

KEEP THE BEAT



Drummers provide traditional music for Saturday’s powwow.

STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

LAWSUIT

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Cities Insurance Trust, of which the city is a member. The civil lawsuit by Koeneman claims the city and individuals who served on the city council violated the city charter when it created and filled the Economic Development Authority director position in 2012. The civil suit dated April 6 against Shawn Mason, Tim “Chopper” McBride, Gail Rognerud, Paul Eklund, Cynthia Jaksa, the city’s EDA and the city requires a reply within 20 days to attorney Donald C. Erickson with the law firm of Fryberger, Buchanan, Smith and Fred-

erick of Duluth. The suit seeks dismissal of some elected and appointed city officials from their positions now and prohibits them from holding city office in the future, criminal action and a monetary judgment. Anderson said Thompson advised the council not to discuss the lawsuit. He said he expects the council to meet in a conference call with Thompson sometime in the coming weeks. In addition, Anderson told the council the insurance trust plans in its defense of the lawsuit to engage the services of three law firms: one to defend the city and EDA; one to defend McBride, Eklund, Rognerud

and Jaksa; and one to defend former Mayor Mason, who now serves as EDA director. McBride, Eklund and Rognerud no longer serve on the council. In other business Monday, the council agreed to allow Borderland Substance Abuse Court the use of Smokey Bear Park and its shelter June 27 for a celebration of the court’s establishment 10 years ago. Lisa Santee, coordinator for the court, met with the council to tell them of the success of the program and to invite them to the celebration. Santee said the celebration will include kids games and food, with free-will donations to benefit the court’s

alumni group activities. Anderson told Santee city Attorney Steve Shermoen sings the program’s praises and successes. Shermoen is a member of the court support team. The council also concurred with appointments made by Anderson to a committee to negotiate the terms of the 2016-2019 agreement with the Rural Fire Protection Association. Anderson appointed to the committee Fire Chief Adam Mannausau, Administrator Ken Anderson, Droba and Councilor Brian Briggs, who was absent from Monday’s meeting. The current contract expires June 30, 2016.

KEDA

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The rail spur crosses property owned by Wagner Construction, and KEDA purchasing the land allows the project to move forward. An appraisal from Koochiching County put the value of the land at \$2,200 per acre, KEDA Director Paul Nevanen said. Built into the sale agreement are several contingencies that center around project funding and construction, Nevanen said. “We wanted to make sure there were some contingencies to protect us,” Nevanen said. The sale will go through if the project is able to obtain funding from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Nevanen said. The DEED funding would be through a grant with a local match from the city of International Falls and Koochiching County, Nevanen said. The local match would be \$175,000 each from the city and county. The

MnDOT funding would be in the form of a no-interest loan which KEDA would pay back over 10 years. The other contingency would be Wagner Construction doing preliminary construction work for the line at “competitive, prevailing prices,” Nevanen said. He noted Wagner Construction performed similar work at the multimodal district, where a rail spur was installed. “We’re using that estimate as a basis for this,” Nevanen said. “And they want to conduct the work, work on their property.” The current estimate of the public cost of the project is \$1.083 million, Nevanen said. That includes land acquisition, site preparation, installing the rail line and the rail crossing across Highway 332. The business owners will cover the project costs, which are “significant,” for the portion of the rail on their property, Nevanen said. “There will be additional job creation for both entities and investment,” Nevanen said. “That’s one of the bases for the public-private

partnership, that there will be job creation.” Area loggers will be concerned about the impact the rail crossing over Highway 332 might have on truck traffic on the highway, KEDA member Brian McBride said. Nevanen said rail cars will go through the crossing an average of once per day, so the traffic impact will be small. The project won’t require any wetland mitigation, Nevanen said, which is unique for Koochiching County. “This is a first in my three years here,” KEDA member Pete Kalar said. “Not to jinx us on the whole project.” The project will move forward as quickly as it can, Nevanen said. But first, funding from DEED and MnDOT must be secured. “We’ve had good support from all the players involved in this,” Nevanen said. “We’ve got a ways to go yet, but at least this starts the clock and the process begins.” Other business During his director’s report, Nevanen informed the board about recent talks with Frontier Com-

munications representative Kirk Lehman on upcoming broadband projects in Koochiching County. Frontier has a few projects designed to increase county Internet speeds scheduled for 2015, including Ranier and the area east of it. Despite indications the state Legislature will cut broadband funding, the Frontier projects will move forward, Nevanen said. “The good news for us is that we do have the players in Koochiching County making these additional investments,” Nevanen said. “So we’re pretty far ahead of a lot of folks.” In other business, McBride informed the board he would be taking KEDA member Rob Ecklund’s place as one of the county’s regular KEDA representatives for the rest of the year. Ecklund served as the group’s treasurer, so McBride was nominated and approved as KEDA’s new treasurer. Nevanen said the role has a bit of a learning curve, but the process of going over the finances has been simplified and isn’t “overly burdensome.”

AWARD

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Herman said when the Minnesota SBA director called her and told her she had won the award, she was “very pleased and humbled. I believe I’m just doing my job.” The annual Women in Business Champion recognition honors individuals who have fulfilled a commitment to the advancement of women’s business ownership, according to a release. Elaine Hanson, director of the University of Minnesota-Duluth Center for Economic Development and the northeast Minnesota SBDC at UMD, nominated Herman for the award.

The award isn’t just a personal recognition either, Herman said. It shows Koochiching County is a place that fosters small business growth. “There is strong support in our region for small business development,” Herman said. “The KEDA (Koochiching Economic Development Authority) has proven its investment and commitment to small business by its continuous support of my full-time SBDC position.” In addition to her role as a business consultant, Herman teaches workshops designed to educate business owners, coordinates the local Junior Achievement and CEOs in the Classroom programs and is a member of the Women’s Business Network in Fort Frances. She has also created and sustained an active International Women’s Business Network for the past seven years. “Of the total clients with whom I worked since I began, more than 50 percent of them have been women,” Herman said. “Women are great entrepreneurs and our work in Koochiching County is strengthening the environment for more women to make the investment in small businesses.” Herman will be honored at the Minnesota Small Business Week Awards program May 7 at the Minneapolis Marriott Northwest.


“It’s encouraging and inspires me to continue serving the needs of the small business community in our county.”

Jenny Herman



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