

CITY OF COLUMBUS JUNCTION *continued from page 1*

Still, the city approved the final design and the council eventually accepted a \$1,458,300 bid from Spectra Build, Wapello, to complete the work. A \$300,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and \$270,000 in America Rescue Plan (ARP) funding reduced that cost, but the city still needed to borrow the remainder and raise sewer rates to cover the loan.

Work on the system began in July 2022 and initially was expected to take 75 days. However, because of delays in obtaining parts, equipment and other issues, construction dragged out.

Now that it has been completed, Salazar indicated the DNR still needed to provide the city with a new discharge permit. He indicated that permit would likely be issued after the city

submits discharge reports that show the new system is correctly operating and meeting current standards.

In other action, the council agreed to hold a March 27 public hearing to receive comments on its proposed Fiscal Year 2025 maximum property tax levy. According to the public notice, the city's maximum rate is expected to be slightly above \$12.37 per \$1,000 valuation, a decrease of about 31¢ from the current rate.

Once the proposed maximum rate is published, the city can lower the rate but cannot raise it.

The council also approved holding an April 10 public hearing on the city's proposed FY 25 budget. That document is still being developed.

The council also learned the Iowa Highway 92 widening project was scheduled to begin March

18, with the roadway closed to most traffic from U.S. Highway 218 to County Road X17, about one mile west of Columbus Junction.

Salazar said traffic will be officially detoured using County Road G36 and X17, but suggested some traffic may use other routes.

In final action, the city council accepted police chief Donnie Orr's recommendation to hire Rusbel Calderon as the city's new police officer; and mayor Mark Huston administered the oath of office to Calderon soon after the council's action.

Calderon, who currently works as a West Liberty police officer, is already certified and lives in Columbus Junction. He will begin his duties on March 23.

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owners are expected to see the same percentage drops.

Once the proposed rates are published, the supervisors can still drop the levy rates but cannot raise them.

Schnedler also reminded the supervisors the new FY 25 rates do include the 58¢ per \$1,000 valuation EMS tax that was approved as part of a special March 5 election.

The supervisors officially canvassed that vote during their March 12 meeting without any changes in the unofficial results that were announced after the polls closed last week. The canvass included both the EMS levy vote and another for the voter-approved Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL) in the Columbus School District.

Meanwhile, during a separate discussion, the supervisors learned county auditor Selena Gerst had located the account holding the remaining revenue from the sale of the former county home farm several years ago.

Gerst said she and her staff had determine almost \$207,000 still remained from the sale and had been deposited in a County Home Fund. County officials had earlier indicated they felt there should still be revenue available from the farm sale, but had not been able to identify the account holding the money.

Apparently, some of the funding was used as a loan to the county conservation board to acquire the Wilson Prairie east of Grandview, with other funding coming from a grant; and the Mabeus acquisition to Virginia Grove.

The conservation board is repaying the loan with a \$40,000 annual payment, using non-tax revenue from its camp fees, land rent and other sources.

In other action during the meeting, the supervisors approved a liquor license for Heritage Oaks Golf & Country Club; and approved the Sandyburr

Kerr Subdivision south of Wapello.

The board also approved an application from Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative to bore duct and cable on L Avenue east of Morning Sun. That application was approved as part of county engineer Adam Shutt's weekly report to the board.

In the remainder of his report, Shutt updated the supervisors on the Iowa Highway 92 widening project. He said the Iowa Department of Transportation was expected to begin the work on March 18, meaning the highway would be closed from U.S. Highway 218 to (west of Columbus Junction) for the first phase.

Traffic will be detoured around the construction zone using County Roads G36 and X17.

Other work being completed by the secondary roads department included rocking gravel roads, completing tree removal and bridge cleaning and patching.

He also reported working on a new policy that will govern culvert replacement/installation on private driveways.

Shutt also said Muscatine and Louisa counties would be conducting a dual upgrade on County Road G28, which includes portions in each county. He said Muscatine County will likely call for a complete surface replacement of the roadway, while an overlay will be completed on the Louisa County section.

An agreement with Nyhart Services, Indianapolis, to complete an Iowa 509A Actuarial Attestation for \$1,200 was also approved. Officials said the review was needed because the county's self-funded health insurance program had exceeded expenditures by 2.3 percent.

County auditor Selena Gerst said the reviews are required whenever self-funded programs exceed expenditures by 2 percent. She said the county's

program hit that level because more employees had taken out insurance.

In another insurance action, the board reviewed and signed its Iowa State Association of Counties renewal and open enrollment for the FY 2025 plan year.

