City to reassess Ave. G sidewalk plans

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A public hearing on a $1.55 million project to redo the sidewalks and curbing has been pulled from the city’s Tuesday Council meeting agenda.

According to Mayor Brad Randolph, bids for the project have come in close to double the available funding.

HR Green, Inc. out of Cedar Rapids has been handling the project for the city, and Randolph said the project is being “reassessed.”

“It’s very frustrating,” he said.

The project included putting in new sidewalks, curbing, permeable pavers, and storm water enhancements along the north and south sides of Avenue G. The pavers would go back about six feet, with the rest of the sidewalks to the buildings being new concrete.

The funding source comes from the interest that would have been paid to the state on loans taken out to rehab the city’s waste water treatment plant. So instead of paying interest on those loans, the city can use what amounts to a refund of the interest on those waste water treatment loans, up to $1.55 million, to fund the project.

The work was originally suggested to cover from 6th Street to 10th Street along the downtown portion of Avenue G. However, estimates on the work required several scale backs, including lighting and other amenities along the tract of work.

Officials have come to the council several times indicating the project was over budget for the available funds. Bids for the work went out in January.

County swans learning new song

DNR gives county two female swans for marsh

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

MONTROSE – The population of Lee County’s trumpeter swan is low compared to other areas of the state such as Fort Dodge, Des Moines, and Atlantic, but the dedicated marsh just west of Heron Bend grew by two on Wednesday.

Lee County Conservation Wildlife Manager Rick Tebbs released two flightless swans to the aerated marsh on Wednesday afternoon. The swans were given to Lee County by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. The females were injured and flightless, but they can now nest with males and hatch cygnets.

The cygnets in turn become wild swans and are free to migrate and nest in the wild.

The move is part of an ongoing reintroduction of swans to the area. The birds are not longer on a watch list, but about 30 years ago, the population of trumpeters was down to 60 in the Yellowstone area, Tebbs said.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources had been keeping an eye out for injured swans after Tebbs told them one of the females in the Lee County Marsh had died due to injury from a predator.

“Something had gotten ahold of her and damaged her leg and we lost her. I called and told them about it and they said they would keep an eye out for any birds,” Tebbs said.

He got a call from Dave Hoffman, the DNR biologist who oversees the trumpeter program for Iowa, a couple of weeks ago. Hoffman had received a report of two female birds that were spotted injured.

Lee County Conservation District Natural Resources had the project for the platform at the new depot appear to be ready for approval.

At the Feb. 19 regular council meeting, the city will not only be possibly approving the 2019-20 fiscal year budget, but will also hear from Mayor Brad Randolph about some new possible funding options that could reduce, or possibly completely offset any hit to the budget under consideration.

Varley put out three memos to the city council on Friday outlining three different agreements that need council approval. Varley also used the memos to outline exactly what the city’s responsibilities are under each agreement.

The city has to approve three separate agreements with Amtrak; an agreement to sublease the platform, an Old Station Revitalization agreement, and a lease agreement.

Under the lease agreement, the city would lease 813 square feet of space to Amtrak, along with a common area for passengers. The term of the lease is 20 years with two 10-year extensions available. In exchange, the city would get currently, a $400 monthly rent payment from Amtrak.

The city would be responsible for all maintenance, upkeep, and repair on the platform, restrooms, and common area including 20 parking spaces reserved for Amtrak passengers. The city would also be responsible for having someone identified as the building manager.

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DONALD “DONNIE” EUGENE WADE

Donald “Donnie” Eugene Wade, 65, of Keokuk, IA, entered into Heaven’s Gates on Friday, February 15, 2019 at 12:33 a.m. at Fort Madison Community Hospital following a sudden heart attack. He was born on January 3, 1954 in Keokuk, IA, the son of Irwin R. Sr. and Gwendolyn M. Phillips Wade. On February 6, 1972, Donnie was united in marriage to Joyce Ann Protsman. They had just celebrated their 47th wedding anniversary.

