.

The first question Robinson addressed was whether open precincts that switched to mail-in ballots in 2020 due to COVID-19 were moving back to having open polling places this year. She said seven of the eight precincts were going back to in-person voting. Those include Buh Township, Cushing Township, Darling Township, Green Prairie Township, Pulaskee Township, Ripley Township and the city of Upsala.

Pierz Township is the only one of those precincts that has opted to remain mail-in only.

In all, the county has 21 mail-in ballot only precincts and 28 open polling locations, including the Auditor/Treasurer's Office. The latter accepts all absentee ballots and is the home for the mail ballot precincts.

"Morrison County's only location for dropping off mail or absentee ballots is the Auditor/

Treasurer's Office," Robinson said. "Morrison County doesn't have any ballot dropboxes. We didn't in the past and we don't now."

Blaine said, as the county has aimed to make things convenient for residents in the past, there is box outside of the Morrison County Government Center in the south parking lot where residents can drop tax payments, papers for social services and more. He asked if there had ever been issues with residents thinking it was also a dropbox for ballots.

Robinson said there could be "signage everywhere" informing residents that it's not a ballot dropbox location. However, as it's not certified, any voter who puts a ballot in that box does so at their own risk.

"In the back parking lot, it would be under camera surveillance," she said. "If that were to happen, it would turn over to investigation."

She added that if someone cannot make it into the Auditor/Treasurer's Office but wants to hand in their mail-in or absentee ballot, they can call the office to make arrangements.

The Board also asked at the previous meeting if it could hold a review of the county's election equipment. Robinson said her office will host an open house from 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. Monday, June 27, in the Board Room at the Government Center. Anyone is welcome to come test the new Omni-Ballot assisted voting devices.

"We'll have a test deck with op-

(Continued on Page 3A)



(061922-RibbonTree)

Photos by Staff Writer Sheila Bergren and reader Pat Arnold

Loved ones and friends remembered with ribbon tree

More than 25 people gathered in Maple Island Park in Little Falls, Saturday, June 14, for a memorial event and the planting of a ribbon tree. While the event was hosted by CHI St. Gabriel's Home and CHI Health at Home, the Snowcap Japanese Lilac tree was donated by Mayor Greg Zylka, who had two ribbons placed on the tree in memory of his parents, Celestine and Mildred Zylka. Many of those who were present tied ribbons to the tree in remembrance of their loved ones and friends who died recently or have been long gone. Chaplain Blaine MacNeil, above left, said a short message, played the guitar and sang Amazing Grace. The ribbons will remain on the tree for about a month and will be taken down as they become weathered and tattered to prevent littering of the park. People are encouraged to tie their own ribbon to the tree in memory of their loved ones. Pictured above right, sisters Lynn Nutile, left, of Sartell and Cindy Marihart of St. Paul tied ribbons on the tree for their deceased mother, Lorraine Bruflat of Little Falls, who died March 29, and for their father, Charles Bruflat, who died March 24, 1974. On the right, Lillian Wolter, 3, daughter of Ryan and Theresa Wolter of Little Falls, put on a ribbon on the tree in memory of her great-grandmother Dorine Lehn, who died Nov. 21, 2021. Lillian's grandmother Pat Arnold of Little Falls captured the touching moment with her camera.



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HPC permits demo of Hurrle Hall

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formed to advocate for saving the structure — sued the Sisters to prohibit its deconstruction or demolition. That lawsuit was eventually settled, in October 2016, when the Sisters agreed to not take any further action until at least 2019.

It was also agreed, at that time, if the Friends of Hurrle Hall and the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota could find a developer willing to take on the then \$6.573 million cost of renovating and repurposing the building, the Sisters would consider selling it.

The Sisters' legal counsel, Marc Manderscheid, told the HPC that in the nearly six years since, only one developer ever approached the Sisters. They were given a tour and asked to provide plans for the building, but no further proposal came forward.

