

FEE

➤ continued from A1

Later in the meeting, Anderson offered an amendment to a motion to pay the fee, seeking to delay the payment until a July 31 public “visioning” meeting is complete and a new appraisal is conducted on the property.

“I am not saying don’t pay, but withhold it until we have more information,” he explained.

The council voted 4-1 to pay the fee, with Anderson voting no.

A public input meeting scheduled for 6:30 p.m. July 31 at the AmericInn is among the first steps to establish a plan for development of the property. The visioning process, which will include four public meetings, will be facilitated by staff from the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission.

Anderson also questioned the \$1.8 million appraisal of the land, upon which the brokerage fees were based. The appraisal was conducted in 2009 by Bigelow Appraisals of Hibbing.

Anderson said the county placed the value for taxation purposes on the land at \$400,000. He noted that since the land is now owned

by the city, no taxes are being paid on it. He told The Journal that he believed the taxes on the property were about \$1,600 per year when it was owned by the Donahue family.

Anderson told The Journal Wednesday that brokerage fees are generally paid to someone who finds property for someone seeking property and helps with the transaction, similar to the fees paid to a real estate agent.

Matt Donahue told The Journal Wednesday that a brokerage fee is paid to brokers who negotiate deals.

“I am not real smart so the city got a professional appraiser to protect their interest,” he said. “Based on that, my company, MJD Enterprises, received a 5-percent fee for doing that. That 5-percent fee — \$15,000 spread over six years with no interest — is to support my mother (former property resident Ethel Donahue) — that’s where the money goes if somebody asked about it.”

Donahue continued that due to what he called the questioning of the integrity of the council and himself by Anderson, “I stand ready to purchase it back for the \$60,000 they invested now, right now.”

Donahue said the appraisal is on file with the city. “There is no cost to hold that land, no taxes on it because it belongs to the city,” he said. “There is no cost to hold the land unless there are expansion ideas and then they would be real glad to have the land.”

Donahue also said there is no restriction in the agreement on the city selling the land, except that the trail may not be developed, which he said is intended to be a benefit to the residents of the city.

Other members of the council believed it important to honor the agreement and make the payment, while some agreed that discussions with Matt Donahue about the agreement may be appropriate.

Councilor Pete Kalar said he believed the payment should be made, but said the property should not be referred to as a gift. He said he could support discussions with the Donahue family about the value.

Councilor Paul Eklund also said the payment should be made, but the council could discuss the agreement with Donahue. Regardless of the fee, he said, the land is still a value to the city.

“In the long run, we come out ahead,” he said.

Rognerud said should the council agree to discuss the property with the Donahues, another appraisal may be beneficial.

Councilor Cynthia Jaksa said the property, which is bordered by Rainy River and the Falls Country Club, is valuable and could be developed into “high-end” housing. She said the city has little land that can be developed for housing.

Most communities, she said, would welcome the property and the trail, which she said is another amenity the city can offer to residents, visitors and newcomers.

“It’s not out of the norm for a city to purchase property for development,” she said.

But Anderson said annexing the property into the city and extending water and sewer service to it would be a lengthy and expensive process.

City Attorney Steve Sher-moen said the city has a contractual obligation to pay the fees. But, he said, that does not preclude discussions with the Donahue Family Trust to determine whether it wants the property back or would renegotiate the value. He noted that the “gift” created a tax advantage to those giving it.

“To not pay may invite a lawsuit,” he told the council.

City residents Pauline Glennie and Dick Koeneman also questioned the brokerage fee and the appraisal. Glennie supported conducting another appraisal, and said the value of the property will likely decrease in the next couple years with the reduction of jobs at Boise Inc.’s International Falls paper mill.

“I don’t think it’s an asset,” said Glennie. “This money should be spent on infrastructure,” added Koeneman.

The property, which includes 1,440 feet of Rainy River shoreline, was a part of the Donahue Farm, located to the west of the Falls city limits, known for its produce offered for sale to local residents.

In other business, Anderson reported that he and staff met with 17 landlords in the city to discuss an agreement with the county’s Housing and Redevelopment Authority for the city to perform inspections on some rental units under HRA jurisdiction.

