

Riverside's spring dilemma: Water, pumps and chlorine

BY PAUL D. BOWKER
The News

RIVERSIDE

Water, pumps and chlorine are quickly turning into a major spring project, and headache, in Riverside.

A repair project is expected to begin at the city's wastewater plant by May 1.

Designs for an even bigger reconstruction and repair project is underway for the city's water treatment plant.

Additionally, Monday's City Council session was dominated by reports of broken pumps, a non-functioning chlorine and PH panel, leaking pipes and flow preventor repairs.

People Service, which operates the city's water systems on a daily basis, has been working with the city on equipment issues, and workers actually check chlorine and PH levels

regularly by hand because the electronics used to check those levels aren't working. One of the systems is down to two working pumps.

"I've got some frustration. This is all coming at once," said Council Person Edgar McGuire.

Axiom Consultants of Iowa City, which serves as the city engineering firm, has been heavily involved in the design planning for improvements at the water and wastewater plants. The Council began to consider Monday whether an engineering firm specializing in water systems may also be needed. A representative from Purpose Associates, an engineering firm that has worked on water systems in other Iowa cities, spoke to the Council about what it can provide and was directed by Mayor Allen

Schneider to provide examples of programs at a future council meeting.

"We can't continue to go on, and wait, wait, wait," said Council Person Kevin Mills.

The Council did approve \$9,351 to Electric Pump of Des Moines for the repair of a pump at the wastewater plant and \$4,199 to Summit Fire Protection for the repair of a back-flow preventor.

The Council tabled action on the replacement of another pump, pending multiple quotes, and a chlorine and PH panel.

Third Street Update

Work on the Third Street water and sewer main project is nearing its end, Brian Boelk of Axiom Consultants told the Council. But some residents have contacted the city be-

cause of their desire to have a rail or fence constructed above a retaining wall. They also are concerned about the steep slope in portions of the project near their property. The project included lowering the elevation of Third Street in an area of the city, located north of downtown, that is extremely hilly.

Prior to work starting on the project last year, Axiom Consultants and the city held a series of public meetings to discuss the scope of the work.

"I think we went above and beyond trying to appease these people," McGuire said.

Council Person Lois Schneider suggested that the City Council hold an on-site work session to view the concerns.

Council Action

The Council approved a

payment of \$143,255.31 to Streb Construction for work completed on the Third Street project.

The Council approved a rezoning of a pair of properties from C-3 Avenue of the Saints Commercial to C-1 Central Business Commercial, pending an approved site plan.

The Council approved a request from La Chiva Loka restaurant for the closure of Railroad Street on May 5 and 6 for a Cinco de Mayo celebration and outdoor concert.

The Council approved a resolution waiving the right to review a preliminary plat request of a property that is being considered by Washington County.

Next board meeting: The City Council's next regularly scheduled meeting is at 6 p.m. May 1.

Johnson County faces \$18.1M in building repairs/replacement

BY PAUL D. BOWKER
The News

IOWA CITY

Seven of 26 Johnson County-owned buildings were rated in very poor condition and in need of replacement, according to a county-wide facilities assessment study conducted by Faithful+Gould, a global management consultant firm.

The Johnson County Board of Supervisors were given the assessment results at its April 12 work session and quickly initiated plans to convene a capital planning committee that would meet in the next month.

Consultants from Faithful+Gould estimated current replacement and repairs

at \$18.1 million with that number rising to \$25 million in 10 years.

A county-owned maintenance shed in Lone Tree is among the seven buildings receiving the lowest rating.

Also on that list is the building housing the Sheriff's Department and county jail. Sheriff Brad Kunkel said the building on South Capitol Street in Iowa City was constructed 42 years ago for a staff that has doubled in size to nearly 100.

"We have to think big picture," Kunkel told the Board. "That 35,000 in rural Johnson County will continue to grow. How do we accommodate those demands, those needs, those

towns growing, and we can't keep doing it out of this building."

Of the 26 assessed buildings, 11 were rated in good condition. Another six were rated in poor condition and two in fair condition. A county shed in Frytown was rated in poor condition.

Replacement of the Sheriff's complex was estimated at \$4.5 million while replacement of the Lone Tree shed would be \$314,000.

The County Courthouse is in the midst of a renovation that is costing millions of dollars.

The Board agreed on forming a committee consisting of Dave Curtis, Facilities Man-

ager, along with a project systems analyst and representatives from the county's finance, special projects, attorney, and Planning, Development and Sustainability (PDS) departments.

"We need to be thinking about, what's the long-term plan?" said Supervisor V Fixmer-Oraiz.

