

ST. THOMAS

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“The bulk of our student numbers are in the lower grades,” Flesland said. “We know we can’t build a school up by keeping higher grades. We have had families who have enrolled their child later in their school years to get more one-on-one help... but normally, we’re going to grow from the small grades.”

Exact details on how a revamped preschool program will operate are still unclear, but Flesland said extending preschool hours longer than a 3-hour day is being discussed.

“Most of our kindergarten class comes from our preschool program,” she continued. “If we can get that preschool program built up a little bit, we’re hoping to keep some of those families.”

Flesland said unfortunately, the reduction of

“We’re being very proactive so we will not have to close our doors, but it’s still very heartbreaking.

Dawn Flesland
St. Thomas School principal

grades could mean staff layoffs.

“We’re looking at how we can restructure,” she said. “Obviously we won’t probably have jobs for everybody...it might be some full-time employees go to part time.”

Flesland said the parents are supportive, but still surprised.

“Most reactions are that they’re disappointed,” she said. “We’re disappointed, too.”

In a church newsletter,

the Rev. Kris McKusky wrote the “never give up” mentality of Borderland kicked in during the decision-making process.

“Our attitudes quickly turned from despair to one of hope for rebuilding,” he wrote. “We quickly began looking for ways to get through a tough time while setting some groundwork for future success...Our challenge now is to support our Catholic school and parishes and work to ensure that Catholic education remains a part of the Borderland region for years to come.”

Flesland echoed McKusky’s comments by explaining she was optimistic the decision keeps the school from closing completely.

“This is one of the options we have to exhaust,” she said. “If we build up our younger grades, we will hopefully, in the future, have enough students to include the upper grades again at some point.”

BUDGET

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“An example would be making changes and/or additions to our current course and section numbers which could come with additional cost,” he said. “This would be done with the hope of retaining more students in the future and helping our financial picture.”

Falls and West End Elementary principal Melissa Tate said the district should focus on investing in young grades to ensure future success of students. One area in particular need of restructuring, she said, is the district’s preschool program.

In addition, the letter said Community Education generates about \$120,000 in revenue each year and eliminating the secretary position would leave several duties left undone and do a “huge injustice to the Community Ed department.”

■ **Transportation:** Transportation Director Jeff Veeder said adding door-to-door bus service, instead of several regional stops, for all district students to and from school is a good idea, but could come with a cost.

“It’s not an easy situation to pull off, but it’s something we need to do to compete with our neighboring districts,” Veeder said.

On the downside, Veeder said the district wouldn’t be reimbursed for added miles traveled for certain students.

“The time has come to change our ways,” he said. “I think we can pull it off with minimal cost...we’ll be adding two routes.”

Veeder also asked board members to replace a bus, which could have a price tag of about \$100,000.

“I know on an evening when you’re discussing cuts, it’s a hard one to swallow,” he said. “I believe it is a step for the future of the viability of our transportation department.”

■ **K-2 teachers:** Nelson’s original cost adjustment proposal said staff reductions at both the elementary and secondary level could save – on the steep side – about \$370,000. All the kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers Monday urged board members to keep four sections of each of the three grades.

“We do not believe it is an option that is in the best interests of students or staff,” Mary Kay Hardwig, kindergarten teacher, said of reducing K-2 sections. “Last year, kindergarten sections were as many as 28 students. This year, due to the generous addition of the fourth section, the kindergarten sections are between 16 and 19 students.”

Hardwig said smaller classes sizes are beneficial to saving the district money in the long run.

“Several parents have expressed concerns in class sizes next year and have stated they’ll leave the district if (an increase) happens,” Hardwig said. “Increasing class sizes would only decrease the trust parents have in our district.”

Lisa Auran, first-grade teacher, said young learners need extra one-on-one attention that can be given in a class of a smaller size.

“People need time to talk, play and explore,” she said. “They also need a sense of belonging...With less

students, we have less discipline problems.”

■ **Local 4798:** Nelson previously said if assignments of educational support professionals are reconfigured, the district could save \$125,000. Janet Underdahl, president of the educational support professionals union told board members there are 48 para professionals employed with the district.

“Every para’s job is different,” she said, adding students, teachers and parents depend on para professionals to ensure students are successful and safe when attending school.

■ **English as a second language (ELL/ESL):** The superintendent said in November only one hour of ELL taught by Rosa Christianson is offered and he doesn’t see a need for the \$8,600 spent on it. Christianson said the program helps students become proficient and succeed in the mainstream classroom.

She added the program is self-funded and receives \$14,000 from the state. Also, because the Falls’ ELL program has eight students, it is required by the state if a district enrolls one or more English learners, there must be a specialized English learning educational program in place.

■ **Special education:** Shawn Johnson, special education teacher, said para professional support is “vital to her job.”

“Without their support, my job would be very difficult to manage,” she said.

■ **Local 510:** Local 510 president Josie Toninato said the secretary and custodian union is requesting an incentive package for early retirement be offered to union members without reopening negotiations on the contract.

