

RIVERFEST

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Backus Community Center Director Ward Merrill agreed. “Rotary and Backus worked well together in planning this,” he said. “It was a big decision to move ahead and both boards are and I believe still are committed to make this a real success for the community,” he said Monday. “I don’t think that has changed.”

Now, he said, plans are moving ahead to make Riverfest bigger and better every year.

“I realize the crowd was less than the previous two years, but we’re real pleased with the weather, I don’t think it could have been better,” he said. “I appreciate the folks that turned out and the folks who didn’t missed a great summertime outdoor experience. The price of the ticket for a day of great rock-and-roll music was well worth it, I think.”

A wrap-up meeting to review the event and consider next year’s event is planned by both groups next week.

Merrill said the groups are open to considering offering different types of music, different bands, and a different format.

Ward said the two groups were hoping to get enough funding from ticket sales to cover the money invested and carry over to next year’s event to possibly sign a name band instead of cover bands.

“We don’t have full numbers, but it looks like we’ll be OK,” said Ward. “We will not



Two concert goers showed their appreciation to the performers Saturday.

make the money we hoped to make to carry over, so we have a little more work trying to get a name band in.”

And while Ward said Arch Allies and the other bands performances were “incredible,” he said he believes that the three previous performances by Arch Allies may have played a role in ticket sales. He estimated that just less than 1,000 people attended this year, with attendance at the previous two concerts at double that.

“And that’s most likely because there was a name band that people could connect with,” said Ward.

Ward noted that earlier performances by Arch Allies

may have been appreciated more than the headline acts they preceded.

“We will look for a bigger headline band next year, whatever we do,” Merrill said. “We’re always open to ideas.”

Merrill said it was no surprise that Arch Allies wasn’t the draw it has been at previous performances.

“We did not have a lot of time to plan this, so we did what we did, understanding that it was going to be different than it had been before,” he said.

But Ward said he was disappointed for ticket holders who did not come early enough to catch the bands

that performed before Arch Allies. “They really missed out on some incredible music,” he said.

Ward said the discussion among Rotary and center leaders has already turned to how to improve next year’s Riverfest offering.

“Overall, people walked in here and turned this into something that is a great place to listen to music,” he said of the amphitheater. “That’s the real positive we have — we’ve figured out how make the amphitheater work and get feather flags from donors, and the stage works well with the river in the background. Now, we have to figure out how get a

band here to draw up to 2,000 or 2,500 (people)—that’s now our goal.”

Meanwhile, Merrill said he hopes that the use of the profits by both groups helps to spur attendance.

“Rotary Club and Backus really forged a good partnership on this event,” Merrill said. “We are both focused on using whatever profits we realized toward youth programs we both do in the community. We intend to put that money back into International Falls and in particular youth programs.”

Ward said the establishment of Riverfest has changed the way Rotary is able to serve the community.

While the club conducts other fundraisers throughout the year, beer sales at Riverfest have generated a significant amount of money.

“The real story for us is we help out with the Learning Tree and STRIVE programs at high school,” he said.

The Learning Tree helps provide school supplies. STRIVE helps to motivate high school students to graduate. Ward said unfortunately the amount of money the club provides to the programs is increasing along with the need. In addition, Rotary provided \$4,000 to help with costs associated with separating a school library into two to better serve students.

“Riverfest has changed what we are able to do for the community,” he said. “Sales (of beer) go right back into the community through scholarships for kids, STRIVE, the Learning Tree — that’s where all this money ends up going and it’s important to us and important to make sure that funding works as hard and goes as far as it can go.”

Ward and Merrill credited all those involved in producing the event, including city workers, volunteers, Rotary members and Backus Community Center members and staff.

And both Merrill and Ward said Riverfest would not happen without the sponsors that help to fund it.

“We owe a lot to them that helped us with money upfront for advertising and the promotion we had to do,” said Merrill. And, he said, the city and its staff helped the two groups in a variety of ways.

COUNTY

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nology to identify and notify adult relatives of a child’s need for foster care placement.

In other business Tuesday, commissioners agreed pay \$41,400 towards improvement projects at the Northeast Regional Corrections Center, or NERCC, in Duluth.

According to Jaksa, when the county is required to send someone to corrections to seek needs beyond what can be met locally, the person is sent to NERCC.

