

CONTRACT

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In October, Sandberg told The Journal there was a concern there would be reductions in staff and an increased workload for teachers. However, he stressed students are top priority, especially during a time the district’s enrollment is dropping monthly.

“Our overall goal is to keep kids in the school,” Sandberg said Tuesday of including a seven-period day in the agreement. “We need to keep our culture.”

Nelson said a large chunk of time spent at the negotiation table involved discussing the pros and cons of a seven-period day.

“It was very congenial,” he said of the process. “We really looked at how (seven periods) could benefit stu-

dents and the long-term benefits it could have for the district.”

SALARY INCREASES

The new contract also includes a salary increase for staff, in a way Sandberg said hasn’t been done before.

For the first year of the contract, \$80,000 will be divided among the district’s 74 full-time equivalent, or FTE, teachers. The second year of the contract, staff will see a 0.5 percent pay increase.

“We did get some more in insurance, too,” Sandberg said.

Nelson added the increase to insurance packages was a “small amount.”

“I have to compliment the teachers union on the agreement they came forward with,” he said. “What they ended up with is only a few dollars in addition to what

they’ve always had...I’m really appreciative of them stepping forward and doing that.”

CORDIAL AGREEMENT

Both sides referred to the negotiation process as “professional” and were pleased to finally reach an agreement.

Sandberg said both sides were “open and honest” and the board was approachable with concerns.

“It was nice to voice our concerns and discuss solutions,” he said.

Board chairman Gordy Dault said Monday he was glad to have the contract settled.

“I felt that there wasn’t any screaming by either side,” he said.

Vice-chairman Michelle Hebner agreed.

“I’m excited about the seven-period day,” she said.

“It’ll be a great opportunity for students.”

Hebner said she’s been negotiating for a seven-period day for several years and thanked the teachers union for coming to an agreement.

“I’m kind of excited for a seven-period day,” Sandberg admitted. “It’ll offer more electives for kids...We want to make the whole school – both high school and elementary — have a better climate.”

OTHER BUSINESS

In other action Monday, the board accepted letters of resignation due to retirement from Ardel Henrikson, Harmony Lennox, Elizabeth Johnson, Brenda LeDuc, Gigie Harder, Mary Kay Hardwig, Onida Kocinski and Jeff Veeder.

The district will be in search of an additional preschool teacher for the 2014-2015 school for the newly-im-

plemented all-day preschool class.

Hebner said she’s heard positive feedback from the community about the district offering all-day, free preschool and commended those involved with the effort.

The board also agreed to a one-year contract with Cedulie’s Photography for school pictures for the 2014-2015 school year.

The photography business originally requested the board agree to a three-year contract with prices not increasing over what was offered this year, however, board members felt it would be best to consider the school picture contract on an annual basis.

OPEN FORUM

Karen Bates, school employee and parent, voiced concerns to the board about the areas left to consider

when making cuts to offset the loss of the state funding due to a decline in enrollment.

“I hope you can come up with creative and innovative solutions,” she said.

The list of items left for consideration to cut, Bates noted, all impact high school students.

“There are several places across the board cuts can be made,” she said.

Student Tayler Hebner requested the board consider offering open lunch Monday through Friday to juniors and seniors.

The 25-minute lunch period is now limited to senior students and only on Fridays.

Hebner’s request stated open lunch would offer students more freedom and could act as a reward to students who attend Falls High School.

RIVER

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“We’re just making it more usable and more attractive for walleye to spawn there,” he said. “They’re already spawning there, we just want to enhance it.”

Working on the project in the winter has its pros and cons, Burri said, and he’s done similar projects on ice and in open water in other parts of the state.

Dave Harder, of Up North Builders, said once a hole is opened up on the ice, it’s a plus to work on, as it provides a nice, flat surface to work from. His company served as contractor on this part of the project.

“When it’s this thick, it’s great,” he said. “You have to watch the weight on the ice as well as the force you’re using with your equipment.”

PROJECT BEGINNING

Tim MacKay, RLSC vice president, said the club has a 50-year commitment to improving the Rat Root River, and looked for funds to do that. Spawning on the river had decreased over the years due to man-made and natural issues, he said.

