Early approval processes for a proposed county landfill kick off

By Madeline Westberg

Early approval processes have begun for converting the current Yahara Hills Golf Course off U.S. Highway 12/18 near McFarland and Cottage Grove into a proposed landfill.

A land sale agreement for 230 acres of the current Yahara Hills Golf Course was approved by the city of Madison’s finance committee on April 25. Additionally, a change to the Yahara Hills Neighborhood Plan, to accommodate a possible landfill, passed through the city’s plan commission on April 25.

These steps are the first of many in the lengthy approval process, with many opportunities for public input, said John Welch, the director of Dane County Department of Waste and Renewables, the arm of the county responsible for waste management.

The land sale agreement, and development plan changes, are both slated to go in front of the Madison Common Council in June, and to Dane County’s personnel and finance committee in late May. It’s also projected that the landfill project will be taken up by the Dane County Board in June.

Welch said this project will have many counties hoping to close on the sale of the land by September, and work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Consultants to do necessary research.

See LANDFILL, Page A2

Dane County purchases 10th renewable vehicle

In honor of Earth Day, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi recently visited McFarland, and the county’s facilities there, to highlight efforts to use renewable natural gas collected at the Rockford Landfill to power county vehicles.

Parisi announced on April 21 that the county acquired its 10th vehicle that runs on renewable vehicle fuel. The county collects more than 2.5 million gallons of renewable gasses a year at the current landfill, purifying them into almost pure methane, and using them to power renewable vehicles.

“Dane County is a national leader in renewable energy and sustainability efforts, and we are excited to mark this Earth Week by celebrating the acquisition of our 100th vehicle that runs on renewable vehicle fuel,” said Parisi. “By investing in clean fuel infrastructure, Dane County is leading the way on what is possible in the public and private sectors to help combat climate change and be part of the solution.”

Dane County currently owns 100 renewable natural gas (RNG) hybrid vehicles, 3 electric vehicles, and 13 hybrid electric vehicles, 3 of which are electric only.

The 100th vehicle, a 2023 Ford E-Transit, is expected to save more than $350,000 this year.

See COUNTY, Page A11

Pledge of Allegiance to stay on county board agendas, prayer is removed

Prayer acceptable as form of inspirational message

By Ryan Spoehr

The Dane County Board will continue to say the Pledge of Allegiance at its meetings, and there will no longer be a prayer listed on its agendas.

Instead, prayer will be an optional kind of inspirational message, the board decided in an April 19 vote to update its agenda format as a new term begins.

The board also voted against changes in March, calling a prayer unacceptable as a song.

District 2 Supervisor Heidi Kiefer made a last ditch effort to change the board’s policy at the April 19 meeting to keep prayer in by moving to amend the change, essentially putting the word “prayer” back in.

Kiefer called the timing ironic because it was the first time since 1991 that Passover, Ramadan and Easter all fell during the same time in April.

“For billions of people around the world this time, it’s an incredibly sacred month, but this is the time that the Dane County Board is going to remove the word ‘prayer’ from its agenda,” Kiefer said.

Kiefer cited a U.S. Supreme Court decision in 2014 that allows prayer at the top of meeting agendas at county and local levels.

“If someone wants to say Dane County over having prayer at meetings, I say go ahead. You won’t have a lot of luck,” Kiefer said.

District 20 Supervisor Jeff Weigand concurred.

“Prayer is a communication to an almighty and holy God, and it’s intended for his ears and not ours. Prayer is not an inspirational message,” Weigand said. “America was built on Judeo-Christian values. It’s our single biggest weapon we have to fight against evil, and by taking prayer out of the equation, we are essentially tying our hands behind our back going into battle. The fact that we can pray openly and freely in this country is a true blessing, and we shouldn’t be striking this from our agenda.”

See PRAYER, Page A2

Dane County is leading the way to put more clean fuel infrastructure, said Parisi. “By investing in clean fuel infrastructure, Dane County is leading the way on what is possible in the public and private sectors to help combat climate change and be part of the solution.”

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