

VNP

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on a 3-2 vote not to pursue selling the VNP lease. Commissioners Bob Anderson and Pete Kalar voted against the motion.

Katrin in June told the commission after meeting with brokers and considering the current and future value of the lease, it makes sense to continue to own the property and lease it to the federal government.

“The work shows that for realistic rates of return on city investment, the lease is a far better use of funds because it generates a 4.17 percent rate of return — which is historically better than the city’s investment rate,” he wrote in an executive summary of the issue. “As long as the city, on av-

erage and over time, earns less than 7.13 percent on investments, we should keep the lease.”

In June, Anderson suggested the commission consider whether it makes sense to sell the lease and/or property to the private sector.

The federal government pays the city \$108,000 in monthly lease fees for the VNP facility. From that amount, the city keeps just 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 project was financed by the city selling bonds for the project.

Anderson Monday reiterated his desire to sell the lease and said he’s been working with two interested

clients.

“Why?” asked Commissioner Paul Eklund. “We’ve been pretty clear here (that it makes more financial sense to retain the lease).”

Eklund said a great deal of work had been done that leads to a reasonable conclusion and the commission ought to take the recommendation that resulted.

“It would be foolish to let other people make money on this in the future,” he said.

Kalar agreed with Eklund, saying he had no intent to move forward with sale of the lease. He said he believed it was important to follow through with the agreement with the federal government, however, he said that does not preclude anyone from considering selling the lease.

EDA President Gail Rognerud said a motion of the

EDA’s intent was needed.

Rognerud urged the commission to “put our efforts in moving forward instead of looking backward.”

But Anderson said the city could earn money for the city now. “How is that looking backward?” he asked.

Rognerud told Anderson that he has attempted to “undo all the previous council has done,” referring to the council prior to Anderson’s election to the council.

She said there is no consensus to sell the lease, it is considered a legacy for future generations, and the end of the lease in 17 years will bring money into the city’s funds.

Commissioner Cynthia Jaksa said she had received offer of \$15.1 million for the lease, but said the value is less than assumed.

She later said the broker has assumed that the federal government will enter into another lease with the city after the current lease ends.

In other EDA business, Mason said a number of issues will be brought to the Oct. 7 meeting of the International Falls City Council, including a recommendation from the EDA Advisory Board to bring offers for work at the Donahue property, provided to the city in 2009 by the Donahue family. Part of the agreement in providing the 122 acres to the city west of the city limits is that a trail and a monument recognizing the Donahue family be created on the property.

Mason said a local logger has offered to build a trail on the property in exchange for some of the wood there.

In addition, she said Bowman Construction has offered to contribute rock for the memorial.

The council is also expected to hear that Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development staff have said if utilities are not fully installed to the multimodal district along County Highway 155 prior to December, a \$657,000 state grant must be extended to December 2014. While the EDA owns the district, the city serves as the fiscal agent for the grant.

Mason also said the council agenda will include a request from the City Beach Task Force to initiate the process to expand camping at the park. The task force has proposed to include pop-up type campers in certain areas of City Beach.

MEETING

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been involved in making improvements in the Con-Con area, west of International Falls. Money gained on the property must be spent in that area, but it also impacts other areas outside the Con-Con land area in some instances, said Koochiching County Land Commissioner Dennis Hummitchsch.

Hummitchsch said he and Assistant Land Commissioner Tom Morris will attend Monday’s meeting.

The Con Con Committee, said Hummitchsch, has been involved in a variety of issues and projects, including keeping judicial ditches flowing freely, improving the Birchdale Fire Hall and community center, organizing Birchdale Pioneer Days and some economic development projects.

Con-Con lands came into being in the early 1920s and 1930s, according to the DNR website.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, a number of counties in Minnesota issued bonds to pay the cost of ditching millions of wet acres for the purpose of draining the land for agricultural use. Land was sold to individual property owners and ditches were dug. Not

all of these efforts resulted in the creation of suitable farmland, however. Continued drainage problems combined with the economic depression of the 1930s caused many landowners to default on their property taxes, which, in turn, put the counties at risk of defaulting on the ditch bonds. The state of Minnesota interceded, paying off the county ditch bonds in exchange for full state ownership and management of the lands.

Three legislative acts in the late 1920s and early 1930s paid off the bonds and transferred the land to state ownership. All income from these lands was consolidated into one fund, hence the name Consolidated Conservation, or Con-Con lands. The Con-Con lands were placed under the management of the then Department of Conservation, now known as the DNR.

There were originally about 1.9 million acres of Con-Con lands in seven counties: Aitkin, Beltrami, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, Mahnommen, Marshall, and Roseau. About 400,000 acres were reclassified as agricultural land and sold to private parties during the late 1930s through the 1990s. Some of these lands went tax-forfeit again and were re-sold.

SHERIFF

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Jespersen said, but the differences in terrain would mean a different situation.

“I think our floods here are a more gradual rise, like Rainy Lake or Rainy River coming up,” he said. “There’s obviously been water over roads in the past here, but of course we don’t have the population to deal with either.”

While the flooding overshadowed the conference, Jespersen said he learned quite a few valuable things he’ll apply to his job here in Koochiching County. Things like knowing your own strengths and weaknesses, communication, and networking with community leaders were the big takeaways, he said.

“One of the biggest things is being able to talk with people,” he said. “If you sit down and talk with people and learn the issues at hand, and listen to them.”

In a small community, Jespersen said communication with community leaders is important, as it can help solve problems, and keep the community safe, which is his responsibility as sheriff.

The National Sheriffs’ Association paid for Jespersen to attend the NSI, he said. The conference was recommended to him by other sheriffs at a previous conference in Minnesota.

“When I went to the first sheriffs’ conference here in Minnesota in June 2012, the other sheriffs said ‘if you get a chance to go, you sign up and you go, because it’s the best training you’ll go to,’” he said. “I’d say they were right.”

As a lifelong member of the community, and a 1984



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Mike Jackson, Correctional Program Specialist, National Institute of Corrections, Sheriff Brian Jespersen, Koochiching County, and Sheriff Lenny Millholland, City of Winchester, Va., class mentor, at the National Sheriffs’ Institute earlier this month in Aurora, Colo.

Falls High School graduate, Jespersen said he’s never wanted to work in a metro area. After attending Vermillion Community College and Hibbing Community College, he returned to town and was hired as a part-time police officer in the spring of 1988 by the Falls Police Department. He went full-time in 1991, and stayed there until 2007, when former Koochiching

County Sheriff Brian Youso hired him as chief deputy.

During his 25-year career in law enforcement, Jespersen said he’s seen a lot of change, notably in technology and how it’s used in the field.

“I’m open for change,” he said. “Sometimes we get caught in ‘if it’s not broke, don’t fix it’ and I agree with that philosophy, but sometimes you do have to look at

other technologies that are out there.”

Balancing the need to adapt to the current situation and not changing too drastically is difficult, Jespersen said.

“Sometimes change is tough for people, just not for myself, but for the employees, the community, and commissioners,” he said. “Sometimes change is needed.”



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