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SENTINEL-PRESS

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Our public notices are also published on the web at:

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- Jackson County
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Ordinance discussed *Who should pay for unnecessary fire calls?*

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

Jackson County needs to educate rural residents to notify officials when they plan to do open burning of a field or ditch, but the county does not need an ordinance requiring the notice, several area rural residents told the Board of Supervisors last week.

Approximately 15 rural residents attended a public hearing on Nov. 10 called by the supervisors to gather comments on a proposed ordinance requiring advance notice of open burning.

Most of those addressing the board expressed opposition to the measure, saying that education rather than legislation is the key.

The three-page measure was proposed by the Jackson County Fire Chiefs Association as a way of reducing the instances in which firefighters are dispatched to a fire that they find is a controlled burn, or a fire deliberately set to burn a pasture, prairie, roadside ditch or large amounts of landscape waste, including dead trees.

Most such unnecessary fire calls result from a passerby seeing flames or smoke and calling 911 with his or her cell telephone to report what they may think is a fire out of control.

The supervisors took no action on the proposed ordinance. Chairman Jack Willey said the board would meet with Lyn Medinger, the county's emergency management coordinator who is representing the fire chiefs organization, and some of the chiefs to modify the ordinance.

Willey said the board would not approve the ordinance in its present form and additional public hearings would be held on any new proposed ordinance.

The ordinance would require that anyone planning to do a controlled burn to notify the Maquoketa Law Center beforehand, giving the date, time and location of the burn and the name and telephone number of the person doing the burning.

The ordinance does not apply to smaller fires, such as burn barrels, campfires and burning of plastic pesticide containers and seed bags.

Supervisor Larry "Buck" Koos listed several questions the he said the ordinance does not answer, such as how much advance notice is required and more specifically what items could be burned without requiring a call.

"I understand what the fire departments are trying to do," added Koos, who is a 20-year veteran of the LaMotte Volunteer Fire Department.

"I think their idea here is to quit running on these wild goose chases that cost the departments a lot of money and henceforth cost the county taxpayers money."

He suggested that the ordinance be clarified "because I don't think there's been a topic where I've gotten as many phone calls."

"I think some of the wording in this is a little vague," Koos told Medinger. "I think you need to sit down and work something out that's mutually agreeable between the fire departments and the taxpayers."

Medinger said the ordinance is similar to that used successfully in two counties, including Clinton.

Supervisor Steve Flynn also questioned whether an ordinance is needed.

"I think if we could educate the public to call in when they have a burn, I think that would solve this problem," Flynn said.

"I don't know if we need to legislate an ordinance to try to get people educated to a common sense thing to call the law center or the Maquoketa (Police Department) if they're having a substantial burn."

He said the possible maximum penalty of a \$625 fine or 30 days in jail "to me seems a little steep."

Flynn and several others asked about statistics that show the lack of notification is a problem.

Medinger said he didn't have figures because fire chiefs file reports directly with the state. He said he would collect that information.

Maquoketa Fire Chief Mark Beck said the fire chiefs aren't trying to say you can't burn. All we're asking for here is a common courtesy to your local fire departments."

He said he didn't know if an ordinance is the total answer, and added that education also is needed and "we had to start somewhere. We can tweak this."

He added that the Iowa Department of Natural Resources has a rule requiring permission from the local fire chief in advance of open burning. He said the rule carries a penalty, but is rarely enforced.

Mark Drake of rural Maquoketa suggested that when a person reports a fire with his cell phone, that they be asked to check to make certain what they're reporting isn't a controlled burn.

Koos said he received several similar comments from callers.

"My response is, how are you going to regulate someone who's trying to be a Good Samaritan?"

"We don't have to have it all written down," Drake said. "We need to get out there, educate the people and have each fire department tell people, 'Before you burn, let us know.'"

Medinger said the fire chiefs association estimated it would take three years to educate people and added, "we need to start somewhere."

Mark Ostwinkle said people should use common sense before they decide to do a controlled burn and avoid burning when conditions are exceptionally dry or windy.

Ostwinkle also said if he is burning a large tree, which might burn for two or three days, he would not comply with a requirement in the proposed ordinance that an adult remain at the scene until the fire is out.

Dick Ostert of rural Maquoketa said many things are over-regulated. He called the \$625 fine "utterly ridiculous." He suggested that a farmer will leave a fire that gets out of hand rather than report it for fear of being fined.

Ron Juergens said information is needed on how many unnecessary fire calls are made.

"Every time you enact an ordinance, you're taking some of our rights away from us," he said. "This is just common sense." He also questioned whether the sheriff's office has the time and availability to investigate controlled burns in which

■ **BURNING,**
Please turn to page 26



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

Light bulbs for food

Save some money and help feed area residents in need. Maquoketa Municipal Electric Utility is collecting nonperishable food items for the Maquoketa Community Cupboard. In exchange for a nonperishable food item, MMEU customers will receive a free compact fluorescent light bulb. The bulbs are energy efficient, replacing traditional 60-watt bulbs while using 75 percent less energy. MMEU employees Julie Babcock, Carmen Gerlach and Nancy Buck are shown holding the light bulbs behind some of the food items they've collected so far. The light bulbs for food project will continue until MMEU's supply of 3,000 light bulbs is gone.

Election results declared official

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The results of Jackson County's municipal elections were completed last week when the Board of Supervisors canvassed the outcome and used a tie-breaker to decide one race that ended in a draw.

Sherry Short, a write-in candidate, was chosen for a seat on the Baldwin City Council over Jean Miller, whose name was on the ballot. Both received nine votes to tie for the final seat to be filled.

Supervisors Chairman Jack Willey drew Short's name out of a coffee mug during the supervisors meeting on Nov. 10.

The supervisors also made the election results official with the canvass of the voting results. No changes were made from the unofficial results reported on election night, Nov. 3, said M. Joell

Deppe, county auditor and elections commissioner.

"Everything went really well," Deppe said of the voting process in the county's 12 municipalities.

Sabula recorded the highest voter turnout with 45.8 percent, or 251 of the town's 548 eligible registered voters casting ballots, either at the polls or by absentee.

Sabula also had the most crowded council race, with seven candidates running for two council seats. The mayoral race also was contested with two candidates vying for the office.

Here are turnout results for the other cities:

■ Andrew, 10.3 percent, with 32 of the town's 312 registered voters casting ballots.

■ Baldwin, 25.5 percent, with 24 of 94 registered voters.

■ **ELECTION,**
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