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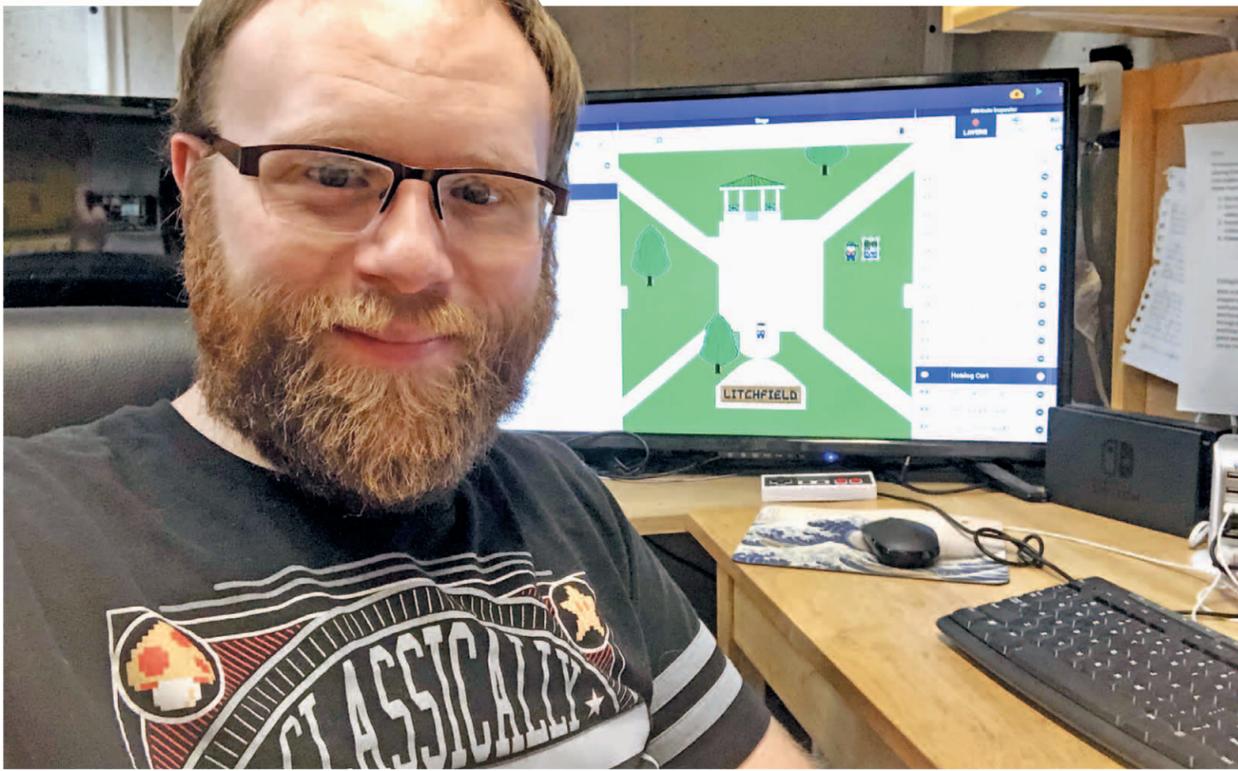


PHOTO COURTESY PAUL PERKINS

Paul Perkins, a Kentucky native, moved to Litchfield 10 years ago to marry a Litchfield woman. He's been here ever since, and is now developing a video game that he says replicates a newcomer moving to Litchfield and becoming a resident through exploration of the town and meeting its people.

Taking a byte of Litchfield

Video game hobby leads Paul Perkins to create digital version of adopted hometown

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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Litchfield became home to Paul Perkins about a decade ago. The Kentucky native saw it as a good place to raise a family.

Nothing has changed his perception of Litchfield during the past 10 years.

In fact, he enjoys the town — its people, buildings, history and events — so much that he's using his burgeoning skills as a video game creator to immortalize Litchfield in digital form.

"I had the idea for this for a while, but really started working on it within the past month," Perkins, 32, said during an interview in late November. "From making a game design document and getting my thoughts together, and then, of course, right now I'm in the process of making all the artwork for this."



IMAGE COURTESY PAUL PERKINS, 4-8 GAMES

Central Park was one of the first scenes Paul Perkins decided to replicate for the video game he's creating, "Town Life RPG: Litchfield MN," which he expects to launch some time in 2021.

That artwork will include two-dimensional, digital versions of landmarks, such as Central Park and its bandstand, and historic buildings like the G.A.R. Hall and Opera House. Oh, and

he envisions events like Watercade, the county fair, Parade of Bands and more being part of the game play, as well.