FY24 Budget

A public hearing on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 Budget will be held Wednesday at 5:30 p.m.

The budget calls for \$146.8 million in expenditures, or \$163.8 million including operating transfers. The new budget year begins July 1, but the

budget must be finalized and approved by April 30, per state code.

Property taxes are expected to top \$65 million in FY24.

For more information, or to view the proposed budget, go to: johnsoncountyiowa.gov.

Board Action

The Board awarded All American Concrete of West Liberty with a contract of \$484,846 for work on the healing trail at the Johnson County Historic Poor Farm.

The Board issued a proclamation in honor of Fair Housing Month.

Next board meeting: The board will hold its next formal meeting at 9 a.m. April 20.

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graphical graphic novel by Maia Kobabe. In late February, the library received a formal request that the book be withdrawn from circulation. The board was made aware of the reconsideration request at their March 14 meeting and was expected to make a decision at their meeting this month.

Although the book has won awards and has been lauded as "a useful and touching guide on gender identity," it also reached #1 on the American Library Association's list of Most Challenged Books of 2021 for having "LGBTQIA+ content and because it was considered to have sexually explicit images."

Before the week began, the library had received two requests for reconsideration for "Gender Queer"; then unexpectedly, in the 24 hours before the meeting, they received five more. Two of the requests had "a petition-style list" of signatures attached, Library Director Trevor Shering told The News after the meeting. Of the 50-some names on the list, Shering said a little more

than half of them are library patrons. Four names were illegible, and 18 or so are not library patrons but are Washington County residents.

The library also received an influx of phone calls during that time, which tipped the library off that the night's meeting might not be business as usual.

"I got a lot of phone calls, on both sides. People in support and people who were against it, who called and asked, 'When's the board meeting?' I've never had anyone call to ask when a board meeting is," Shering said. "That's kind of how I knew how many people were coming."

Informed of the situation, one of the board members asked Shering to request a Sheriff's deputy be present at the meeting, which there was. "We didn't anticipate that anything bad was going to happen, that there would be a negative reaction," Shering said. "It's just better to be safe."

In spite of knowing there would be no discussion by the board of the challenged book, several members of the public

voiced their opinion on the issue during the Public Forum portion of the meeting.

James Jennings, editor at the Southeast Iowa Union, said that speaking as a Kalona resident, "My first thought was, is it a book? Yup. Then it shouldn't be banned. Period. Full Stop. We need to have all ideas represented in the library. Even ones that offend us."

Brown Rencher of Riverside agreed that the book should stay on the library shelves. "Those LGBTQ adults who reviewed this book say overwhelmingly that they wish that that would have been available during those confusing years when they were trying to understand their feelings," he noted.

Molly Jennings, Kalona, was also in agreement. "There are people for whom this is vital, and for whom this could maybe even be lifesaving. These people deserve to see themselves reflected in the library. The beauty of it all is that you have the choice not to read it, but you don't have the right to make that choice for

others."

David, Wellman, did not disagree with the thoughts previously expressed, but added, "I guess my angle personally is my concern with the pornographic images that are in the book, that I wouldn't necessarily want my child looking at at a young age."

Elaina Short, Hills, said, "I don't have a problem with children reading this book," but didn't want it available "readily on the floor" where her child could easily look at it without

her knowledge. She did not indicate her child's age.

Per the library board's policy, the board listened to the thoughts expressed but did not comment. After the public forum closed, many members of the public left the meeting, which continued on to discuss regular business.

The Kalona Public Library's next regular board meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 9 at 6 p.m. in the Library's conference room.

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4-HERS COMPETE IN STATE 4-H HIPPOLOGY CONTEST

The 2022-2023 Washington County 4-H Horse and Pony Hippology Team competed at the Equine Extravaganza Saturday, April 15 and returned home with 5th place overall. This contest is hosted annually by Iowa 4-H at Ellsworth Community College. The group has spent the last three months preparing for this contest. The contest tested 4-Hers on several topics involving anatomy, breeds, colors & markings, conformation, digestive, equestrian events, feed, tack and other horse related topics.

According to Jessica Read, volunteer 4-H leader and Hippology coach, "The 4-Hers had a great time, learned a lot and are very motivated to continue their hard work. I love watching these members grow in friendship through these 4-H opportunities."

The team included Bella Dickinson, Charlee Read, Braydon Clough and Bryce Roth.

For more information on Washington County 4-H, Horse Project area or the horse project area, contact the Washington County Extension Office at 319-653-4811 or follow "Washington County 4-H - Iowa" on Facebook for up-to-date information on youth outreach throughout the county.

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