“This can be accomplished with a memorandum of understanding,” she said. “There are a number of members who would be interested in at least looking at any offerings.”

Toninato, who also serves as the Falls Elementary secretary, asked board members to consider increasing the number of months she works from 10 to 11 to allow for more time to complete tasks and projects.

Board Chairman Gordy Dault said the board appreciated the presentations, and presenters were looking out for the best interests of the district’s students.

The board is scheduled to meet at 5 p.m. Feb. 12, during which an open forum of discussion will be held among board members and the public.

“It’ll be a chance to generate discussion,” Nelson said.



STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

Bruce Carman discusses a Silver Bay aquaponic farm with the Falls EDA Commission Monday. The commission agreed to seek funds to conduct a feasibility study on the proposal

EDA

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The Silver Bay farm grows lettuce and basil atop troughs that grow tilapia. Tilapia was selected because it matures in nine months and it dies at water temperatures of 60 degrees or less and would not pose a threat to the native fish species should it escape. The farm has also grown tomatoes. The 8,600 square foot facility grows 500 tilapia a month in nine large tank along with lettuce. The products are sold to area restaurants and other places within a 65-mile radius of Silver Bay.

Carman estimated the 8,600 square feet facility cost \$1.5 million from feasibility to completion, but noted it was designed to be a break-even facility and was created as small as possible to cover the expenses.

The Silver Bay facility received \$300,000 in seed money from Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation agency. Carman called Rep. David Dill a cornerstone in helping to secure start-up

money for the facility.

A 26,000 square foot facility would be able to produce 3,000 fish per month and 6,000 heads of lettuce a week, he estimated.

Carman described an educational component could be created with RRCC, and said the facilities could be heated and powered by biomass collected from the forestry products industries.

EDA Director Shawn Mason indicted she would see grants to conduct a feasibility study for 10 “greenhouses” with each measuring 26,000 square feet.

Carman toured the Second Creek area in the city’s multimodal district with Mason earlier in the day and called it an excellent location for the proposed facilities.

Access to rail “is huge,” he said, explaining it could be used to transport the products to market quickly after harvest.

Monday’s meeting drew several people to the audience, including two county commissioners, the EDA Advisory Board Chairman Mike Katrin and others, who posed questions about

the concept.

Carman estimated a 26,000 square foot facility would create six jobs: two with an annual salary of \$50,000 to \$60,000 and would serve as the head of the facility and on call; two to three with annual salaries of \$30,000 to \$40,000; and the remainder serving as basic laborer positions.



Dill told The Journal Tuesday while the number of jobs created by such a facility may seem low, “it’s the way economic development has to be approached.”

“Home runs are few and far between,” Dill said. “We have to go past first, second and third base before we get back to home. Let’s get a man on and then get into a scoring position.”

Dill said it’s been exciting to watch the partnership between the state, Silver Bay, UMD, and IRRR that created the Silver Bay facility grow.

But he said each community exploring the aquaponic farm concept will be different and have a different strategy for financing.

“I am very supportive of this,” he said of the Falls EDA’s move.



Notice: Public Information and Environmental Report Scoping Meetings

Minnesota Power's Great Northern Transmission Line Certificate of Need

The Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is holding public meetings for Minnesota Power's **Great Northern Transmission Line Project** Certificate of Need application.

MEETING INFORMATION

The same information will be presented at each meeting

City	Location	Date/Time
Roseau	Roseau Civic Center 121 Center St East	Tuesday Feb 11, 6pm
Baudette	Baudette Ambulance Garage 111 First Ave SW	Wednesday Feb 12, 6pm
International Falls	AmericInn 1500 Highway 71	Thursday Feb 13, 6pm
Thief River Falls	Ralph Engelstad Arena Imperial Room 525 Brooks Ave N	Tuesday Feb 18, 6pm
Bemidji	The Sanford Center 1111 Event Center Dr NE	Wednesday Feb 19, 6pm
Grand Rapids	Sawmill Inn 2301 S Highway 169	Thursday Feb 20, 6pm

Bad weather? Check if a meeting is cancelled - call (toll-free) 855-731-6208 or 651-201-2213 or visit www.puc.state.mn.us.

- Citizens will have the opportunity to offer oral comments, written comments, or both into the record.
- PUC, DOC, and Minnesota Power staff will be available to answer questions about the project and the process.
- Citizens who do not wish to speak may submit questions or comments in writing.
- Comments received at the meetings and during the comment period will help develop the scope of the environmental report.

Submit written comments by Mar. 14, 2014 (4:30pm):
Bill Storm, Minnesota Department of Commerce
85 7th Place East, Suite 500, St. Paul MN 55101
Email: bill.storm@state.mn.us | **Fax:** 651-539-1549
Online: mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities/#comment
Include the PUC Docket No. (E-015/CN-12-1163) in communications

mn.gov/commerce/energyfacilities/Docket.html?id=33608
PUC Docket No.: E-015/CN-12-1163 | OAH Docket No.: 65-2500-31196