To ensure his game includes the best, or most memorable, of Litchfield, Perkins put out a call on social media in November and again earlier this month, asking Litchfield residents to share with him the landmark buildings and events that make the town special to them.

"I had my idea, but I also ... there's probably things that I'm not aware of, events throughout the town that maybe people would like to see in it," Perkins said. "That's why I was asking for suggestions."

"I got a lot of positive feedback," he added. "I think I got over 200 likes on that post, and more than a dozen people shared it. It was kind of my way of gauging and feeling out and getting people's opinion."

Perkins to 2 >

COVID aid bill not the solution some want

Oberg says \$458,000 for Meeker County businesses is just a 'band-aid'

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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Meeker County businesses could see more assistance as a result of the COVID-19 aid bill passed by the Legislature last week.

The bill, which passed during a one-day special session Dec. 14, included \$216 million in business relief. Among the details, it calls for:

■ Department of Revenue to distribute \$88 million to restaurants, bars and other eligible business that have seen a 30 percent decline in their business. Also included in the list are gyms, bowling alleys and breweries, wineries and distilleries.

■ \$14 million in targeted assistance to movie theaters and convention centers through the Department of Employment and

Economic Development.

■ \$114 million for the state's 87 counties, who will be tasked with distributing their allocation to businesses in need. Meeker County is in line to receive \$458,000; McLeod County \$700,000.

■ A 13-week extension of unemployment benefits for those who lost jobs due to the pandemic.

"I think that was remarkable," Rep. Dean Urdahl, R-Acton Township, said of the Legislature's quick and collaborative action. "But even more remarkable was in such a short time they were able to put the bill together."

"(Rep.) Dave Baker, R-Willmar spearheaded the Republican side," Urdahl added, "and did a fine job of getting both sides and the governor. It's a good example of what can be done when we're working together."

Though there was overwhelming bipartisan agreement on the bill — it passed 117-13 in the



Rep. Dean Urdahl

House and 62-4 in the Senate — there was division over who, or what, was at fault for the dire position many businesses find themselves in during the pandemic.

Many Republicans pointed directly at Gov. Tim Walz, whose executive orders restricting some businesses, including closing bars and restaurants to indoor service, they blamed for putting businesses in peril. Democrats pushed back, saying Walz has followed the science in trying to slow the spread of COVID-19.

For his part, Walz said in a statement that the bill's passage was "a critical lifeline for those businesses, and for the Minnesotans whose livelihoods depend on them. This bipartisan bill will provide direct, targeted aid to keep our small businesses afloat, support



Rep. Glenn Gruenhagen

Relief to 7 >

County Board approves budget, levy

2021 budget grows by 4.7 percent, levy by 2.9 percent

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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The Meeker County Board formally approved the county's 2021 levy and adopted the 2021 budget during its meeting last week.

Next year's budget will grow by about \$1.6 million, or 4.7 percent, to \$35.2 million. The levy will increase 2.9 percent or \$440,000 next year, to \$15.5 million.

While both the budget and levy received unanimous approval, it didn't come before Commissioner Beth Oberg expressed disappointment in the growing cost of government.

"We always have the discussion and it always remains the same," Oberg said of the increases, which she questioned when the preliminary budget and levy were presented in early September.

And the preliminary levy did decrease from that point — from an initial 5.5 percent to the 2.9 percent increase approved at the Dec. 15 meeting.

County Administrator Paul Virnig said that a goal this year was to reduce use of fund balance, in a change from 2020 when there were larger draw downs of balances in different funds. And there were some areas, especially the highway construction budget, that were larger than normal. In addition, the county's interest earning fell by about \$180,000.

Budget to 7 >

School Board approves levy

Unanimous vote certifies levy at 3.77 percent for 2021

BY BRENT SCHACHERER
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Litchfield School Board's truth-in-taxation hearing Dec. 14 was a quiet affair, with no members of the public showing up at the Wagner Education Building to question or discuss the district's levy or operation.

And following a brief presentation by Business Manager Jesse Johnson, the School Board certified the district's 2021 levy at \$5.5 million — a 3.77 percent increase over the current year.

Johnson's presentation included an explanation that the tax levy is based on state-determined formulas, with some increases in tax levies offset by state aid. In addition, school districts' budgets are limited by state-set revenue formulas, voter-approved levies and fund balances, not tax levies alone.

The bulk of the school district's 2020-2021 general fund revenue — more than 80 percent, or \$15.6 million — came from the state, with local taxes providing 16.73 percent (\$3.2 million) and the federal government 1.98 percent (\$380,256).

The district's budget is divided into five funds — general, food service, community service, building construction and debt service.

Litchfield School District's construction



Jesse Johnson

Levy to 7 >

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