"The decision that was made in 2016 was that, maybe the Friends were right," Manderscheid said. "Maybe the Minnesota Preservation Alliance were right. Maybe there was a developer, someone out there, who was prepared to come forward, could use that 130-year-old footprint. The Sisters, at that time, decided that their need to keep their financial health in order could wait. The demolition costs have increased substantially since that time."

The cost to renovate the building for housing purposes is now estimated at \$12.25 million, according to Manderscheid. Within their plans, the Sisters have included a plan to deconstruct the building. The idea behind that is to preserve anything that still holds value, such as stained glass windows, woodwork and bricks. Those would then be reused and repurposed. They also have plans to build a Memorial Garden where the building once stood, commemorating the building and the Sisters' im-

pact in Little Falls. Prior to the HPC's vote, six people gave public comment about the permit request, five of whom were against deconstruction and one in favor.

Darlene Kotelnicki of Litchfield, speaking against deconstruction, contended that there was nothing in the plans about hazardous materials abatement.

"You've got a 35,000 square foot facility that you know has plaster walls and lead paint, and that's going to be very expensive whether you demolish the building or you repurpose it," she said.

Connie Lies, also of Litchfield, said the city has a "true gem" within its boundaries in Hurrle Hall. She said the structure not only embodies the history of the city, but also the history of humanity and how the Sisters have provided the latter to others.

She said the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act (MERA) states that any building eligible for the National Register — which she believes Hurrle Hall is — is considered a "natural resource" and should be treated as such.

"I've seen buildings stand empty for many years until the right person comes along," Lies said. "Once a building is demolished, it's gone. No memorial, no monument will ever replace that."

Lois Maciej, a vocal opponent of demolition dating back several years, said many people object to letting the building go because it is "one of the last few magnificent buildings in Little Falls."

She said the building was designated as a local landmark in 2002, which required approval from the HPC and the Little Falls City Council. She said if the organizations "pulled an about face" it would not look good on either.

"There are many uses for Hurrle Hall," Maciej said. "The city's studies show a shortage of housing. Why

not put Hurrle Hall to use as an apartment building for senior women, a home for the homeless or any other housing facility? To re-use the facility is considered going green. Isn't that what our country is trying to instill in us at the present time?"

Community Development of Morrison County Executive Director Carol Anderson said she had a "unique, first-eye view" of how the Sisters came to the decision to deconstruct Hurrle Hall. She described it as a "very difficult and painful" decision.

Anderson said some of the Sisters told her about leaving their homes to join a new family in Little Falls. They recalled being on their hands and knees, scrubbing floors with a brush.

"They made a vow to live in poverty, chastity and obedience," Anderson said. "Vows go two ways. The Sisters made the vow back to them, as the attorney said, that they would take care of them. They'd feed them, they'd clothe them, they'd house them, they'd take care of them until the day they died. They can't do that with the expense of this building."

She said there were no developers out there who would take on the \$12.25 million project it would take to renovate Hurrle Hall. In her position, she would have known about anyone who might be interested.

"I would urge you to respect the Sisters and their wishes for everything they gave to this community for over 130 years," Anderson said. "This is their property. Please respect their wishes."

In response to the concern regarding hazardous materials mitigation, Manderscheid said the contractors are aware of the presence of asbestos. He said they would take the required steps to ensure deconstruction is done in a way that complies with all health and safety codes.

Block pointed out that the Friends of Hurrle Hall intended to file for an environmental worksheet, if the permit was approved.

"The Friends of Hurrle Hall used the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act to sue the Sisters in 2016," Manderscheid said. "If



Submitted photo

Dam Festival medallion found in LF dog park

Laurie Koll of Little Falls was the lucky person who found the Dam Festival medallion, worth \$500, at the dog park in Little Falls. The medallion hunt was sponsored by Mid Minnesota Federal Credit Union (MMFCU). Pictured are (from left): MMFCU staff Allison LaBorde; Laurie Koll and MMFCU Little Falls teller supervisor Karen Dauer.

This week's government meetings

The Little Falls City Council meets at 6:30 p.m. Monday, June 20, at Little Falls City Hall.

The Morrison County Board of Commissioners will meet at 9 a.m. Tuesday, June 21, at the Morrison County Government Center.