The board also agreed to table action on proposed 4.4-acre crop lease at the County Complex to determine if conservation tax credits or other revenue source may be available. A decision on the single bid that was presented is expected at the board's March 19 meeting.

The board also met with veterans affairs director Curt Hartlieb and public health administrator Leah McElhinney for the monthly department updates. McElhinney reported COVID isolation guidelines had changed again and people who tested positive for the virus only needed to isolate for 24 hours if they became fever-free or did not show other symptoms. The guidance did not change for health care workers, she added.

Smith also reported there had been a recent increase in referrals and admits to her office. She also said progress was continuing on switching over to a private, vaccination management system.

In his report, Hartlieb told the board that personnel and hours were no longer available to assist with a planned spring community outreach event and it had been canceled.

He also provided monthly budget; office, nursing home and other visits he had completed. The Disabled American Veterans van continues to provide transportation to the VA Medical Center in Iowa City for VA approved appointments.

Veterans needing that service can contact Hartlieb at 319-527-6513. Five volunteers serve as drivers, although that number drops to four during the winter months.

REFLECTION: *A View from the Other Side of the Desk*

by SANDRA MARTIN

Volunteering at the Columbus Discoveries Thrift Shop has given me so many opportunities to learn about possessions and other people—the donors and the purchasers, but mostly I often evaluate myself. Last week I was assigned the task of sorting four boxes of greeting cards that had been brought in.

I was first of all amazed that anyone would have that many extra greeting cards on hand to donate. When I want a card, I go to the store and pick up one. I do have a few in a box that I have somehow accumulated, but the card I want is seldom if ever available in my personal stash of cards. I buy a new one. Maybe the few I have on hand will be donated some day.

I began by categorizing the cards and counting them. There were 125 Christmas cards. Many were very unusual. When I was younger, I always sent Christmas cards. Especially when my kids were little—I wanted all my friends and relatives to know what we were doing. I really cared about telling my story. I wrote Christmas letters every year to include with my cards. Since Bob passed away four years ago, I have not sent a single Christmas card. (Maybe I expend all my ideas writing this column.) I love receiving Christmas mail, but I have become delinquent in sending any.

Secondly, there were 2 Valentine cards, 5 Easter cards, and 2 Thanksgiving cards. I didn't realize that people actually sent Thanksgiving cards. I have never sent Easter or Thanksgiving cards, but Bob was the only person I ever gave a valentine to, and he would always tell me it was a waste of my money.

In the traditional categories of cards, there were 37 thank you cards, 18 get well cards, 16 sympathy cards, 13 birthday cards, 1 baby card, 1 anniversary card, and 3 congratulations cards.

Thank you cards seem to be used less and less. I give gifts because I want

to—not because I want to receive a thank you note; however, seldom do I get any thank you in the mail. Occasionally, someone will send me a text message saying, "Thanks," but even that is rare. I, personally, send thank you letters to people far away and thank you texts and emails to people I see frequently. Maybe I need to change that.

I can't remember the last time I sent a get well card. I need to do better. Here again the Internet seems to convey the message much more quickly. Sometimes by the time I learn someone is sick, he/she has recovered. As I age, I find myself purchasing more and more sympathy cards. That seems to be a staple of life!

My family almost always receive birthday cards from me, but again, too often friends read my birthday wishes for them on the Internet. Most amazing to me in sorting the birthday cards, I found a card that wished the recipient a "Happy 100th birthday!" Surely, Hallmark doesn't make many of those cards. How did that card end up in our box of cards? Was there an anticipated century birthday that didn't happen, so the card was donated to the thrift shop? It was a beautiful card. I couldn't help but hope that someone would need that card and pay the 25 cents the shop charges to put the card to good use.

General cards were interesting as well; there were 79 friendship—just thinking of you cards, 119 blank postcards, and 331 blank cards—write one's own message.

Two rather unusual cards stood out to me. One was a "You're expecting" card. I wonder how many

of those the company sells. The other was a "To a caregiver" card. What an interesting idea to encourage someone!

Why has mail correspondence dwindled? Probably the cost of postage stamps has something to do with the changes. When I was a child, a postage stamp was 3 cents; the last "FOREVER" stamps I bought were 68 cents. The Internet is far more convenient and cheaper.

I will confess that I have two very good friends who correspond with me quite often through the US Mail. I love those letters, and I tend to save them and reread them. There is nothing that makes me smile as much as going to my mailbox and finding a personal letter that is much more intriguing than my Alliant bill! There really is a place in our society for letters and cards, and I need to use them more.

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