The center is administered by Arrowhead Regional Corrections, and provides correctional services to five counties of Northeastern Minnesota’s Arrowhead region. The facility is operated by a joint powers agreement between the participating counties of Koochiching, Carlton, Cook, Lake and St. Louis.

The ARC Board in April met to discuss options for completing

improvements at the Northeast Regional Corrections Center at the cost of about \$6 million. St. Louis County commissioners agreed to host a capital improvement bond for the project, which will be repaid over a 20-year period.

Koochiching County is responsible for 0.69 percent of the \$6 million — or \$41,400, based on usage of the facility.

Commissioners Tuesday were given the option to pay the lump sum, which would be due in 2014, or incur bonded debt to be repaid over 20 years, which with interest would amount to \$57,692, averaging about \$2,900 per year. The county would pay St. Louis County annually for its share of the debt.

“To me, it makes sense to pay it off,” Pavleck said of paying the lump sum. “I’d rather nail down our contribution... it’s the cleanest and simplest way.”

McBride agreed. “If we were going to spend this much money, we’re going to do the whole thing.”

DONAHUE

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with whatever the citizens ask us to do.”

Anderson, who at an earlier Falls council meeting apologized for suggesting Serrano provide a wetland assessment for the property, saying he found out after the council took action that the price would be about \$1,000 when he believed it would be less. Discussions at the meeting about the property indicated that adjacent property could be considered as having a similar amount of wetlands.

Anderson said when Serrano offered to him to do the work “pro bono,” he rejected the offer because of the council action.

“Someone made an end run, again,” said Anderson, referring to the idea that Serrano would do the work for free.

Rognerud rejected Anderson’s assertion and said city officials believe the information will be valuable for the public planning process.

And Anderson questioned rescheduling the planning process, which will delay consideration of an offer made by Matt Donahue via a news story to purchase the

property back from the city for \$60,000 — the amount it has paid his firm in brokerage fees so far. The city has agreed to pay \$90,000 in brokerage fees based on an appraisal that set the value at \$1.8 million.

Shawn Mason, city economic and community development director, told the commission that Donahue has said he would like the future use of the property to be considered by the public in the September and October planning process.

Anderson has also questioned requirements in a 17-point agreement with the city that calls for establishment of a monument to the Donahue family and trail within the property. Mason said Donahue has said the trail does not need to be expensive and the monument can be similar to that at the Pat Roche Memorial Access off Highway 11 East — native rock with a bronze plaque.

She said Donahue and other members of his family plan to attend at least one meeting of the planning process to explain the history of the land and answer questions.

Commissioner Cynthia Jaksa said the planning process would be assisted by information about how other communities have handled

large properties they have owned. She pointed to Silver Bay, which used property it owned to establish a hydroponic vegetable and fish rearing business. She said property in McGregor adjacent to a golf course was purchased by a developer for a resort, which created 60 jobs.

“This is an asset,” she said of the Donahue property, “and it deserves thorough consideration and an understanding of what other communities do. We all owe this process to ourselves.”

But Anderson said the discussion “sounds like face saving to me” and voted against the motion.

VNP HQ

In other business, the commission on a 4-1 vote agreed to authorize Mike Katrin, a member of the advisory committee, and Jaksa to gather an estimate of the current retail price of the lease and building occupied by Voyageurs National Park headquarters, as well as the value of the future revenue of the lease to the city.

The action was based on a suggestion by Anderson that the city consider selling the lease, or some combination of lease, building and surrounding property.

Anderson voted in favor of

the motion, while Commissioner Paul Eklund voted no.

“This was meant to be a legacy for future generations,” Eklund said. “It would be a shame to sell any of it.”

Eklund said the city’s effort in establishing the headquarters facility kept park jobs in the community.

The federal government pays the city \$108,000 in monthly lease fees for the VNP facility. From that amount, the city keeps a little less than \$20,000 each month for maintenance. In addition, the city keeps money for operation expenses of the buildings and to fund permanent improvements. The city financed the project by selling bonds.

The bonds are expected to be paid off in 17 years, after which the lease fees will go directly to the city.

Anderson said he was bothered by the suggested process to determine whether it would be financially prudent to sell the building and lease now instead of waiting for profits after the bonds are sold. He asked why the city wouldn’t just take bids on the property.

Steve Shermoen, EDA Advisory Board member and city attorney, said any other process would require public hearings and formal offers.

CLASS OF “54” REUNION MEETING

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