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HOW TO VOTE:
Starting Monday, June 20th through Sunday, July 10th readers will be able to go to our website,
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Hurle Hall

(Continued from Page 2A)

the Friends of Hurle Hall choose to sue the Sisters again, we will, this time, be forced to defend the Sisters' decision."

Sharon said, as she thought of the issue, "respect" was what kept coming to mind. She contended that sometimes to deconstruct something and see it go on to be reused in "the Franciscan way" is better, and it could be a part of the Sisters' legacy moving forward.

"I do not want to see it have to go into demolition by neglect," Sharon said. "You're not going to be able to care for this. I would love to hand \$12 million over, but I don't have it. If anybody else does, please step forward. I think that would

make a lot of smiles happen."

LeMieur further said she was "sick about this," and noted that Sharon was almost in tears during her statement.

Ultimately, however, she reiterated that the Sisters don't have the money to take care of Hurle Hall. She said everyone there loves old houses and old buildings. They'd love to "save everything old." But there comes a point where it just does not make sense.

"If somebody's got \$12 million — I hate to say it like this — put your money where your mouth is," LeMieur said. "It's been six years since we last visited this and no one's come back to us until today. There's nobody who came and said, 'We have money. Can you help us?' We've heard nothing."

Block agreed that he hoped someone would come forward, and Don Opatz — a charter member of the HPC in 1992 — said it is probably the hardest decision he has had to make on the Commission.

When asked, Manderscheid added that the Sisters had retained a construction manager to oversee the deconstruction process. Though there is not a fixed cost, at this point, he said the estimated cost, all-in, was \$1 million to \$1.1 million.

Joel Larson, a downtown business owner and ex-officio member of the HPC, said he agreed that Little Falls needs housing, but there were better uses of more than \$12 million if a developer wants to provide housing in Little Falls.

Ultimately, he said, as the building's owners, the

Sisters should be able to do as "their heart warrants."

"I understand people's point of view like, 'We've got to save it. We've got to save it,'" Larson said. "I understand that, but it's been six years. If you're very serious about it — it's always like, somebody else can do this. 'I want this, but you make it happen.' They should have made something happen."

Just before the vote, Maciej asked if the HPC could table the decision until its next meeting so that the Friends of Hurle Hall could work with an attorney to draw up a letter of intent to purchase Hurle Hall.

Wednesday, Kevin Maciej sent a letter to the editor of the *Morrison County Record* stating a buyer has come forward. An appeal on

the HPC's decision to grant the permit is expected to be heard by the Little Falls City Council during its meeting at 7:30 p.m. Monday, June 20, at Little Falls City Hall.

"A comment was made about us tabling this, having a chance to purchase it," Block said. "I guess that would be between the Sisters and the Friends of Hurle Hall."

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City of Hillman	Township of Parker
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City of Sobieski	Township of Platte
City of Swanville	Township of Richardson
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The Morrison County Auditor-Treasurer's Office will be mailing out Primary Election Ballots between July 5th and July 26th, 2022, to all registered voters as of 5 pm on July 19th, 2022, who live within the boundaries of the above Cities and Townships. Your polling place will not be open on Primary Election Day. A registered voter who will be absent from the precinct may request, in writing, that the ballot be mailed to the voter at a different address.

Anyone not currently registered to vote and is eligible to vote for the Primary Election, should contact the Morrison County Auditor-Treasurer's Office and complete an Absentee Ballot Application.

Ballots must be returned to the address below prior to 8 pm on Election Day, August 9th, 2022, either by postage paid return mail, in person or by designated agent. Ballots will be accepted:

Monday thru Friday	- 8 am - 4:30 pm
Saturday, August 6th	- 10 am - 3 pm
Monday, August 8th	- 8 am - 5 pm
Tuesday, August 9th	- 7 am - 8 pm

Ballots will be counted after 8 pm on Election Day, August 9, 2022 at the Morrison County Government Center.

CHELSEY ROBINSON
COUNTY AUDITOR-TREASURER
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For additional information or questions:
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