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Five Flags board reacts to proposal

\$25 million plan is met with mixed reviews after commission members backed \$90 million overhaul

BY JOHN KRUSE
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Five Flags Civic Center Commission members this week offered mixed opinions on a new proposal to put more than \$25 million into rehabilitating the center without expanding its footprint or seating capacity. During a commission meeting,

City Manager Mike Van Milligen discussed the proposal to invest at least \$25.8 million into the facility to address a variety of needs and deficiencies.

Some commission members said the idea was the best direction for the city to take following years of discussion but no action toward a more ambitious project.

“I just think we have to be realistic,” said Rod Bakke, chair of the commission. “I believe Mike’s proposal does fit a great deal of the criteria that I have personally looked for.”

However, others found the proposal to be too conservative and suggested that a larger project that expands the arena space would better benefit the community.

“It still isn’t addressing some of the movement around and inside the arena,” said Commission member Brenda Christner.



Rod Bakke

The city’s new proposal harkens back to a scenario first presented in 2018 that would involve making renovations to Five Flags to address several deficiencies, including aging equipment, a leaking roof and outdated seating.

Four years ago, that scope of work was estimated to cost \$18.6 million,

though costs likely have climbed since. Additionally, other issues at Five Flags have emerged since then and also need to be addressed.

City officials suggest a limited renovation be pursued again, with the bulk of the work being conducted in a two-year period, while another 13 years would be spent making smaller improvements through capital improvement projects.

The new scenario was proposed partly because funding it wouldn’t

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STEPHEN GASSMAN • Telegraph Herald

About 50 guests gathered at the Merrick home in Dubuque for Friendsgiving on Saturday.

Friendsgiving leans in

Casual celebrations become tradition for some

BY ELIZABETH KELSEY
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The first time that Meggan Merrick held a Thanksgiving dinner with friends, it was simply a way to practice for the main event of hosting her family later that month.

“I was newly divorced and just had gotten my own place, and I was going to be hosting Thanksgiving for the first time with my family by myself,” she recalled. “I thought I’d do a trial run the week before and just invite a few friends and cook a turkey.”

That first November, about 10 years ago, perhaps 10 people came for the celebration, she said.

This year, around 50 people crowded into Merrick’s rural Dubuque home on Saturday for her annual celebration of Friendsgiving, a national trend that has grown in popularity in the last decade.

Friendsgiving events often feature all the classic trappings of Thanksgiving, from the turkey-centric menu to group activities and football games on television, with one major difference: the majority of attendees are friends and neighbors, rather than family members.

“Family holidays can be tricky, but Friendsgiving is just easy,” said Merrick. “You don’t have a lot of expectations or stresses, it’s really relaxed, and everybody looks forward to it because you’re going to one house and hanging out with the people you’re really close with.”

RISING POPULARITY

The word “Friendsgiving,” defined as “a celebration or meal shared among friends on or near Thanksgiving,” was added to Merriam-Webster’s

See **FRIENDS, PAGE 3A**



Adrianna Joy Photography

Adrianna Webb and her husband, Logan, (center, rear) have hosted Friendsgiving at their apartment in Dubuque for several years.

Maquoketa school board weighs employee expression policy

Flags will remain in classroom while officials continue their discussion.

BY ELIZABETH KELSEY
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MAQUOKETA, Iowa — Maquoketa Community School District officials will continue to discuss the presence of two flags in a high school classroom after school board members this week approved an amended, state-required policy regulating employee expression.

Board members voted unanimously to approve the second and final reading of the policy, amended to remove a sentence dictating that classroom displays should be “primarily focused on curriculum” and instead referencing several existing board policies addressing employee

political activity and the teaching of controversial subjects.

Approval of the employee expression policy first came before the board in September to bring the district into compliance with state law. Board members approved the first reading of the policy at that time.

Around the same time, however, district administrators also heard from a parent concerned about the presence of flags supporting LGBTQ+ Pride and the Black Lives Matter movement in the classroom of Maquoketa High School English teacher Mykah Kennedy. The flags have hung in Kennedy’s classroom since she began teaching in the district three years ago.

Board members last month voted unanimously to table the second reading

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U.S. renews COVID booster shot push **15A**



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