“The old timers say it used to be wall to wall,

bank to bank, during spawning,” MacKay said. “The numbers have really declined.”

The club hired Sandy Verry, chief hydrologist with Ellen River Partners in Grand Rapids, to provide the club with ways to increase spawning, MacKay said. Wood removal, reforestation and stabilizing the banks, and enhancing the spawning grounds were three things that could be done, he said.

“It’s really slowed down over the years,” he said of the water movement. “We needed to get the river to form its original channel again by increasing the flow, and it has opened up.”

The club found a conservation partner grant from the DNR to fund the project, but couldn’t manage the money, and that’s where the Koochiching SWCD came in, MacKay said.

“In partnership with the club and the DNR we authored the grant application to get funding in to the projects,” Koochiching SWCD district coordinator Pam Tomevi said. “The DNR wasn’t in the position to serve that role, and the club doesn’t have the internal controls to meet the grant requirements.”

The Koochiching SWCD served as grant writer and fiscal agent for the project, Tomevi said. The \$215,000 Rat Root Sediment Control and Spawning Enhancement grant featured a 15-percent local match of \$32,250, she said, providing a total of \$247,250 for the three phases of the project. The local match was covered through \$21,500 in cash from the RLSC, she said, with the rest coming via combination of in-kind and cash donations from Koochiching County.

Improving the spawning habitat on the Rat Root River fits in well with the Koochiching SWCD’s goal of maintaining and enhancing soil and water quality for the environmental and economic benefits they produce, Tomevi said.

“It ties back to water quality by providing a quality environment for spawning,” Tomevi said. “We were created to protect our water resources, and this is an important piece to our partners as well.”

This project is the result of an ongoing conversation between the groups involved, said Kevin Peterson, DNR area fisheries supervisor. When grant funding became available, it was apparent the talks

could move beyond the discussion stage and they could start working on projects. Needing a group with experience in seeking and administering grants required reaching out to the Koochiching SWCD, he said.

“They were the third leg of the stool needed to complete the partnership,” he said.

PHASE I

Tomevi said the project’s initial phase involved removing logjams along a 15-mile section of the river, and that was completed in spring of 2012. According to the Koochiching SWCD website, 30 logjams were either completely removed or opened for fish passage and boat navigation during the first part of Phase I in summer 2011.

Workers returned in winter 2011 during ice conditions and removed more logjams, with most of the wood having been cut up into smaller pieces and hauled away or removed from the flood-prone area of the river.

Due to high spring water levels, the crews returned in spring 2012 for the final stretch of wood removal. Due to favorable winter conditions, more than 90 percent of the wood in each jam was

above the ice and accessible. Crews also cut down dead, over-hanging trees to prevent future logjams.

PHASE II

November 2013 saw the completion of the second phase of the project, which involved stabilizing the banks of the Rat Root River to prevent further erosion. The project used rock, fabric, and “bio-D” blocks, made of coconut husks, to protect the shoreline and allow vegetation to grow. The planting of 600 cuttings of willow and dogwood in the “bio-D” blocks also promotes vegetation growth.

PHASE III

The final phase of spawning site enhancement was completed Friday afternoon, Peterson said. The DNR has regularly monitored the river since 1980, he said, and can use an annual assessment to determine if the spawning enhancement was successful. However, as walleye take about seven years to mature, and only mature fish come back up the river to spawn, this is more of a long-term measurement tool, he said. To measure the short-term success, though, he said staff can go out in the spring to the site and check for walleye eggs.

COUNCIL

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The contract for the property calls for a total of about \$90,000 in brokerage fees paid annually over six years to Matt Donahue’s brokerage firm. In February, the city had \$30,000 left to pay on the property.

Four recommendations were brought to the commission: minimal initial investment in construction of a trail, which is required in the acquisition agreement; construction of a monument, also required in the agreement, that can be easily moved should the site be developed; work with user groups and neighbors to ensure the site does not become degraded; explore annexing the property.

The recommendation

from the board came following a “visioning process” conducted by staff of the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission in September and October and presented in a report to the city in January.

