

Memorandum

DATE: December 7, 2007
TO: Mayor & Council Members
FROM: Al Roder, City Administrator
RE: Friday Memo for the week of December 3 - 7, 2007

Here is a list of city activities for the week of December 3 - 7, 2007:

Administration

The city facility tour times will be as follows:

Tuesday, December 11th, beginning at 1:00 at city hall
Friday, December 14th, beginning at 7:30 at city hall.

The schedule for both days will be city hall, safety center, liquor store and library.

Information Technology

Melissa Reeder and Kurt Wolf met with Craig Dunton from St. Olaf Telco to discuss upcoming upgrades to the City's network. The exact day has not been determined, however within the next two weeks the City will move from the wireless backbone to a fiber backbone provided by St. Olaf Telco. This will be a private loop on fiber optics between City Hall and Safety Center.

A new LCD panel has been purchased to replace the existing TV located in the hallway outside the Council Chambers. The old TV picture and sound were starting to fail.

Kurt Wolf, Network Technician spent a day in class learning how to program our new data/voice switches that are installed at every facility. These switches handling all data and voice traffic within the City network.

Library

The annual Winter Walk seems to have been a huge success! An amazing 1,175 people went through the library last night to see the model train exhibit. New exhibitors Svea Drentlaw, Ed Buchwald and Clark Webster joined the Len Rado family, Mac and Ruthabeth McElrath, Wayne Kivell, John Machacek and Dale Turnacliff. Many, many thanks go to the exhibitors, the Teen Board and Friends of the Library, Leesa Wisdorf and Kathy Ness, the staff members who coordinated the event, the Street Department crew who set up traffic management prior to the event, and Rod Svien who cleaned up the mess afterward.

Library use increased in November over November of last year. Circulation at the library was up about 1.5%. The bookmobile was also busier. The library's Heritage Quest database (an electronic subscription that allow people to search for genealogical information from their homes) experienced over 1100 hits this month.

Because December tends to be a quiet month and because the college student volunteers are out of town, we have reduced the number of children's programs. First Steps will be open regular hours and Merlin Mondays will be held through next week. All other children's programming will resume the week of January 7, 2008.

The library will be closed on Monday, December 24 and Tuesday, December 25 as well as Tuesday, January 1 and will close at 5:30 p.m. (instead of 9:00) on Monday, December 31.

The Contemporary Women's Writers discussion group will meet next week at the home of Dot Lauer. For more information, contact Joan Ennis at the library.

The Long-range Planning Committee will meet next week to work on the library's long-range operational plan. The Long-range Planning Committee will be recruiting community members to help identify community needs and possible library responses to those needs.

Lynne Young attended a SELCO (Southeastern Libraries Cooperating) Advisory Committee meeting on Tuesday. The Advisory Committee consists of the library directors from all the member libraries. There have been a number of retirements and director changes in the member libraries, the most recent being the retirement of long-time Owatonna director, Graham Benoit.

The SELCO libraries will have the opportunity to display the Minnesota State Sesquicentennial banner during March, April and May. We are not yet sure when the banner will come to Rice County and Northfield but will keep you posted.

Liquor

On December 3, 2007 the Municipal Liquor Store--one of 21 liquor license holders in the area who passed the recent compliance checks--received a certificate of recognition from the Northfield Police Department, in conjunction with the Mayor's Task Force on Youth Alcohol and Drug Use.

The Northfield Wine Club Holiday Show, our final event of the year, will be held Thursday, December 13 at The Grand Event Center, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. As usual, we will feature wines from around the globe--with special emphasis on styles best suited for the holiday table--paired with artisan cheeses supplied by Just Food Community Co-op and baguettes from Brick Oven Bakery.

The Liquor Store's very successful third quarter performance has continued through the months of October and November; total sales (without tax) for the past two months were \$443,360, which is \$37,074 above the same period for 2006. For the year we are running roughly ten percent above last year.

Public Services

Community Development

Community Development staff assisted the Economic Development Manager with information related to business prospects that are exploring expansion or development in Northfield.

Staff met with representative from Northfield Township related to road and bridge improvements and maintenance needs on Hall Avenue/Spring Creek Road.

Staff is continuing to review the drafts of the next chapter of the proposed development regulations.

Staff continues to analyze the administrative time demand associated with the recently adopted rental code to support a proposed fee change, which will be brought to City Council in the near future.

Economic Development

Prospects: Staff worked on the closings for The Sketchy Artist LLC, which will be opening a new art store 300 Division Street in January

The "Meet and Greet" last Friday afternoon with another prospect went well and most of this week was spent working on this particular project. The firm plans to hire over 50 people and invest over 6 million dollars in the community.

The Coach Crafters building closed and staff will be working with them over the next few months.

The BP gas station is being purchased by a new buyer. Staff is working with the client to get ready for another closing.

Partnerships: EDA staff and the Community Development Director met with two other prospects hoping to expand in Northfield.

Engineering

5th and Water Street

The Streetscape task force met on Wednesday to review the current project concepts for the 5th and Water Street project. There were a number of design issues discussed which will be incorporated into the final design concept. A summary of the meeting minutes is available on the project website.

Mill Towns Trail Bridge

Joel Walinski and Katy Gehler-Hess attended the Mill Towns Trail Joint Powers Board meeting on Wednesday. An update of the project was presented and a request for additional funding was made. The Board voted to extend an additional \$180,000 to Northfield for the project from two bonding money sources. The bonding money is administered through the DNR. Staff is working with the DNR to finalize the cooperative agreement for the funding. As soon as this is complete the contract will be presented to council for approval along with a request for authorization to re-bid the project.

