

LOCALNEWS

FALLS SCHOOL BOARD

Group makes request for elevator at arena

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

The need for an elevator in Bronco Arena was expressed to the Falls School Board this week.

Melanie Benike, Zach Wood and Ashley Germain approached the board during Tuesday’s open forum requesting the board consider installing an elevator to make the arena more handicap accessible, according to Superintendent Kevin Grover.

The board doesn’t take action on open forum requests, however Grover said the plea didn’t fall on deaf ears.

“Installing an elevator at the arena has been on the (to-do) list numerous times,” Grover told The Journal Thursday, adding last year a more handicap accessible seating area was created at the arena. “This is something we’re going to try to move forward with.”

The superintendent said an estimate to install an elevator was secured several years ago, and came in around \$200,000. That price tag, would include making the restrooms handicap accessible, he said.

“I don’t know how old that estimate is, but we’re hoping we’d still be in that ballpark,” he said.

Should the effort move forward, Grover said the group that presented Tuesday said they supported it being a community project.

“We’re going to see if there’s any grants available,” he said. “Hopefully, this is something that can happen in the near future.”

Also during Tuesday’s open forum, Grover reported Jennifer Windels, an active member on the school’s Blue Ribbon Panel and Partners in Education effort, suggested the board consider developing a more in-depth technology plan for the district.

The plan could include a technology person to help teachers at the elementary level and potentially a technology coach, she said. That type of coach would research applications teachers could use on the iPads and then instruct the staff how the apps are used, said Grover.

“She feels it’s important,” Grover said. “We are looking at getting more technology support as we try to increase our technology offerings.”

Joe Silko, a representative from the Education Innovation Partners, presented on the program and

the district’s involvement.

EIP is a regional partnership of more than 20 school districts and five community colleges across north-eastern Minnesota. It was created to provide a 21st century education for youth and adult learners throughout the region.

“The focus is to have a regional technology plan,” Grover reported. “We want to be part of the conversation as far as where the region is going.”

In other business, the board agreed to the formation of a drama club at Falls High School. Grover said about 27 students are interested and it will be a good thing for the district.

A resolution was adopted by the board to direct administration to make recommendations for reductions in programs and positions. Grover said the move is done annually and is normal protocol.

“There is nothing looming,” he said of cuts and reductions.

At the end of the regular meeting, the board entered into a closed session to review the superintendent. A summary of the review showed the majority of marks fell within the “commendable” category.

Grover’s goals included better communication between himself and the staff, community and school board. In addition, personnel reviews will be conducted on every district employee’s performance by fiscal year-end.

Also Tuesday the board agreed to:

- Restructure the district’s hiring committee to not include a board member.
- Adopt a revised policy for student activity accounts.
- Approve a contract with the International Falls Figure Skating Club for summer ice time rental in the amount of \$800.
- Acknowledge Steve Joslyn as a volunteer boys swim coach.
- Approve the hire of Jamie Hell has a .75 FTE secretary starting Feb. 17.
- Accept the resignation of Janelle Ice as an educational support professional.
- Accept the resignation of Tiffany Reineck as an educational support professional.



Kevin Grover

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Kevin Grover
Falls Superintendent

KEDA discusses consultants’ visit

Report highlights work on current projects

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer



Paul Nevanen



Pete Kalar

Professional business consultants visited Koochiching County earlier this month, and members of the Koochiching Economic Development Authority Thursday discussed their impressions of the meeting.

Consultants from Newmark Grubb Knight Frank toured Koochiching County Jan. 7-9, and visited with local officials, business leaders and more. The visit was a part of the Voyage Forward initiative, which seeks to foster growth and development in the community.

KEDA Director Paul Nevanen said the consultants will develop a strategic plan for the area, which will be presented in June. The consultants also work in site selection, so they also understand that aspect of economic development, he said.

“They made some nice comments about, there’s no silver bullet to this, there’s no quick fix or quick answer to this,” Nevanen said. “It takes time, it takes persistence, it takes an understanding of what you have and how you market it.”

Voyage Forward is now in the second part of the development process, Nevanen said, which involves sending data to the consultants, so they can put together a more clear picture.

“It’s very detailed on utilities, infrastructure, education, demographics,

all of that,” Nevanen said. “And they’re going to start putting that all together.”

The consultants will again visit the area in March when they’ll continue to meet with people, Nevanen said.

Part of the process involves looking at business attraction versus business retention, Nevanen said. The community has to balance the focus on attracting new businesses, which is difficult, versus retaining existing businesses.

Nevanen said he liked how the consultants made a point of visiting Fort Frances when they were in the area, as the two communities are closely linked. They also spent time meeting with local customs and border officials, he said.

“I just think a lot of people forget how intertwined our two communities are,” KEDA member Rob Ecklund said.

KEDA member Pete Kalar said he was encouraged that the local officials and consultants were already on the same page in regard to ideas and plans they had.

“That was encouraging, because you never know if you’re doing the right thing, but we are doing the right thing,” Kalar said.

The plan the consultants are developing covers the whole county, Kalar said, which is important.

“We’re a region, we’re

not just a town,” Kalar said. “And whatever’s good for one is going to be good for the other.”

KEDA member Bob Anderson said the Newmark consultants wanted to be known as partners and not just consultants, which is an important distinction.

KEDA member Soren Olesen said even if nothing significant comes of the report, at least all the work involved brought the communities in the county together.

“We’ve got people from all over the county talking on the same page,” Olesen said. “That helps a lot, it really does.”

In other business, Nevanen’s director’s report highlighted the International Falls Business Park, located at Second Avenue and 22nd Street. The fisheries building on the property is being listed for sale after the building’s owner couldn’t make the business work, Nevanen said.

“He had the distribution, but could never put the financing fully together,” Nevanen said. “Nor could he secure long-term contracts.”

There is an adjacent building which is under construction, Nevanen said, and through tax forfeiture has reverted to the county. The second building will be auctioned off during a county auction in May.

The fisheries building’s owner, Steven Heller, has some initial interest from buyers, Nevanen said. However, he said Heller believes there is a way for the two buildings to be packaged together, and the second building could then be used.

“It’s a good location, the two buildings compliment each other,” Nevanen said. “We think that there might be some real possibilities, already with some interest there.”

The director’s report also highlighted the work on the rail siding project involving Bergstrom Wood Products, Rainy Lake Oil and Minnesota Dakota and Western Railway. The project would

run a section of rail across property owned by Wagner Construction to the businesses, allowing them to streamline their operations.

Due to higher estimated costs in acquiring an easement from Wagner Construction

for the project, the group has decided to look into purchasing the land outright, Nevanen said. They’re also working on an application for a grant from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development for the project.

“We want to do this the right way so we can get DEED’s support on this,” Nevanen said. “And we have an actual project in-hand with additional investment and job creation.”

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Pete Kalar
KEDA member



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NOTICE: COMMERCIAL PROPERTY OWNERS

The County Assessor’s office will begin inspection of all Commercial Businesses within the city limits of International Falls.

The main purpose of the inspections is to transition field card record keeping and rating to electronic record keeping and rating. This will involve inspecting, measuring, sketching and taking new photos of all commercial property. While the main concern is not revaluing property, certainly value discrepancies between like properties will be addressed.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call the Assessor’s office, e-mail the County Assessor or drop by:

Koochiching County Assessor
Phone: 218-283-7002
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