

School Board considers new school day system

By Jim Rudisill

After one year of trying an eight-hour school day, the Columbus School District might switch to a new system to increase class opportunities and increase classroom time. High school principal Jeff Maeder told the school board during its January 17 regular monthly meeting the change would help solve those two problems caused by the eight-period day. He stressed the idea was still in the planning stage and details still needed to be developed.

"It will truly be a staff decision," he told the board, explaining teams of administrators and teachers were currently researching the idea and a recommendation would be developed over the next few months.

Maeder said developing a complete proposal could force a delay in establishing next year's calendar.

Board members said they would be willing to wait, but the proposal would need to provide a good explanation on how the new system would work. Board member Sandy Martin said she was concerned about the potential impact on transfer students and graduation requirements.

In other action, the board agreed to certify the district's 33-cent portion of the Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL) for the 2011-12 school year. A 67-cent portion of the PPEL, which was approved by voters several years ago, is not affected by the board's action.

Superintendent Rich Bridenstine said the board-approved portion of the PPEL brings about \$70,000 of revenue to the district's budget. It can be used for transportation and infrastructure needs.

The board also agreed to begin

using a new testing system in the elementary school to evaluate student achievement. Elementary principal Shane Rosenberg said the Measures of Academic Progress (MAPS) testing could be conducted in February and May this year, with future testing in the fall and spring.

According to a three-year schedule Rosenberg presented to the board, all K-6 teachers would attend a mandatory workshop for new MAPS districts in February. Additional training and review meetings would be held throughout the three-year period.

After two years, the school district would have enough data of student growth to begin holding goal setting conferences with students. As additional achievement testing is conducted, those goals would be revisited and revised.

Board members said they supported the evaluation testing, but cautioned they did not want it to impact efforts to implement the district's Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP). The district has been implementing SIOP program over the past two years in an effort to boost student achievement scores.

Board members said they were concerned the additional training time needed for MAPS could limit the training needed for SIOP. Rosenberg said those concerns could be eased by holding many of the MAPS training periods during regular teacher in-service periods.

Board member Polly Prior voted against the MAPS testing plan, suggesting the district should wait until next year to implement it.

In final action, the board approved the third readings of several new board policies and received a

positive financial report on the swimming pool from Bridenstine. According to the pool report, the ending balance for the facility on September 30, 2010 was \$16,786. In the past, the balance was frequently in the red because of revenue shortfalls.

Bridenstine credited the voter-approved PERL fund for causing the turnaround, explaining it provides around \$30,000 in revenue support each year.

In other swimming pool discussion, Bridenstine reported the pool board was not recommending any

change in pool prices for 2011, but would offer \$5 discounts for some early purchases. He also said long-time pool manager Bob Curtis, who earlier announced he was resigning, had agreed to remain until a replacement manager is selected.

Lifeguards at the pool will also be provided with one-piece uniform swimwear, apparently in reaction to comments over past swimwear worn by the guards.

The board also agreed to hold a 2011-12 budget workshop on March 14.

An old fashioned mess



After a relatively mild winter, the Columbus Community was hit with an old fashioned mess on Monday. A combination of snow and sleet led to slick roads and sidewalks, causing travel to become hazardous. Schools were cancelled on Monday, and a two-hour delay was instituted on Tuesday. Like it or not, we're still in the grips of winter, and anything can happen.

City Council reviews water and sewer rates

By Jim Rudisill

Water and sewer rates in Columbus Junction will likely need to be increased in the near future, city officials warned during the council's regular January 12th meeting. Officials said the rates had remained the same for the past 12 years, but the flood of 2008 forced the city to begin using reserves and the current rates have not been able to restore the funds to their previous levels.

"We were doing pretty good until then, (but) then it just hammered us and now we're in a spot," council member Mark Huston explained.

Currently, the minimum water rate for city residents is \$10.75. Residents who use 3000 gallons of water a month pay \$13.50, while the charge for 5000 gallons of water is \$19. Sewer charges are based on water usage. A copyrighted report of 81 communities surveyed by French-Reneker Associates, Inc., Fairfield, in 2010 showed the median minimum water rate for the 81 communities was \$11.20. It jumped to \$23.50 for 3000 gallons and to \$31.80 for 5000 gallons.

Council member Phil Kaalberg agreed with Huston that the flood had caused a major shortfall in the water fund and the present low rates was not sustainable.

"We're going backward instead of forward and we have some expenses coming up. We need to get (added revenue)," he explained, adding the issue was coming up now because

city officials would soon begin developing budget proposals for the 2011-2012 fiscal year.

