LOCAL NEWS

FALLS SCHOOL BOARD

It's in the voters' hands

Local voters will decide if board should consist of seven members

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

In conjunction with the Nov. 4 general election, the Falls School Board Monday agreed to hold a special election asking voters if they favor an odd-numbered board.

On a 3-2 vote, the board agreed to place on the ballot a question asking voters if they favored upping membership from a six to a seven-member board. Gordon Dault and Darrell Wagner voted against the motion. Willi Kostiuk was absent from the meeting.

"I still think it should go down to five (members)," Wagner said.

Dault said he agreed, however, in June he looked into the possibility and found the need for legislation, that could stand as a roadblock to any action.

The question on the ballot will ask voters if the board should consist of seven members. If approved, it would go into effect during the 2016 general election.

Dault pointed out, however, during this election there are three vacancies on the board and only one person, Tom Holt, has filed for a position.

"We've only got one person running," Wagner said. "It doesn't make any sense."

The main reasoning behind moving to an odd-numbered board, according to members, is to avoid a split vote in the future.

"I haven't been on (the board) before when we haven't had enough candidates," member Michelle Hebner said. "But, I support an odd-numbered board...I think we let the public decide."

"But," Wagner said, "if a vote is tied, it's a failed motion."

Member Mike Holden said that makes for "wasted time."

"If we have an odd number, we'll clear (decisions) at that time, during that meeting," he said. "Let the public decide."

But what will happen during this election when the board hasn't attracted enough candidates to fill vacant seats?

According to Bob Lowe, director of management services for the Minnesota School Board Association, the same issue is popping up in other districts across the state.

"The election will still be held," he said.

Typically, the person who filed will be elected and the remaining seats could be filled through a write-in vote, Lowe said. Then, he said, if there are winners of a write-in vote, they will be given the opportunity to accept or reject the seat.

"With three vacancies, the people with the three highest number of votes wins," he said. "However, if there is a fourth person in line, they won't be elected if a write-in candidate rejects the seat."

In other words, if a write-in rejects an open seat, the board will be given the power to appoint someone to fill the position. That process, Lowe explained, is ambiguous and MSBA laws don't specify a process the board will need to use to fill the appointment.

Meanwhile Monday, Falls High School Principal Tim Everson reported enrollment is at 546 students, including the sixth graders at West End Elementary.

"I don't have the numbers from last year so I can't tell you where we've gone as far as adding the sixth grade in to the high school," he said. "We are up 16 students from June in the 10th grade."

Both the high school and Falls Elementary have struggled with declining enrollment during the past year, and Everson said having some grade levels experience and increase in students is "promising."

Falls Elementary Principal Melissa Tate was not at Monday's meeting to report elementary enrollment figures.

Everson said he is looking forward to the school year and implementing the Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, or PBIS, program meant to address behavior issues in a positive way.

"We've got a really strong team of teachers preparing," he said.

The program kicked off at the elementary level last year, and according to officials, was successful and will continue this year.

KEDA discusses 2015 budget process

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching Economic Development Authority Tuesday took the first step towards finalizing its 2015 budget by reviewing a draft of the budget.

KEDA Director Paul Nevanen presented a general overview of the 2015 budget to the board, describing where income and funding for the group comes from, and what the general expenses are.

Nevanen said the budget has been fairly consistent over the past three to four years, and that the board approaches budget planning conservatively. He said the group's funding primarily comes from two sources: the Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation Board, and revenue from the cold weather testing facility.

IRRRB funding is based on a formula from taconite production, which has steadily increased the past three years, Nevanen said. The IRRRB funding allocation for 2015 is set at $95,719.14, which is $2,276.64 more than the allocation in 2014.

Paul Nevanen

"Taconite production remains strong, and that's good for the county and good for this organization," Nevanen said. "We anticipate that will continue about that level."

KEDA also receives some funding from the Small Business Development Center to support the SBDC position Jenny Herman holds, Nevanen said. Last year, KEDA budgeted $24,000 for SBDC reimbursement, and received $32,000 due to additional hours allocated to the local office. The new budget is conservative, and $20,000 is budgeted for SBDC reimbursement for 2015.

The largest expense KEDA incurs is employee expenses, Nevanen said. The budgeted rate for the KEDA Director and SBDC counselor positions won't change in the 2015 budget. Office expenses, professional fees, and travel & entertainment expenses will remain consistent with 2014.

Nevanen also outlined KEDA's advertising budget, and how the group is able to effectively market itself on a smaller budget.

"You can spend a lot of money marketing and advertising, and we've been fairly conservative in that approach as well," Nevanen said.

The budget for the cold weather testing facility is more difficult to plan for, Nevanen said, because the testing season and operating expenses can vary based on the severity of the weather. This past year, for example, the typical testing season of November to March extended much later in the spring due to the colder temperatures.

"Right now, we're very successful in the level of activity we're seeing out there," Nevanen said.

Expenses can also vary, Nevanen said, in that if there's a large amount of snowfall, the facility would incur greater snow plowing expenses.

CAN I GET A HAND?

Four hands were needed to haul in this 64-3/4 inch sturgeon at the North American Sturgeon Championship in Birchdale Saturday.

PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

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6:00 pm Elk's Spaghetti Dinner

Thursday, August 21st
2:00 pm Concessions Open
2:00 pm Flea Market
2:00 pm Craft Show
3:00 pm Teen Idol Contest
4:00 pm Beer Gardens Open
4:00 pm Flood Volunteer Appreciation
6:00 pm Boat Parade
6:30 pm Flood Volunteer Appreciation Program
7:30 pm Casting Call
10:00 pm Jam Session by Local Artists

Friday, August 22nd
10:00 am Arts & Crafts Festival Flea Market
11:00 am Concessions Open
11:00 am Rad Zoo
11:00 am Fun Zone Opens
12:00 pm Fun Zone Blow-Up
12:00 pm Tractor Rides
12:00 pm Beer Gardens open
1:00 pm Kids Games, Old Fashion Races & Fun Zone
1:30 pm Rad Zoo
4:00 pm Weigh-Ins
6:00 pm Lawn Mower Drag Racing
6:00 pm Steak Dinner
8:00 pm Don Tersigni-Comedian
9:30 pm Johnny Bird Show

Saturday, August 23rd
8:00 am Kids Fishing Tournament
8:00 am Classic Car/Motorcycle Show Registration
9:00 am 5 K Race
9:00 am Fastpitch Tournament
10:00 am Arts & Crafts Festival Flea Market
10:00 am Classic Car/Motorcycle Show
10:00 am Disc Golf
11:00 am Concessions Open
11:00 am Family Fun Zone opens
12:00 pm Beer Gardens open
12:00 pm Tractor Rides
12:00 pm Go Cart Races
12:00 pm Jam Session by Local Artists
12:30 pm Kids Games, Old Fashion Races & Fun Zone
3:30 pm Car/Motorcycle Show Awards – drive thru
4:00 pm Weigh-ins
7:00 pm Hypnotist
9:00 pm Brat Pack Radio
10:00 pm Raffle Drawing

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