

LOCALNEWS

Littlefork to change license ordinance

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Littlefork City Council Thursday started the process of changing an ordinance to match up with a long-standing practice.

Ordinance 60 states the cost of an onsale liquor license is \$1,500, city Administrator Sonja Pelland said. However, the city has been charging businesses like J C's Restaurant \$500 for the license renewal, which has been the case for years, she said.

"Years ago the intention was to change the ordinance, I just don't think it ever got changed and was an oversight," Pelland said.

The city now will publish a legal notice of the ordinance amendment, and then will have a sec-

ond reading of the amendment before it officially becomes law, she said. She noticed the difference while looking something else up, she said, and decided the time had come to change it.

"We need to do this and make sure it's right," she said.

In other business, the council approved the budget for the Littlefork Medical Center, which Mayor Mike Fort called conservative, Pelland said. The budget is based on having three patients in the Pinewind Recovery Center and 47 in the care center, and is a "bare bones" budget, she said.

"Until we get a CEO they wanted to make it a conservative budget, because they need to break even," Pelland said.

The city office will also be getting a technology

upgrade, as the council approved the purchase of new computers to replace the two older Dell computers the office currently uses, Pelland said. The older machines were running on Windows XP, which will become obsolete soon.

"It was just time for upgrades," Pelland said.

Councilor Loren Lehman reported some of the trailer homes in the trailer park were in bad condition and need to be addressed, Pelland said. The city will talk with the owner about potentially removing the homes in the spring. Residents have been bringing concerns like this more often, she said.

"People have been talking about cleaning up items like that," Pelland said. "Junk cars, things like that."

Aquafarm may have local potential

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Local officials who toured an aquaponic farm that raises vegetables and fish in Silver Bay said the idea has potential for Borderland.

Victus Farms greenhouse houses tanks to raise tilapia and vegetables in a closed loop system. The aquaponics system uses waste from fish to fertilize vegetable plants. The concept was developed by the University of Minnesota Duluth's Center for Sustainable Community Development with the idea it could be used elsewhere. The Silver Bay farm uses rain water collected from the roof, and during the winter, melting snow supplies the tanks. Victus is Latin for nourishment or food.

Locally, the area's rivers could be tapped as a source, with water returned containing less phosphates and nitrates.



Rob Ecklund



Cynthia Jaksa

Authority Commission Jan. 27, Jaksa said.

While both Jaksa and Ecklund told The Journal the project wouldn't mean a lot of jobs, it would help to diversify the local economy, and provide locally grown produce.

Jaksa estimated an operation similar to Victus Farms would create 10 "fairly well-paid jobs."

Jaksa said the city of Virginia is exploring the idea, and Thunder Bay, Ontario, is planning an aquafarm operation where it would grow barley to supply a local brewery.

Jaksa said, similarly to Silver Bay's connection to UMD, a local project would have an educational component tied to Rainy River Community College. She said Elena Favela, RRCC interim dean of students, has been involved in local discussions.

"There is the potential for RRCC to step into the leading edge in an industry that will really grow," Jaksa said, noting drought and climate change may push aquafarms forward.

In addition, Jaksa said an aquafarm that produced fish and vegetables could capitalize on the popularity of clean produce as well as Borderland's access to rail transportation to deliver the products.

"You could pick lettuce in the morning and have it in Chicago in the afternoon — locally grown produce that is pesticide free," she said.

Fish and lettuce grown at the Silver Bay aquafarm is "sold out," Ecklund said. Food from the operation is shipped to the UMD food service, area groceries stores and higher-end restaurants which want the organic, locally grown label, he said.

Ecklund said he tasted the lettuce being produced in Silver Bay. "It was good," he said, "like leaf lettuce from your garden at home, versus the grocery store variety. It really had flavor to it."

The investment required to start an aquafarm "is not overwhelming," Jaksa said. "It's a small chunk we could bite off, chew and create," she said.

Ecklund said he found the idea of starting small and easily expanding interesting.

Gas prices pick up downward momentum

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Average retail gasoline prices in Minnesota have fallen 3 cents in the past week, averaging \$3.20 per gallon Sunday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 2,856 gas outlets in Minnesota. This compares with the national average that has fallen 2.2 cents in the last week to \$3.27 per gallon, according to gasoline price website MinnesotaGasPrices.com.

No local gas prices were listed on the site.

Including the change in gas prices in Minnesota during the past week, prices Sunday were 8.8 cents per gallon higher compared

to the same day one year ago and are 17.7 cents per gallon higher than a month ago. The national average has increased 4.7 cents during the last month and stands 1 cent per gallon higher than this day one year ago.

"The national average has picked up some downward momentum over the last week," said GasBuddy.com Senior Petroleum Analyst Patrick DeHaan. "It's likely that during this week, we will see gasoline prices again drop below their year ago levels yet again. However, as we're approaching February, the most recent drops will likely reverse as refineries

begin their maintenance season, which will see refineries doing critical work preparing for summer at the expense of gasoline output, which will be a contributing factor to an upward rise in gas prices. Motorists should expect more volatility in late-February through May as the market generally reacts to any unexpected production related issues, and there are generally several issues each year," DeHaan said.

GasBuddy operates MinnesotaGasPrices.com and over 250 similar websites that track gasoline prices at more than 140,000 gasoline stations in the United States and Canada.

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