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IN THIS ISSUE

Surveys could
determine fate of
Andrew schools



Page 3

Local	Pages 2-3
Family	Pages 4-6
Obituaries	Page 15
Sports	Pages 16-17
Classifieds	Page 19
Agri/Business	Pages 20-21

SUPPLEMENTS

■ Aldi

Due to a varying number of supplements purchased by our advertising customers for insertion in *The Maquoketa Sentinel-Press*, subscribers in some areas may not receive all the supplements listed.

PUBLIC NOTICES

- Foreclosure Petition
- Chase Home Financial
vs. Brandy Pataska et al
- Maquoketa City Council
- January 4, 2010 meeting
- JC Board of Supervisors
- December 22, 2009 meeting
- December 29, 2009 meeting
- JC Sheriff Sale
- BAC Home Loan Serv.
vs. Sue Franzen et al
- Notice of Intent
- Bellevue School Water permit
- City of Maquoketa
- 4th Quarter Building permits
- Maquoketa Community School
- Jan. 6, 2010 Special meeting
Bus Drivers Bargaining Unit
- Jan. 6, 2010 Special meeting
Custodians Bargaining Unit
- Wapsi Wireless
- MEGA Talk
- Cascade Communications
- Rates
- MMEU
- Annual Wages

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- Jackson County
- City of Maquoketa
- City of Andrew
- City of Baldwin
- City of Monmouth
- City of Delmar
- Delwood School District
- Maquoketa School District

Goals set will need budget to back them

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

More than once, development of the city's downtown rated as a top priority when the Maquoketa City Council that took office this month met to set goals for this year.

Street improvements, clean-up of the outdoor swimming pool site, the YMCA budget and wind turbines also rated as priorities.

All seven members that make up the 2010 City Council and Mayor Jason Hute recently chose capital projects and programs on which they would like to concentrate during the year.

DeWitt City Administrator Steve Lindner led the two-hour session, which the council holds annually near the end of each year.

The council chose its priorities for capital projects and programs from among a list of potential goals suggested by individual council members and city department heads.

Council members briefly reviewed the lists, then voted for the possible goals it would most like to see as priorities.

On the capital projects list, downtown captured the most interest, with all eight council members voting for a project that would replace the downtown infrastructure, such as water, sewer and stormwater lines, and undertake a streetscape project that could change traffic flow and bring other changes to the business district.

Continued repair and replacement of streets also rated as a priority. The council has identified Quarry Street as the next street for comprehensive rebuilding, as was done in recent years with Western Avenue and South Jones and Thomas avenues.

Also rating as a priority for capital projects was installation of a wind turbine to provide electricity for the Maquoketa Area Family YMCA. The city last year received a \$156,836 grant from the Iowa Office of Energy Independence that would help finance purchase and installation of a wind generator for the YMCA facility.

Other capital priorities identified by the new council include updating the equipment for the city's local-access cable television channels and improvements to the sewage treatment plant that would improve and speed up the treatment of the large amount of wastewater that comes into the plant following a major rain.

The top program goal for the council this year is disposing of the former outdoor swimming pools and bathhouse property to the Maquoketa Community School District.

A committee representing the council and school board has held talks about the possibility of the pools being filled in, the bathhouse removed and the property developed as a parking lot for Goodenow Field.

One suggestion has been to plant grass on the property and use it for school-related recreational purposes as well as parking for football games and soccer matches.

Completion of the clean-up of the downtown fire debris and development of a plan to attract new construction to the

fire site also was a high program priority for the council.

Along with that goal, the council also listed development of a strategic plan for renewal of the downtown as a top priority.

Concern over the budget for the YMCA was shown, as that also became a priority. The city has committed to subsidize the YMCA by \$200,000 a year for the first three years to help cover the cost of operating the YMCA facility and the city's other recreational programs.

Rounding out the top programming priorities was updating of a book that contains large aerial photographs of the city. The book is used for many purposes, including zoning issues and land-use planning. The photos in the current book were taken in 1978 and are now considered outdated.

Among other projects that received votes but not enough to make the top-priority list were upgrading of 17th Street, the gravel road that serves the Prairie Creek subdivision, purchase of a tanker truck for the fire department, development of an outdoor water park at the YMCA and improvements to the community center, including the roof, ceiling tiles, floor and painting.

Lindner stressed to the council the importance of maintaining communication among all members and respecting each other's opinions.

Council member Amy Moore said she wanted the council to hold more informal meetings to inform residents of the council's plans and priorities and to encourage residents to attend and give their views.

She said she felt that people may be more inclined to attend and offer their opinions at an informal meeting that isn't televised rather than a formal meeting.

Former Mayor Tom Messerli stressed the importance of attending meetings of the council's committees. Details of many council issues are discussed in depth during the committee meetings, then brought to the council for action.

"You have to go to the meetings. You can't just rely on reading the minutes," Messerli cautioned.

The council agreed by consensus to try holding some informal meetings. None have been scheduled.

Mayor Jason Hute urged the council to do more collaboration with the school district, a theme he also raised in his state-of-the-city address last week.

Hute also said the council needs to give Stacy Driscoll, city economic development director, additional guidance.

"She's out there on her own," Hute said. "We need to work more closely with her."

Councilman Ed Turney said the city needs to use "every tool" to promote economic development and more jobs.

Lindner also stressed the importance of budgeting and committing the funds needed to make the goals a reality.

"You have to understand that what's important to you take some dollars," Lindner told the council.

"To get things done, you've got to figure out a way to pay for it. Very few things on your lists are free."



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

Bel Tubbs, Friends of Jackson County Conservation member, sorts some of the items on loan from the Office of the State Archaeologist as she prepares the "Technology from the Past" exhibit at the Hurstville Interpretive Center.

Flint napping to be demonstrated

Stepping Eagle, a local prehistoric weapons technician, will demonstrate techniques that have been used for thousands of years to produce tools for hunting and preparing game during a program on Sunday, Jan. 17 at the Hurstville Interpretive Center.

The flint napping demonstration will begin at 1 p.m. and is open to the public.

In addition to observing the tool making process and the materials that Stepping Eagle uses, participants will have the opportunity to test their skills at using an atlatl and dart, a weapon system that was used to hunt mammoths and mastodons 11,000 years ago.

Also on Jan. 17, visitors will be able to view two temporary exhibits, "Technology from the Past" and "The Tarkio Valley Sloths."

The technology exhibit, on loan from the Office of the State Archaeologist, features replicas of materials and tools used by early Iowans to carry out activities of their daily lives. The sloths exhibit, on loan from the University of Iowa Museum of Natural History, tells the story of the discovery and excavation of a Jefferson's Ice Age ground sloth in southwest Iowa.

Both exhibits will be at the Hurstville Interpretive Center through March 14.

For more information, contact the Jackson County Conservation office at (563) 652-3783.