"We need to have the numbers finalized before the budget is completed," Kaalberg said.

Although officials did not discuss any proposed increase, the French-Reneker study might offer some guidelines. According to the study, the median rate for minimum water usage in the surveyed area has been slowly rising from \$10.25 in 2002 to \$11.52 in 2008. In 2010 however, the median rate actually dropped to \$11.20 for minimum usage. The rate for 3000 gallons of use however showed a constant rise, going from \$15.40 in 2002 to \$23.50 in 2010. The median 3000-gallon rate in 2005 was \$17.34 and \$18.89 in 2008. The median rates for other water usage rates showed similar increases between 2002 and 2010.

While no specific increases were suggested during the council meeting, officials said some action would be needed and quickly.

"We're going to get everyone talking about it," Kaalberg said, pointing out the city needed to replace 80 water meters and had other expenses coming up.

The council agreed to review the French-Reneker study and begin discussing possible increases at a later meeting. A final decision on water and sewer rates would also affect Columbus City and Fredonia. The three communities share a joint sewer

system, while Columbus Junction also supplies water to Columbus City.

In other action, the council approved an engineering services agreement with French-Reneker to provide design and engineering work on a planned levee improvement project. Under the agreement, the engineering firm will complete the work for a budgeted cost of \$103,000.

John Meyer, president of French-Reneker, said the company was planning to have the work completed in time for a bid letting in March or April, even though there had not been a lot of recent progress with the project. If the spring bid letting date holds, that could mean actual construction possibly starting this fall, Meyer said. Funding for the work is coming from a \$695,000 federal grant.

Meyer said the time frame could unravel if the city is required to conduct a more extensive environmental review than now planned. Meyer said the current review only will look at the levee itself, but if a borrow site is used for levee fill; another environmental review could be triggered. Hauling in fill from a commercial site would mean higher costs, but fewer environmental impacts.

Meyer also said a wetland delineation could impact the project. Louisa County Engineer Larry Roehl has agreed to conduct the delineation, but was not able to conduct the study last fall. Meyer said Roehl will need to complete it before any potential

wetland mitigation can be determined, which could also affect the overall project cost and other issues.

In final action, the council adopted the city police department's first policy and procedures manual and approved several procedural appointments for official banks and city newspaper.

Mayor Dan Wilson also announced he and other city representatives would be meeting Friday with Keep America Beautiful and Keep Iowa Beautiful officials. The organizations are helping the city develop several improvements around the community.

Wilson also asked council members to begin thinking about implementing a firearm restriction for public buildings and other areas. He said he was concerned recent state legislative action setting statewide rules for gun permits could lead to an increased number of people carrying firearms. "I lean towards adopting an ordinance to prohibit guns from this building," Wilson said, pointing out city offices and the library were both located in it. He said state legislation already apparently prohibited firearms in schools and public parks.

Wilson acknowledged the issue would be controversial, which was why he was not proposing anything, but only asking the council to begin studying the issue. "It's a hot button issue," Huston agreed. No timetable for discussing the idea was announced.

Whooping Cough becomes a concern in Louisa County

Whooping Cough is once again becoming a health concern for Louisa County residents. According to Louisa County Public Health Administrator, Alana Poage, "There have been four confirmed cases of pertussis in Louisa County since November 2010 occurring in residents aged 6 months to 20 years of age. We are urging every resident who has not had a Pertussis booster to obtain a DTaP vaccination now." The DTaP vaccine provides protection against diphtheria, pertussis and tetanus.

The cost for the adult DTaP vaccine is \$40 per dose and can be obtained at the Louisa County Public Health office in Wapello every Thursday

from 1 to 4 p.m. and by appointment.

Over 650 confirmed and probable cases of pertussis (whooping cough) were reported to the Iowa Department of Public Health in 2010, and activity continues in 2011. There were approximately 66 percent more cases of pertussis reported in 2010 than the average of the past five years. While children ages 5 to 14 years make up the bulk of reported cases, note that adults are important 'spreader's of the disease.

Children receive pertussis-containing vaccines between 2 months of age and school entry, and are recommended to get a booster dose of pertussis-containing vaccine at 11 or 12

years of age. Most adults in Iowa, however, haven't received a pertussis vaccination since childhood, leaving them fully susceptible. When they get the disease, their symptoms are often mistaken for a lingering cold. They spread the disease without even knowing that they have it.

It's especially important that adults receive a pertussis-containing vaccine because they can spread the disease others, particularly to infants who are too young to be immunized. In infants, pertussis can be severe and even deadly. Adults should receive the Tdap immunization (the adult tetanus vaccine that also contains whooping cough vaccine).