Cannon River Sanitary Sewer Crossing

The pre-construction conference was held on Monday afternoon for the Cannon River Sanitary Sewer Crossing project. Construction is scheduled to start on Jan.7.

Housing

Staff worked with Three Rivers Community Action to work out a purchase agreement with an area developer for vacant land. Price and acreage is still being worked out, but staff hopes to close on the deal before the end of 2007. Staff has also contacted area developers with residential lots for sale and has requested price bids for 8-12 lots. Staff hopes to have that information next week, and present a purchase plan to the HRA board at the monthly meeting.

The HRA monthly meeting is usually scheduled for the second Thursday of the month. However, the December meeting will be held on December 20 at 5pm, which is the third Thursday of the month. This change is ONLY for the December meeting. January will have the regular meeting on the second Thursday.

Staff is attending the monthly Regional Housing Academy meeting on Friday, with the topic of "Reducing the 'Ostrich' Effect: What to do about the foreclosure crisis." Foreclosures are up in Northfield compared to prior years, but have not dramatically boomed as some other communities have. Staff is working with the Rice County Sheriff's department to keep an eye on the number of local foreclosures; staff is also networking with regional and metro groups that are working to provide solutions or options to households facing foreclosure or ballooning mortgage payments.

Staff learned this week that Kathie Davis of Mankato's Partnerships for Affordable Housing passed away. Kathie has been a pivotal person in designing, funding, marketing and providing HomeStretch classes to the area, creating the Regional Housing Academy, and pushing for communities to get involved and aware of the housing needs in their own City. Her work will be greatly missed.

Facilities

The facilities crew has been busy with the continued work on creating a training room at City Hall. Initially this space will be used as additional office space and should be completed by the end of the year.

Also with the snow last weekend and on Tuesday the crew has been busy with clearing sidewalks, steps and entryways at the City of Northfield facilities.

Recreation

With the icy weather last weekend there were several hockey games that were cancelled; however, due to the cooperation of everyone involved the rescheduling of those games was easily completed.

Planning

The Development Review Committee (DRC) met this week to have a follow-up meeting with Johnson Reiland Construction about their proposed 50-acre annexation request north of Wall Street Road. Staff discussed planning they have completed for various infrastructure and road improvements in relation to the residential annexation. The request will be brought to the Planning Commission on January 8th for a public hearing before a recommendation is made to the City Council. Staff also met with Carleton College on two projects they are working on: the reuse of the Old Middle School property (with construction slated to begin in 2009) and the proposed location for a new student residence (with construction slated for 2008).

Staff continued to work on edits to the Comprehensive Plan. That Plan should be available for Board/Commission/Council review in the next week. A joint meeting between the Planning Commission and Council to discuss the Plan could be held sometime in January.

Streets/Parks

The past week has provided early work for the snowplow operators with the snow emergency over the weekend followed by an additional snow on Tuesday. With the snow comes a number of questions and concerns regarding the plowing operations. City policy is to plow the center of the road way first and then come back later to 'flip' the snow on the boulevards. That means in most cases residents will have a plow pass in front of their homes twice to remove the snow from the street. The primary focus is on main thoroughfares, which means some of the residential streets may not be plowed until after the snow stops.

The two snow events resulted in an approximate total of 10" to 14" of snow, which was removed within 14 hours in each case, which just missed our goal of 12 hours for a normal snowfall of 2" to 6". In addition, the snow was removed from the downtown in less than 48 hours where our standard is normally 72 hours.

Water

Water Division Crew Leader, Scott Murphy was up at the Booster Station that went into operation one year ago, on North Avenue and discovered that the 2 gas heaters were not working. He brought in a temporary electric heater to help keep heat in the building. After staff did some investigating on the heaters, Scott contacted Franek Electric to see what parts were at fault. The fan motors were stuck on both units and a limit switch was out on one of the heaters. They were able to get one of the fan motors to start. Scott contacted the manufacturer of the heaters and the installers of the heaters to get the replacement parts; which were under warranty. The heaters will be repaired as soon as the parts arrived.

The chlorine vacuum at Well # 2 was fluctuating this past week, occasionally dropping below normal levels; however, it never dropped below required levels. Water Operator Dean Huschle replaced the chlorine tubing for the chemical system and he also took apart the chlorine injector unit, cleaned and inspected it and replaced the injector. The chlorine levels returned back to normal after this procedure.

Wastewater

Representatives from the City of Faribault (Wastewater Superintendent, lead operator, City Engineer, and a Council member) visited the Northfield Wastewater Treatment Facility last week. Faribault is in the planning stages for a major facility upgrade and expansion and wanted to look at the processes employed at the Northfield facility. The main focus was on the phosphorus removal. There are several ways to remove phosphorus, each having pros and cons unique to that system.

The City of Northfield uses ferric chloride to precipitate out phosphorus in the primary clarifiers. Glenn Lindroos explained that using chemicals to remove phosphorus in the primary clarifiers also significantly enhances the removal of suspended solids and biochemical oxygen demand (measures of pollutants in the waste stream). This takes load off the biological treatment systems that follow, which increases the amount of wastewater that can be treated in a similar sized facility. It also requires no separate section of the facility to remove phosphorus, so construction costs are reduced over some systems. The major disadvantage with chemical precipitation is that it significantly increases the total amount of sludge produced, which adds costs to treating, storing, and removing biosolids from the facility.

The other area of interest was the sludge handling systems used at Northfield. Faribault currently produces a Class B sludge that is applied on agricultural land. The material is legal to land apply, but the public perception is negative and it is becoming more difficult to find land to which this can be applied. As facilities upgrade many are choosing Class A processes that can be certified as "exceptional quality" (Northfield has a Class A EQ certified process). The material produced is deregulated and may be handled and applied like any other soil amendment.

cc: Department Managers