

# LOCALNEWS

## Ranier City Council sets proposed tax levy

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

**RANIER**The Ranier City Council Monday set its proposed 2015 tax levy — the first step in the levy process. The proposed levy was set at \$160,000. The proposed levy can be lowered before the final levy is set in December. The levy was set at \$150,000 in 2013.

In other business, Mayor Dennis Wagner updated the council on the Spruce Street railroad crossing. Wagner said a project to repave the crossing to make it smoother for traffic will take place in three to seven weeks, and will also include some work on the arms that block the crossing when a train is passing through it.

Through repeated meetings with Canadian National Railway, state and federal representatives, and other organizations, Wagner said they've been able to reduce crossing time at the crossing by two hours per day. CN has also reduced crossing times by switching train crews at a location past the crossing, he said, instead of at the crossing.

"It didn't cost any money or anything, just through constant pestering improved their efficiency

which makes our lives a little easier," Wagner said.

Wagner also said he thought the public meeting on the proposed land use ordinance which took place last Wednesday had good input, and valid questions were raised. They'll schedule another meeting on the ordinance, he said, but some of the big questions were addressed at Wednesday's meeting.

"I really believe it was fear of the unknown that was the biggest factor," Wagner said.

City Administrator Sherri Gautreaux said she met last week with Federal Emergency Management Agency officials, as well as state disaster relief representatives, and reviewed what information the agencies need from the city when it comes to applying for relief for recovery from flooding earlier this summer. Gautreaux said she'll have a better idea of where the city stands on Wednesday, after officials have followed up with her.



Dennis Wagner

## County board reviews timber auction

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

The Koochiching County Board Tuesday heard a report from county Land Commissioner Dennis Hummitzsch on a recent timber auction, which featured higher sale prices than normal.

The Sept. 8 intermediate and regular auctions featured a total sale of 5,641 cords for a total sale value of \$334,957. The sale values for the different species of wood were higher than average, Hummitzsch said.

"To say we had spirited bidding would be an understatement," Hummitzsch said.

The total sale average for all species was \$59.38 per cord, Hummitzsch said. The bidding was also more territorial than market-driven, he said, and the high sales prices were most likely a one-time occurrence.

The state timber auction is a sealed bidding process, Hummitzsch said, which can be used by sellers to entice higher prices. Many counties are also moving toward a sealed bidding process



Rob Ecklund



Brian McBride

for their timber auctions, he said.

"More and more I think that it's a way to get top dollar and prevent either this going on, or other ways of influencing what goes on in the auction room," Hummitzsch said. "When you see weird things go on in the auction room, it kind of gets me thinking, 'Is this really what we want to see?'"

Bidders don't like a sealed bidding process, Hummitzsch said, because to them, the chance of getting a good deal "goes out the window." Administratively, he said a sealed bidding process would be easier on his office, as there would be less paperwork than the current auction process.

Board Chairman Rob Ecklund said the discus-

sion was all hypothetical, and that he's not advocating for a change to a sealed bidding process.

"I kind of enjoy going to the auctions I can go to, and that last one was pretty interesting," Ecklund said.

If the sale price differences aren't significant between the two auction options, Commissioner Brian McBride said the board needs to keep the loggers' interests in mind.

"The logging community are our customers, and as long as the difference isn't huge, I think we need to keep our customers happy," McBride said. "If we were going to make a change, we'd have to sit down with them and talk about it."

In a committee session following the regular board meeting, the commissioners looked at an overview of the preliminary 2015 county budget and levy, as well as a budget line-item review.

County Administration Director Teresa Briggs said the county has until Sept. 30 to submit its proposed 2015 levy. A proposed levy can

be reduced before setting the final levy, but it can't be increased, she said. The plan is for the board to set the preliminary levy at the Sept. 23 board meeting, as well as confirm the public hearing date for the budget and levy for Dec. 2.

Briggs said the county's tax capacity increased by \$169,000, so if the county budget levy wasn't changed, the tax rate would be reduced by 1.5 percent. The county could also keep the tax rate the same, and increase the levy by up to \$50,000.

As far as the budget review goes, Briggs said for her it comes down to the bottom line, which would be to spend nothing out of the county's general revenue fund. With different loans and amounts set aside for future projects, she said she's concerned how much the county is taking out of the general revenue fund.

"That's what I'm trying to achieve, but the county board really needs to decide what it wants to achieve for this plan," Briggs said.

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Koochiching County - June and July 2014  
--Flooding and related Damage

## Public Notice

### SAND BAG REMOVAL AUTHORIZATION AND AGREEMENT FORM

**Overview of Sandbag Removal, Transport and Disposal Program**

In the months of September and October of 2014, Koochiching County will be hiring contractors to remove sand bags from designated private properties, then transport and dispose of filled sand bags at prescribed locations. Property owners will not be charged a fee for this sand bag removal work.

Koochiching County will only make arrangements to remove sand bags from properties – for which those owners have completed the County's Sand Bag Removal Authorization and Agreement Form. If property owners have not completed the Sand Bag Removal and Authorization form, those properties will not be eligible for Sand Bag removal by Koochiching County forces.

To be considered eligible for this work, all Sand Bags Removal Authorization and Agreement Forms must be submitted to the Koochiching County Engineer at the Koochiching County Courthouse by **4:30 pm on Thursday September 18, 2014**. Soon after reviewing all of the Sand Bag Removal Authorization and Agreement Forms, County staff will establish Sand Bag Pick-up zones (e.g. Ranier area, City Beach Area, Loman Area, Dove Island Area) and work with Sand Bag Removal Contractors to establish Sand Bag Pickup/Removal timetables. County staff will contact property owners to inform them of the anticipated dates on which sand bags will be scheduled for removal from their property. All sand bag removal work will take place between 8:00 am and 7:00 pm on Monday through Friday, unless otherwise agreed upon by private property owners. Property owners will NOT be provided the opportunity to set specific dates/times for sandbag removal on their property, unless special circumstances require the property owner to be on site during sand bag removal.

**Byproducts of the Sand Bag Removal Work – Terms and Conditions**

As part of removing sand bags from private property, County forces and contractor forces will use heavy equipment...e.g. skid steer, tractor backhoe, front end loader, etc. to travel between public road R/W and sand bag install sites (beachfront, shoreline, etc). Damage to yards will likely take place as part of the sandbag removal process. There are NO provisions in this Sand Bag Removal Authorization and Agreement Form for restoration of lawn, placing black dirt, repairing garden, planting grass seed, etc. Lawn and Turf restoration or related yard repairs, are NOT included in this work, and will be the sole responsibility of the property owner.

**Purpose of this Form and Action Required by Private Property Owner**

The purpose of the County's Sand Bag Removal Authorization and Agreement Form is: 1) to confirm property owner's request to have Koochiching County forces and/or designees access private property to remove filled sand bags for transport and disposal, and 2) to allow property owners to confirm their property address, and sign and date this form. The form need NOT be notarized.

Please contact Joe Sutherland at the Koochiching County Highway Dept to request a copy of the **SAND BAG REMOVAL AUTHORIZATION AND AGREEMENT FORM**. The **SAND BAG REMOVAL AUTHORIZATION AND AGREEMENT FORM** is also available on the Koochiching County website at **www.co.koochiching.mn.us**

Contact: Joe Sutherland, phone 218-283-1184 or 218-283-1186; email [joe.sutherland@co.koochiching.mn.us](mailto:joe.sutherland@co.koochiching.mn.us)