

DAYTON

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as DEED commissioner, was the first official to visit the Falls after the Insulite closure.

“He reached out his hand and his help,” said Anderson. “We appreciated his effort that time and I know he has a lot of compassion for the citizens and this community.”

Clark Sieben told the group that she would provide additional resources for programs that may be a good fit for the community.

“I am so impressed by the teams pulling together to focus on the current situation and the future,” she said. “Congratulations for getting this far, though there is plenty left to do. We are here to be helpful and supportive.”

Meanwhile, presentations by local and regional officials brought Dayton up to date on the community’s response.

Lori Lyman, Boise public affairs manager, thanked local and state DEED staff for their efforts and said the mill is operating “business as usual” now.

Koochiching County Commissioner Wade Pavleck discussed local bonding



DEED Commissioner Katie Clark Sieben

requests to the state, all of which he said would represent economic development by creating construction and other jobs associated with the projects.

Randy Lasky, of The Northspan Group, is facilitating the response teams and described their activities.

Pat Henderson of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission, told the group that an application for a \$550,000 federal in-

vestment grant is now held up because of the federal government shutdown. The grant, which requires money from International Falls and Koochiching County as a match, is intended to fund the programs and projects moved forward by the response teams.

Rainy River Community College Interim Dean of Students Elena Favela described the role of the college in response. She noted that the RRCC Foundation immediately offered scholarships to some dislocated workers and their families.

In addition, she said it has become a partner with Advance Minnesota to identify and offer advanced trainings “to get people back into the work force as soon as possible.”

Favela said the college is working with businesses to figure out how to provide the trained workers they need.

Meanwhile, several people discussed specific concerns, including the rail crossing at Ranier and the loss of jobs at a Northome nursing facility. Some thanked Dayton for his action during the legislative session for aid that supports the local economy and other offered ideas for job retention and growth.

improve amenities such as the Falls International Airport.

“This won’t be an easy challenge, with the potential loss of taxes and population (as a result of the downsizing of the work force at the mill),” he said. “We need to work as a city council to keep costs in line and services at a high level.

“And we need to ask for help where ever we can,” he said, adding that is already occurring with the application for a federal assistance grant of \$550,000.

NORTHOME

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building, and reopen it as a nursing home facility, Nevanen said. While the preliminary status of the talks keeps him from revealing who exactly the city is talking with, he said they’re strong candidates with excellent backgrounds in health care.

“They have a presence in the region, they have different facilities throughout the region, and provide various levels of assisted living and care,” he said. “We just have to see if the economics work.”

The impact of losing a health-care facility for older residents and a large provider of jobs for a small community has been large, Nevanen said. When the facility was operating at capacity, he said, it provided 40 full-time and 20 part-time jobs.

“It takes time to fully realize some of those effects,” he said. “Certainly some people had to leave or find jobs elsewhere. A lot of these folks have gone on to other facilities and are commuting.”

The hard work and passion of the workers at the facility were evident when Nevanen toured the facility last spring with one of the former employees, he said.

“She was very passionate about the building and the people she served,” he said. “It was very obvious that it wasn’t just a building, it wasn’t just a job, it was very important to her and the community.”

Koochiching County Commissioner Wayne Skoe represents the Northome area, and he said the closed nursing facility

comes up often when he talks with his constituents.

“There isn’t three days go by by someone doesn’t ask me, ‘have you found anything you can do with it? Is there some way you can get those jobs back?’” he said. “It’s a small town, and you take approximately 40 jobs out of the area, it’s quite an impact.”

The loss of jobs has affected other local businesses like the grocery store, Skoe said. People who had to get jobs out of town will pick up their groceries there, instead of shopping at the local store.

“The facility had a standing account with the grocery store, for food, and with the hardware store for maintenance,” he said. “It’s a compounding effect.”

Older residents looking for nursing facility care have had to go elsewhere because of the facility’s closure, Nevanen said.

“Some of them went to Bagley, some went to Littlefork, International Falls, Bemidji,” he said. “They had to find alternative locations.”

Skoe said one man contacted him, and said because of the nursing facility’s closure, the closest facility he could find for his mother was in Walker.

Trying to get the nursing facility occupied again has given Skoe a chance to work with Kooching County Health Director Susan Congrave, and he said he’s been impressed with the effort she’s put in to find a solution.

Opening a nursing facil-



Paul Nevanen

ity in Minnesota can be tricky, as there’s a moratorium on adding more nursing home beds in the state, Congrave said. If a facility wants to add more beds, they have to find existing beds from a facility that’s not using them or closing. When Tealwood closed the Northome Care Facility, they sold 24 beds to Episcopal Homes in Ramsey County, she said.

“The state, I think, decided quite a while ago that there were enough nursing home beds, and they’d rather see people living in other alternative, less expensive arrangements, like assisted living,” she said.

The difference between assisted living and nursing homes is the level of need required by the residents, Congrave said. Nursing home residents need 24/7 care, she said, while assisted living residents have varied levels of need.

With a growing aging population and longer average lifespans, Congrave said she thinks there’s going to be a nursing home shortage.

“We’re going, in my mind, to need to have nursing home beds and assisted living-type arrangements,” she said. “The southern part of the county is very low on that.”

With a lack of available nursing home beds in south Koochiching County, reopening the Northome care facility would make the transition into a nursing home easier for area residents, Congrave said.

“It’s traumatic for them,” she said. “They were being displaced, and they were also from the Northome area. That was their home.”

MILL

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employees and city officials.

“We had a good conversation and I look forward to meeting him,” said Anderson.

Meanwhile, creating the right climate for the mill and the corporation to succeed is increasingly important, said Anderson.

“We need to do that by providing excellent services at the lowest cost,” he said.

That can be done, he said,

by keeping taxes from increasing and keeping water and sewer rates from rising.

At the same time, he said the community’s amenities and services must be maintained. He pointed to keeping city services, such as well-maintained streets with snow removal conducted within a reasonable time and removing “snow and anything else that gets in their way of buying wood and getting product to their clients.”

In addition, he said it’s important to maintain and

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