Councilor Gail Rognerud, who serves as EDA president, made the motion Monday to accept the recommendation and said she assumed the discussion of a recommendation could include a motion. However, she said the matter could be held over to another meeting, but said she would be sure to include on the agenda a vote on whether to retain the property.

In describing her reasoning for the motion, Rognerud said the report and meetings showed a majority thought the property should be retained. Most indicated

the city should not spend a lot of money on the property, she said.

Anderson took issue with that and said he believed an equal number of people oppose keeping the property. He raised a number of questions about the items in the recommendation. He said city crews have a number of projects to begin when winter has ended, which take priority; wondered who would enforce trail restrictions; and voiced concern trail and monument construction could not be donated, but must instead be awarded in a contract through the public bidding process.

Jaksa said the city already owns the property, and a vote at the next meeting should be about the recommendation.

Councilor Pete Kalar said he, too, believed the city

crews would be busy come summer, and said he opposes annexation of areas without resident support.

Kalar urged members to look out the window, referring to the thick layer of snow on the ground. “It’ll be a while,” he said. “I think we’ve got time.”

Councilor Paul Eklund was absent from the meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rognerud reported a council committee will meet again with landlords in the city as it works toward development of a property code for a rental license ordinance.

The proposed ordinance has been modified as the committee hears from landlords, and she said she wants an ordinance accepted by the landlords.

“The goal of the ordinance is the health and

safety of people who don’t have a loud voice in the community,” she said.

The council also approved an extension to a franchise contract with Midcontinent Communications to June 1. The additional time will allow comments heard at recent public hearing to be relayed to the company. The final contract is expected to be considered by the council in April or May.

The council accepted a letter of retirement from Paula Karsnia, after more than 45 years of employment with the city. It also approved appointment of Jacob Harris to full-time firefighter engineer, replacing long-time engineer Rick Houghlum.

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WATER

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With many water lines being repaired recently, Wagner said the city’s water system is in good shape and it would be fine putting less money in the escrow repair accounts.

“They’ve done a good job of replacing a lot of the lines and that,” Wagner said of previous city officials. “That’s something we have to study a little more — find out where our worse lines are.”

With International Falls officials planning for another 5-percent water rate increase for the following year, Wagner said Ranier would have to act sooner rather than later to avoid a large increase at a later date.

“At some point, we’re going to have to start increasing our rates, but there’s a lot of things in the works right now,” Wagner said. “We’re looking at forming a water district, we’re approaching the city and talking to them about forming a district, along with the county, we’ve had some preliminary discussions about that.”

In other business, Councilor Ron Wilcox said he spoke with a representative from Avnet, the company the city used to design its website. He said the site’s system supports adding electronic payment options, applications for building permits, schedules, and more. City officials can take an online training program on how to better the site for a \$375 fee, he said.

The council approved a motion to pay the \$375 fee for the training course. The city hasn’t worked much with the website to fully use its capabilities, Wilcox said, though it is a good system.

“It was probably a really good system, but it just wasn’t maintained or given any priority,” Wilcox said.

Councilor Todd Coulombe was absent from the meeting.



Tuesday Musicals

and



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Independent School District #361

Koochiching County International Falls, MN

Mission *To prepare all learners for a changing world by developing their potential within a climate of mutual respect and trust.*

AGENDA

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Wednesday, March 26, 2014
Falls High School Cafeteria
3:45 p.m.

PRELIMINARIES:

1.0 CALL TO ORDER:

2.0 ROLL CALL
Gordon Dault _____ Darrell Wagner _____
Michelle Hebner _____ Dena Wenberg _____
Michael Holden _____
Willi Kostiuk _____

3.0 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

4.0 PREVIEW & APPROVAL OF AGENDA:
Moved _____ second _____ carried/failed

NEW BUSINESS: Superintendent Interviews

4.1	3:45 – 4:30	Gwen Carmen
4.2	4:30 – 5:15	Kevin Grover
4.3	5:15 – 6:00	Beth Shermoen

5.0 Candidate deliberation

ADJOURNMENT: Moved _____ Second _____ carried/failed