

LOCALNEWS

Council seeks answers from organization

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

LITTLEFORK- The Littlefork City Council Thursday decided to take a “wait and see” approach about the ambulance thrift shop operating in the city administration building.

The thrift shop is open three days a week, city Administrator Sonja Pelland said. Profits and proceeds from the shop benefit the Littlefork Ambulance Service. The nonprofit organization is operated by volunteers in space at the city administration building. While the city doesn’t have control over the organization, she said, it has an interest in making sure things are running properly because it is located inside city property.

“We wanted to find out if they’re operating as they should be, meeting when they’re supposed to,” Pelland said. “We sent a letter to members of their board asking for operations clarifications.”

According to Pelland, members of the organization sent a letter answering some of the questions posed by city officials rather than attend a city council meet-

ing. The letter provided the group’s nonprofit number to bring things up to date, she said, as well as details about the annual board meeting. The letter said the group is discussing having another meeting soon.

“We’re still looking for answers,” Pelland said. “They’re just frustrated we’re asking the questions. We will stop asking when we get answers.”

When the Littlefork Ambulance Service needs a piece of equipment, it can make a specific request, and generally the thrift shop responds, Pelland said. Because the thrift shop organizers are closely involved with the ambulance service, she said the city is interested in making sure things are running correctly.

“They are in our building, so we have an obligation to make sure they’re operating as a nonprofit, especially when the funds go to the ambulance service,” Pelland said.

The council decided to wait and see if it receives more information from the board, Pelland said. If not, the council will ask that board members attend a city council meeting, she said, or

if the council can attend one of the board’s meetings.

In other business, the council heard about a couple residences experiencing freezing waterlines, Pelland said. Littlefork isn’t unique in this problem, she said, as cities across Minnesota have been having freezing issues.

To remedy the issue, the city asked the owners of 17 residences to leave water running in a small stream until spring when the freezing danger has passed, Pelland said. The city will adjust water bills to account for the extra use, she said.

The council also heard from John Mattonen of JPJ Engineering about an upcoming construction project. In 2015, the city is scheduled to replace water and sewer mains on Fourth Avenue, Sixth Avenue, and Central Road, as well as some interior piping and valves at the water treatment plant, Pelland said.

The more than \$1 million project will likely be funded through a variety of sources, including grants from the Minnesota Department of Health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture rural development program, Pelland said.

Benefits of grant have begun

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Visitors to Voyageurs National Park’s Rainy Lake Visitor Center are already seeing the benefits of a three-year grant commitment by Voyageurs National Park Association.

The \$150,000 “landmark grant” grant that will be provided to VNP in \$50,000 increments over the three years has a variety of benefits, said Voyageurs National Park Superintendent Mike Ward.

The first incremental grant has allowed the park to reopen its Rainy Lake Visitor Center on Sundays, he said. The visitor center was closed on Sundays last May after sequestration’s across-the-board automatic spending cuts. The sequester is a byproduct of the Budget Control Act of 2011, which resolved a debate over the debt ceiling by scheduling broad spending cuts that took effect January 2013.

The visitor center resumed its Sunday hours earlier this month.

“This is the immediate success of them giving us the funding,” Ward said of the VNPA grant. “It was one of things where we

cut based on sequestration — Sunday premium and overtime pay: two important things to pay to be open on Sundays.”

Ward said the funding will also accomplish other goals “that would not have happened if not for the funding.”

An agreement with the city of Orr allows VNP to provide park materials at its information center. “Because we were getting cut so hard, it would have been something we were not sure we would have been able to continue,” Ward said. “So the funding will be used for that. It’s pretty important because we don’t have a visitor contact area down there.”

Without the funding assistance from VNP that allows park materials to be distributed, Ward said Orr would likely have closed its information center.

“And there is a whole bunch of other things we’re working on that we will use the funding on,” he said.



Mike Ward

He pointed to a park evening walk which brought history to life in the form of park staff taking on the persona of local characters. An 18-person waiting list for the program was left at the end of the season. He said the program was so well received and park staff so committed that an extended version of the program is being developed that will allow park staff to get creative, he said.

Meanwhile, Voyageurs National Park will mark its 40-year anniversary and VNPA its 50th anniversary in 2015. The grant recognizes the expanded partnership, said a note in the VNPA bulletin about the funding.

“The Landmark Grant will help us serve the public and protect our precious resources where our own budgets are lacking,” Ward said in the bulletin. “This funding is truly a tremendous demonstration of VNPA’s growth and ingenuity and I cannot tell you how much we appreciate it.”

The bulletin said the grant represents the largest gift VNPA granted to the park.

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