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Decreased revenue may close center

By DOUGLAS MELVOLD

The Scott County Family Y this week asked the Maquoketa City Council to provide \$3,000 more in funding than the city has budgeted for next year and to close the Maquoketa Community Center.

Scott County Family Y officials proposed the measures to the council's Finance Committee Thursday, March 18, as a way of dealing with decreased revenue at the Maquoketa Area Family YMCA.

The Finance Committee is in the process of negotiating a renewal of the city's management agreement with the Scott County Family Y, which operates the YMCA facility and the city's recreation programs under a management contract.

Scott County YMCA officials on Thursday proposed that the city provide a subsidy of \$178,000 for the 2010-11 fiscal year, which begins July 1. That figure amounts to an increase of \$3,000 over the \$175,000 that the city budgeted for the year.

Although the council adopted the city's budget for the year with \$175,000 earmarked as the subsidy, the Finance Committee recommended approval of the higher subsidy figure.

The committee did not make a recommendation on the request to close the community center, but said it wanted to discuss that proposal further.

The committee's recommendations will be considered by the full City Council at its April 5 meeting.

Closing the community center would save approximately \$11,000, Frank Klipsch, president and chief executive officer of the Scott County YMCA organization, told the committee.

Klipsch said the community center is used only for five indoor cycling classes per week. The facility had been intended also for use as a child watch facility, where parents could drop off their youngsters while they went to the YMCA to exercise.

The child watch service had little use, probably due to the inconvenience of having the child watch service in a different facility than the YMCA, Klipsch said.

Committee member Don Schwenker said he wanted to discuss further the future of the community center before acting on the proposal.

"I don't want to just close the community center," Schwenker said. He agreed that use of the community center overall has decreased in recent years. But he noted that a council goal for this year is to upgrade the facility, including a new roof and carpeting.

Groups other than the YMCA that rent the community center for activities would have to find another facility.

The \$696,000 budget the YMCA has proposed for next year also calls for a 4 percent increase in paid memberships.

Statistics given to the committee show that as of February, the YMCA had 571 paid memberships, just over half of the 1,100 paid memberships city and YMCA officials set at a target to support the facility.

That number represents a decline from the peak number of 854 paid memberships in March of 2008.

Asked how the YMCA would increase membership, Klipsch said they would introduce a "while you were away" promotion to entice former members to rejoin.

He said the YMCA also would work with physicians and others in the community who may be referring people for exercise programs.

"We will be more pro-active than we have been," Klipsch said.

He urged the committee to make a decision soon about the proposed community center closing and other issues.

The Maquoketa YMCA has been without a full-time director since Saturday, March 13, after Mark Proeschel resigned to take a new job in Madison, Wis.

Tony Calabrese, chief operating officer of the Scott County Family Y, is serving as acting director pending naming of Proeschel's successor.

Klipsch said they YMCA has two finalist candidates for the Maquoketa position. He has said the YMCA will avoid hiring a new director until after the management agreement is completed.

He said the two candidates are awaiting a decision and noted that a prolonged delay could cause one or both to withdraw or make other plans.

Scott County Y officials also reviewed with the committee several sheets containing graphs and statistical information on the Maquoketa YMCA.

Klipsch noted that although membership is down, the YMCA has a retention average of 74 percent, meaning that 74 percent of members renew their memberships after a year.

A retention average of 60 to 70 percent "indicates you're doing well," Klipsch said. "A retention average of 74 percent is a pretty positive response."

"People aren't leaving in droves," Calabrese said. "They just aren't coming in fast enough."

Nearly the entire drop in paid memberships since the peak in March of 2008 is in family memberships. While the youth and adult memberships have held steady, with 31 and 143 respectively as of February, paid family memberships have declined from 675 in March 2008 to 394 last month.

Klipsch said the drop-off in family memberships could be attributed partly to the economic recession. He said he doubted that the increase in the membership fee played a major role in the family membership decline, because the decline already was showing a trend when the rate hike was implemented in January of 2009.

In addition to the paid memberships, an additional 89 members receive financial assistance through the YMCA's scholarship program and 63 took out short memberships.

Monthly usage of the Maquoketa YMCA shows about 7,000 visits during February, down from a high of about 9,500 visits in January of 2008.

An analysis of what hours the YMCA is being used shows a fairly even distribution throughout the day.

In February, 12 percent of the total pa-



MSP photo by Kelly Gerlach

Maquoketa volunteer firefighter Shawn Gerardy kneels on the roof of a lean-to check smoke coming out of an exhaust fan at Perxactly Bar and Grill in Maquoketa. Firefighters on Thursday afternoon, March 18, extinguished a small blaze in the area of the electrical circuit panel to the business. The fire caused electricity to be shut off to the business until repairs are made.

Blaze extinguished at Perxactly bar

A Maquoketa tavern and restaurant is closed temporarily after firefighters doused a small fire at the business this week.

Maquoketa volunteer firefighters were summoned at 2:42 p.m. Thursday, March 18, to Perxactly Bar & Grill, 110 S. Olive St.

Firefighters arrived to find flames coming from an area above the box containing the electrical circuit panels to the building, according to Fire Chief Mark Beck.

The box was mounted in the rear of the building, near the walk-in cooler.

Firefighters extinguished the fire. They cut out an area of wall at the rear of the building to check that the fire hadn't spread to the area between the interior and exterior walls, Beck said.

"It could have been a lot worse," Beck said.

The fire was contained to the area around the circuit breaker box. Some water damage was done in that area.

All patrons and employees got out of the building safely, he said.

Electricity to the business will remain off until a new circuit panel is installed and any other needed electrical work is done, the fire chief said.

The business' insurance representative also was to visit the site, he said.

Beck said the exact cause of the fire is unknown.

Firefighters were at the scene for approximately 45 minutes.

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