Donnie was active in his Pentecostal faith and attended several local churches along with many Bible studies. Donnie held a variety of jobs, his last being at Manchester Tank in Quincy, IL where he retired in 2009. He had a passion for Jesus, his family and food. He enjoyed singing the gospel and recorded two CDs, “Sonny” (Linda) Wade, Jr., Ron (Diane) Wade, Kathy Radar, Debbie Wade and Melinda “Till” (Jeff) Plowman, and many, many, many other family members. He was preceded in death by his parents, a brother, Richard Wade-Rickerts, a great grandson, his in-laws, Billie & Charlotte Dobbins and Joseph & Joyce Protsman, his brother and sister-in-law, Joe & Diana Protsman, sister-in-law, Laurie Protsman and a great niece, Carissa Horton.

Funeral services will be held at 2 p.m., Saturday at the Vigen Memorial Home in Keokuk with Pastors Harry and Marvin Miller officiating. Visitation will be held Saturday from Noon – 2 p.m at the funeral home with the family meeting with friends at that time. Online condolences may be sent to the family at www.vigennemorialhome.com.
Mayor counting on Amtrak to come through

LEASE - Continued from Page 1

manager, installing panic buttons under the ticket counter, and providing regular security.

However, according to Randolph, Amtrak officials are meeting Tuesday to discuss possibly increasing their contributions to the project, in light of the city’s struggling financial picture.

He said if Amtrak does come through with additional funding, that lease agreement may have to be pulled from the agenda to be rewritten.

“We are counting on Amtrak to come through,” Randolph said Saturday.

The revitalization agreement outlines the city’s responsibility in constructing the platform, signage, and wheelchair enclosure. Amtrak agreed originally to contribute a one-time $150,000 investment toward the cost of the platform construction.

The final agreement is a sublease where once that platform is constructed, the city would give the platform to Burlington Northern Santa Fe. Amtrak would lease the platform from BNSF and lease it back to the city so the city can be responsible for maintenance and upkeep.

In other action, the council will consider

1. The purchase of a $40,500 tractor/mower from Sinclair Tractor of Houghton, and a $4,550 pallet fork from the Iowa Regional Riverboat Association.

2. Fort Commission and Marty Dean to the Southeast

Tough winter. I’ve fallen twice now doing chores, the first time breaking the eggs I had just gathered—that upset me more than the fall. I laid there for a couple of seconds on the ice, trying to determine if I’d broken anything, besides the eggs. I was glad I had my cell phone with me in case I had to dial 911. (“Mr. Swarn, I see you’re lying on the ice. Are you okay?” “No. Would I be lying on the ice if I were okay?”) Fortunately, I was fine.

The second time I fell, I was even wearing those ice cleats that strap onto your boots. It was so cold and the ice was so hard and slick, the cleats were ineffective. I stayed down on my hands and knees and crawled back to the house—glad there was no one watching.

That was enough for me. One more fall on this 70-year-old frame might mean a broken hip, femur, noggin, elbow, wrist, you-name-it. Of course, if it was my noggin, it might be a blessing—knock some sense into me. I’m now driving the truck because they think they’re bringing you a gift. Given the choice between a nice warm farm house and the barn, even in 20-below weather, Barney chooses the barn. He loves it out there and likes doing chores with me. I’ll see him charging through snow drifts I can’t drive through, in subzero weather to get to the barn when it’s chore time. He sure has cleaned out the mice, which can be a problem when you’re storing chicken and cattle feed.

I can always tell when a storm front is approaching. The livestock (in our case, one heifer and a dozen hens) will eat everything in sight to store up. It’s a throwback to their ancestor days in the wild when they would have to hunker down to wait out a storm. I find it particularly comforting watching farm animals eat—maybe a throwback to my hunter-gatherer days.

During the real cold weather that followed the freezing rain, I had problems getting into the freezing rain, I had problems getting into

See SWARM, page 5

Deep freeze was hard on the farmer

from the house out to the barn to do chores—hard on vehicles, easier on the bod.

I think Barney-the-Barn-Cat felt sorry for me. He delivered two dead voles to our doorstep and laid them out neatly on the threshold. That was right considerate. When cats do this, I’m told, it’s because they think they’re bringing you a gift.

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See SWARM, page 5
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FMHS junior Danen Settles, far right, stands with the top eight Class 3A 285 lb. wrestlers Saturday night at Wells-Fargo Arena as part of the 2019 State Wrestling Tournament.