The council agreed to enter the agreement and conduct six inspections on rental properties. These inspections, he said, would provide information about the time it takes to conduct

an inspection. During that time, he said, staff would attempt to identify the owners of all rental properties in the city. The action delays implementation of a plan to conduct inspections until after the inspections of the HRA properties.

The council also agreed to return in August to conducting regular meetings on the first and third Mondays. The schedule was changed earlier this year at Anderson’s suggestion to allow for more discussion at regular meetings on issues that had been discussed more thoroughly at committee meetings, few of which are attended by members of the public or media representatives.

The meetings will continue to be scheduled for 4:30 p.m.

Councilors and staff supported the first and third Monday meeting dates, saying it would allow for more time to prepare the agenda and supporting information, as well as for more research to be conducted on issues.

They said they approved of the committee structure, that does not include all councilors on each committee, and said that has encouraged more discussion and transparency at council meetings.

KOSTIUK

➤ continued from A1

GETTING STARTED

After graduating from high school, Kostiuk attended St. Johns University in Collegeville, Minn. Once there, he joined the U.S. Reserve Officers’ Training Corps, a college-based program for training commissioned officers of the United States armed forces. When he graduated from college in 2009, he became a second lieutenant and lead 40 soldiers the first day on the job.

“After I graduated, I had a few months to get ready for active duty,” he said. “From leading 40 men and women from day one to preparing for deployment, it seemed like everything was moving pretty fast.”

Just a few weeks after graduation, Kostiuk was on his way to Oklahoma for seven weeks to train as a basic officer. He said the majority of the training was in transportation – his area of expertise.

From Oklahoma, he went to Virginia for four months and then on to Fort Bliss in El Paso, Texas, before eventually deploying to Iraq.

“When I got to Fort Bliss, my unit had already been in Iraq for six to eight months and I would be joining them for the remainder of the deployment,” Kostiuk explained.

FIRST DEPLOYMENT

One month before Kostiuk traveled halfway across the world, he married Andrea on Dec. 12, 2009. The newlyweds got little time together before Kostiuk left Jan. 23, 2010, for Iraq.

“It was definitely hard to leave my wife right away,” Kostiuk said.

On the plus side, however, he said timing couldn’t have been better since Andrea, who also serves in the military, had to report to San Antonio, Texas, for three months – an identical length to Kostiuk’s deployment.

“It worked out great,” he said. “There was only about a two-week period that she was home before I got there.”

During the deployment, Kostiuk said his unit spent a lot of time on the road running convoys from his base to surrounding bases.

“Things in Iraq were winding down while I was there,” he said. “The security structure was more stable.”

FROM ONE TO THE NEXT

When Kostiuk returned to the U.S. in May 2010, he said he immediately began training for the next deployment scheduled for 13 months after his homecoming.

“We knew we would be deployed almost right away again,” he said of his unit. “We had time to get used to the idea.”

In the meantime, Kostiuk said he was promoted to a

first lieutenant company executive officer.

While security purposes restricted Kostiuk from providing details of the work done during his second deployment, he noted that his unit was one of the last in Iraq and its purpose was to ensure a good transition for the Iraqi people.

“That deployment was only five months, so again I got lucky,” Kostiuk said.

Kostiuk said the homecoming from this deployment was different, however, because he welcomed a new member of his family into the world.

Five minutes after stepping off the plane onto U.S. soil Nov. 27, Kostiuk’s his father, Willi, had a cell phone waiting for him displaying a very special photo – Kostiuk’s daughter, Anna, who was only a few minutes old.

“It was hard not being there,” Kostiuk said of Anna’s arrival. “Needless to say, coming home and seeing that photo my daughter was a lot for one day – kind of a sensory overload.”

Kostiuk said it was about one week before he was able to travel to Minnesota, where Anna was born.

“It was a shock at first,” he said of the first time holding his daughter. “One week I was in Iraq and the next, I was holding my little girl.”

INTERRUPTED ROUTINE

Not being present for Anna’s birth was one of the many things that Kostiuk said he missed during the first year of his daughter’s life.

“It helps that my wife is in the military, too, so she understands, but it is still hard,” he admitted.

