# LOCAL NEWS

KOOCHICHING COUNTY BOARD

## Board approves construction project bid

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching County Board Tuesday approved a construction bid for a road project which should make area loggers very happy upon completion.

The board accepted a bid from Hammerlund Construction Inc. for the County Highway 332 reconstruction project, which will be completed in fall 2015. The bid, at $5.84 million, is 17 percent more than the engineer's estimate of $4.95 million.

County Engineer Joe Sutherland recommended accepting the bid, and said he'd speak with Hammerlund Construction later Tuesday to discuss a timeline for the project. He said he'd hope the Grand Rapids-based company could begin working in May or June, with project completion in September.

"Again, it's a full detour, so we want to compress the timeline," Sutherland said.

Sutherland said he'd met with the mayor of International Falls, Bob Anderson, and the city's public works director, Gary Skallman, regarding the detour. He said the city wants to use the old truck route, which would have truck drivers turn from Third Street onto Sixth Avenue, and then onto Fourth Street.

The Third Street and Sixth Avenue intersection would be a tight turn for a fully-loaded truck, Sutherland said, so they'll have to test it before setting it as the detour.

"We're going to look at that more closely," Sutherland said. "But we also want to work with the city to be sure that we're putting the trucks where the city wants them as well."

STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

**Wade Pavleck, right, socializes with St. Thomas Catholic School students during lunch Tuesday.**

County Commissioner Wayne Skoe said parking may need to be restricted near the intersection in order to ensure truck drivers have enough room to make the turn.

"Somebody better be there to protect (the Smokey Bear statue)," County Chairman Wade Pavleck joked. "He might get it right in the stomach."

The project was delayed in July due to its proximity to the Falls International Airport. The project would have had construction in the runway protection zones for the airport, which would have triggered a lengthy review process by the Federal Aviation Administration. It was then revised to avoid the review process.

In other business, the county board approved appointment of Paul Nevanen as the at-large member of the local airport commission. The commission presides over the Falls International Airport, which is jointly owned by the city and county.

According to the joint powers agreement for the commission, the at-large member is appointed by the International Falls City Council and approved by the Koochiching County Board. The position is a two-year term, running from January 2015 to December 2016.

County Commissioner Brian McBride said the discussion at the Jan. 5 city council meeting touched on conflict of interest. McBride said the relationships between the airport, city, county and Koochiching Economic Development Authority have changed, but that hasn't changed how Nevanen will approach the appointment.

"I see no reason even to think that there'd be any kind of conflict," McBride said. "He's a man of integrity and I support him."

Anderson clarified Nevanen's work as KEDA director is overseen by the KEDA board, and there's no personal financial interest for him in the situation.

"There's no financial interest, because Paul Nevanen doesn't make any decisions," Anderson said. "It's made by his board."

Pavleck said he's pleased with Nevanen's previous work on the airport commission, and admires his ability to voice his opinion, even if it's not the popular one.

In other business, the board discussed developing a new county strategic action plan. The current plan was developed in 2005, county Administrative Director Teresa Briggs said, and has been "exhausted."

"It set forth specific goals as the board members agreed to, to help guide the county in a certain direction and establish some goals," Briggs said.

Many of those goals, including the Jackfish Bay sewer project, have been completed, Briggs said. The plan has served as a good tool over the years, she said, despite the plan's designed end date of 2008.

The Association of Minnesota Counties provides a consultation service for developing an action plan, and could be tapped to help develop a new plan, Briggs said. She also suggested not dating the new plan, which wouldn't restrict the goals of the plan to a three-year period.

Following the meeting, the county board had lunch with St. Thomas Catholic School students, as a part of the school's lesson on government. Board members got a chance to rub elbows with future voters over sub sandwiches and soup.

## Koochiching County included in flood relief

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Koochiching is among 37 counties and three American Indian reservations expected to benefit by the Legislature's final approval of $17 million for damages and expenses from flooding last June.

The House voted unanimously in favor of the legislation on Monday afternoon. The Senate passed the measure unanimously last week.

The bill was signed Tuesday by Gov. Mark Dayton.

"Last June, communities across Minnesota were declared a major disaster after heavy flooding," said Dayton in a news release. "The bill I signed into law today will help Minnesotans rebuild, repair roads and other infrastructure, and to restore our natural resources. I thank the Legislature for acting quickly to pass this important legislation."

The flood relief bill is the second bill passed in the 2015 session, following legislation that Dayton signed over the weekend to match Minnesota tax laws with federal counterparts.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk, who represents Koochiching, told The Journal the action was necessary because the state didn't have adequate resources to match federal assistance.

The bill includes $13 million to cover the cost of the state match for monies spent by the Federal Emergency Management Agency in responding to flooding that struck the state in June 2014.

In addition, the bill appropriates $3 million for the Department of Transportation to meet that agency's required match for federal highway funds, as well as another $2 million for the Board of Water and Soil Resources and $1.4 million in state-only disaster spending.

Most of the disaster-relief money contained in the bill was covered by canceling leftover appropriations made but never spent in responding to 2011 and 2012 weather-related disasters in the state.

Bakk said the assistance is a good thing for Koochiching and the other counties and reservations.

"The problem is local governments, like Koochiching County, have to do repairs and then apply for FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Administration) money," said Bakk. "FEMA money sometimes takes a couple years because of the federal bureaucracy. Now, they can move forward with assurance the reimbursement will be there."

Rep. David Dill said Tuesday St. Louis County, which he also represents, did not meet the threshold for assistance because of the net worth of the county compared with the damages.

"A few people are upset, but FEMA rules are FEMA rules," said Dill. "We appealed to the president of the United States to get a variance, but it is what it is."

Dill said he will reach out to communities that suffered damages from the flooding, including the Loman Fire Department which suffered damage to its equipment.

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