The most common symptoms of pertussis in children are fits of coughing, sometimes followed by vomiting, a 'whooping' sound as air is inhaled, and difficulty sleeping. In adults, however, only a lingering cough is often seen. This is why many adults do not realize they have pertussis. Doctors should consider pertussis in adult patients have a cough that lingers or does not respond to antibiotic treatment.

For more information about pertussis, including the Iowa Pertussis Update, visit www.idph.state.ia.us/Cade/default.aspx?group=3, and click on pertussis.

Briefly -

Early Childhood Board to meet

The Des Moines/Louisa Early Childhood Area Board (formerly Empowerment Board) will be meeting at the First Presbyterian Church, 801 Middle Street, Mediapolis, IA, today, Wednesday, January 19, 2011 at 10:00 a.m.

Grandview-Letts Lions Club to hold soup supper

The Grandview-Letts Lions Club will hold their annual soup supper on Saturday, January 22, 2011, from 5-7 p.m. at the NEW Community Center and Library in Letts. The all-you-can-eat menu includes: Chili and Wisconsin Cheese soups, homemade pies, celery, carrots, pickles, crackers and drinks. The cost for tickets is: (Advanced from any G-L Lions member) \$5.00; (At-the-door) \$6.00; (Ages 6-12) \$3.00; (Ages 5 and under) Free.

Letts TTT to meet

Letts chapter T-TTT will meet Thursday, January 20, 2011, at 7 p.m., at the home of Dorothy Bailey in Letts.

Pleasant Grove Church to hold Sausage and Pancake Supper

Pleasant Grove Community Church is having their annual Sausage and Pancake supper on Wednesday evening, Feb 2nd, from 4:30-7:00 p.m. Please bring friends and family for an evening of good food and fellowship. Free Will Offering. In the event of foul weather, call 319-480-4706 for information or cancellation.

Senior Center Board sponsors free lunch this Saturday

Attention Seniors: January is here and the dreary days of winter so come out on Saturday, Jan. 22, 2011 at 1 p.m. and have lunch at the Columbus Community Senior Center. It is sponsored by the Columbus Community Senior Board to have a great lunch and a chance to socialize with friends. Please come, bring your appetite, and bring a friend. Look forward to seeing you on Jan. 22, 2011.

Shellbark Club to meet

The Shellbark Club will meet Thursday, January 20th, at 11:30 a.m. at the Bistro in Washington.

Community Club to meet

The Columbus Community Club will meet this Thursday at Noon at the Senior Center. 2011 Dues are now due.

CWO seeks Princess and Prince of Hearts candidates

The Columbus Women's Organization is looking for candidates for their annual Prince and Princess of Hearts Contest. Children 0-5 years of age are eligible for the contest, which will run from Friday, January 28th through Friday, February 11, 2011. Deadline for entry and photos is Wednesday, January 26th at noon with all entry material delivered to Twyla Peters at the Columbus Medical Clinic, or Kirsten Shellbarger at Horak Insurance. Prince and Princess of Hearts will be determined by the largest amount of money donations in that child's name at these locations: Columbus Junction State Bank, The Community Bank and the Econ-O-Mart, between Friday, January 28th through Friday, February 11th, 2011. The Prince and Princess will be crowned on Saturday, February 12, 2011 beginning at 10:00 a.m. at the American Legion in Columbus Junction. The winners will each receive a \$50 Savings Bond donated by Community Bank and the Columbus Junction State Bank, and get to ride in the Columbus Day parade. **MUST BE PRESENT TO WIN!** All proceeds from the contest benefit the Senior Girls Dinner, annually sponsored by the C.W.O.

4-H Club to shovel snow

The Lego Dynamite 4-H club will shovel your drive and sidewalk for a free will donation. Funds collected will be used for our club's operating expenses. If you would like this done please call leader Tessa Pugh at 319-212-0422 or contact a member of the club.

Rep. Sands takes Oath of Office



(DES MOINES)— Rep. Tom Sands (R-Wapello) is seen here signing his oath of office in the Iowa House chamber as the 84th General Assembly kicked off Monday at the Capitol. Sands was re-elected on November 2nd. During the session, Rep. Sands can be reached at tom.sands@legis.state.ia.us or through the House switchboard at (515) 281-3221. The swearing in ceremony of all 100 state representatives begins a week full of ceremonies, including the condition of the state address by the governor, and the condition of the judiciary address by the Iowa Supreme Court chief justice. A full slate of committee work begins as well, as bills begin the process it takes to get them to the House floor for full debate. The legislative session is slated to last 110 days, ending April 29th.