After his second deployment, the family was able to spend about a month together and establish a routine.

“During that 30-day (leave) period, my whole plan was to pack up and bring everyone back to El Paso,” Kostiuk said, adding Andrea was staying in the Twin Cities while he was gone.

And that is what they did. The family headed south to their apartment in El Paso, not thinking anything would alter their plans.

The military had a different idea.

Kostiuk said when he was just a few hours out of El Paso, he received a call that he would deploy again in five months. This time, to Afghanistan.

“It was really hard,” he said. “I just met my daughter, I was moving my family down to Texas and I had no warning. Again, it was a lot to handle in one day.”

But, knowing the price that came with living a military life, Kostiuk said he and Andrea embraced what happened and moved anyway.

“We set up shop and I was there for about five months,” he said. “I was gone a lot for training and learning about the Afghan culture, but we

were together as much as we could be.”

NOT A TYPICAL ROLE

Kostiuk deployed in May of 2012 and was surrounded by a non-typical army experience, he said.

“We were advisers to the Afghan police,” he explained.

The job included equipping officers with tactics and techniques and overall making them a more sustainable, educated force, Kostiuk said.

“We worked to refine their logistic system so that it was more efficient,” he continued.

Kostiuk added that the role included doing “literally everything” with the Afghan police. “We learned their language and their culture, we lived with them, we ate with them, we worked with them. Everything.”

Kostiuk called the nine-month experience “rewarding” and said, although he was doing a lot of the training, he was learning a lot himself.

“It was the best experience I’ve had in the army by far,” he said. “And again, even though it was my longest deployment, it was still short. I got lucky each time.”

And his efforts paid off. Near the end of the third deployment, Kostiuk and the rest of his team was awarded a Bronze Star medal for meritorious service performed during the deployment.

“It was nice to be recognized for the job we were doing,” a humbled Kostiuk said.

The medal is the fifth-highest combat decoration and the 10th highest U.S. military award in order of precedence.

“I was rewarded for learning things I’ll apply to the rest of my life,” Kostiuk said. “It is an honor. From that mission, I gained logistical, technical and leadership experience that I’ll carry with me as I work my way back into the civilian world.”

WORTH CELEBRATING

This month marked the end of Kostiuk’s four-year contract with the government, and although he was unclear about whether he would sign up again, he said he will not continue with active duty.

“I teeter tottered on the decision,” he said. “I know I made the right choice and now I’m going through the process of getting into the National Guard.”

The Kostiuk family is currently planning to make their home in the Twin Cities where Kostiuk has secured a job.

“I’m just ready for some family time,” he said. “Holidays are important to us right now. I missed Anna’s first Christmas and her first birthday, I want to make time for her and for my wife. My plans are spending as much time with them as I can. When we get home, I just want to celebrate being with them and the rest of my family.”



A NOTE FROM BRAGG

Airman First Class Jack A. Bragg, formerly of International Falls and now stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base near Shreveport, La., shows his appreciation for a care package sent to him by Border State Bank’s Tuesday’s For the Troops program. Bragg wrote BSB staff a note expressing his thanks and noting that he shared the contents with his friends at the base. Tuesday’s For the Troops allows BSB staff to wear patriotic clothing or clothing with the BSB logo on Tuesdays and donate whatever amount they choose to the “Troop Fund” that day. The money is used to send care packages to active duty troops from the Borderland area throughout the year. Jack Bragg is the son of Les and Molly Bragg of International Falls.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Check out the

New Items

at City Drug

Joseph®
Joseph

ELEVATE KITCHEN TOOLS

EACH TOOL HAS AN INNOVATIVE WEIGHTED HANDLE WITH AN INTEGRATED TOOL REST, ENSURING THAT THE HEAD IS ALWAYS RAISED OFF THE WORK SURFACE

Improves hygiene and reduces mess!

Also Available Rocker Garlic Crusher

www.citydrugstore.com

City Drug

283-3061

Mon. - Sat. 8 am - 6 pm

What’s Your Style?

Lace & Glitter

Sequin Cadet

Breast Cancer Awareness

Bling It On!

Metallic Shine Snoozies

Many colors available
Women’s sizes, small, med., lrg.