Winter chores bring a freshness to life

SWARM - Continued from Page 1

Blossom's (our Angus heifer's) pen. I've had to keep a bolt-with-a-nut through the chain to keep Blossom from escaping. She's quite the escape artist. When we have freezing rain, the threads on the bolt ice over, and I can't get the nut off. I was about to go to the barn for some wrenches when I thought of something else to try. I had carried water out to her, so I just poured cold water over the bolt. Voila. Off comes the nut—hard on bare hands in freezing weather, yes, but if it works, don't fix it.

I'm actually grateful to have chores to do in the winter. Sure, it's tough getting out there when the wind is howling—pulling on insulated coveralls and boots—but I always enjoy the fresh air and seeing the farm animals once I'm out there. As a remedy for cabin fever, chores are a good way to "get the stink blown off you."

I've found the best shovel to use for shoveling a path through all this snow and ice is still the old-fashioned farmer's aluminum scoop shovel. Although, in reality, an aluminum scoop shovel isn't all that fashionable. The original scoop shovels were made of iron or steel. They were much heavier, and had a problem with snow sticking to the scoop—which makes shoveling snow twice as hard. Slick and light-weight aluminum has helped the situation considerably. At the hardware store the other day, while I was buying 110 lbs of ice melt, I saw plastic scoop shovels. Hmmmm. My father once told me the true test of a man was if he could stand on top of a wagon full of ear corn, and begin scooping from the top. I probably have a ways to go before I can live up to my father's expectations.

Have a good story? Call or text Curt Swarm in Mt. Pleasant at 319-217-0526, email him at curtswarm@yahoo.com or visit his website at www.empty-nest-words-photos-and-frames.com.
Flightless swans will help repopulate area

Tebbs was going to a Wildlife Society meeting near Rathbun this week and Hoffman brought the birds to the meeting. Tebbs brought them to Lee County on Wednesday afternoon for release.

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“We’re trying to be a part of bringing back the whole Midwest nesting population. We’ve probably had close to 50 young from those that are put here. These are injured birds and we use them as breeding pairs and then the young become free flyers,” Tebbs said.

He said there are currently anywhere from 10 to 16 swans that are frequently counted in the area. Some migrate and feed outside the marsh, but use it as a central open waters. Some will go out around the river at times, but stay close to the marsh.

The nesting done at the marsh bears the cygnets, or young swans from eggs, and then those will migrate when they become old enough to leave the marsh. If something happens to one they will usually find another mate,” Tebbs said.

There is no tracking of the birds and the flightless ones will stay where they are. He said the motivation is just to get more birds in the wild. Some birds are tagged and Lee County Conservation will report when they see birds with collars to let federal naturalists know where the birds are migrating to.

“We’ve found some with collars that are from Wisconsin down here. We call to let them know so we can keep track of where migration is, but we don’t actively tag and track them,” he said.

The county keeps the marsh open during the winter with aerators that generate motion in the water to prevent freezing. Only about half of the marsh is kept open for fresh water, the other half is ice covered right now and has plenty of goose population there.

“We have to keep the water open so they have water to drink. Again, these swans can’t fly south because of their injuries so we keep this wetland habitat for open for them,” he said.

The swans will typically nest on top of muskrat houses and those houses stay at water level in the marsh. If the swans try to nest on the river it becomes challenging because the water levels rise and fall regularly and can wipe out the nests.

Populations dwindled in the 60s because people would hunt the swans for feathers and meat. Tebbs said feathers were used for powder balls that women would use to powder their bodies. The birds also have a lot of meat on them, so they were heavily hunted.

Some of the birds were killed in powerline contact, while natural predators also reduced the number of the birds.

He said the birds were on a targeted list due to the reduced numbers of locations the swans were being reported in, but the reintroduction in Midwestern states has the populations in the thousands now in Iowa alone.

According to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, in 2010 there were 193 swans reported in Iowa. In 2016, that number had increased to more than 1,800.

Trumpeter swans weigh up to 30 lbs and have a wingspan of more than seven feet. They get their name from their call.

“That call is kind of like a call to wetland’s preservation. This is why we do this,” Tebbs said.

The trumpeter on the right was recently released into the county’s trumpeter marsh just off Hwy. 61 across from the Lee County Conservation District’s Heron Bend center.