BOARD

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"The sad news is there isn't any short-term, or long-term remediation that we can do to help you under current law," Dill said. "That's a sad thing, I know...I see what's happening."

As an International Falls native, Dill said he cares about he school district and wants to see it succeed. And, he told the board the Falls isn't alone.

"Schools have had this tremendous suffering," he said of declining enrollment in neighboring districts. "People are having a hard time adapting...I'll be honest with you, we can't get enough (funding) to (compensate) for (the loss of) 70 students. We just can't get $500,000 for the International Falls school district. Every district is experiencing the exact same thing and that adds up to a lot of money."

Dill said he needs the International Falls community to help lawmakers stay up-to-date on the school's current situation.

"Legislating almost always needs somebody else," he said. "It is not easy to legislate when we don't have input from people."

Dill expressed disappointment he hasn't received a single email or phone call from constituents of the school district asking for his help.

"That's a problem ," he said. "We're not being heard...I can't translate (concerns) into action at the state capital without a grassroots effort...Somebody has to step up with a solution and we're working on that, but we need help from the moms, the dads, the teachers and the board so we can sell it."

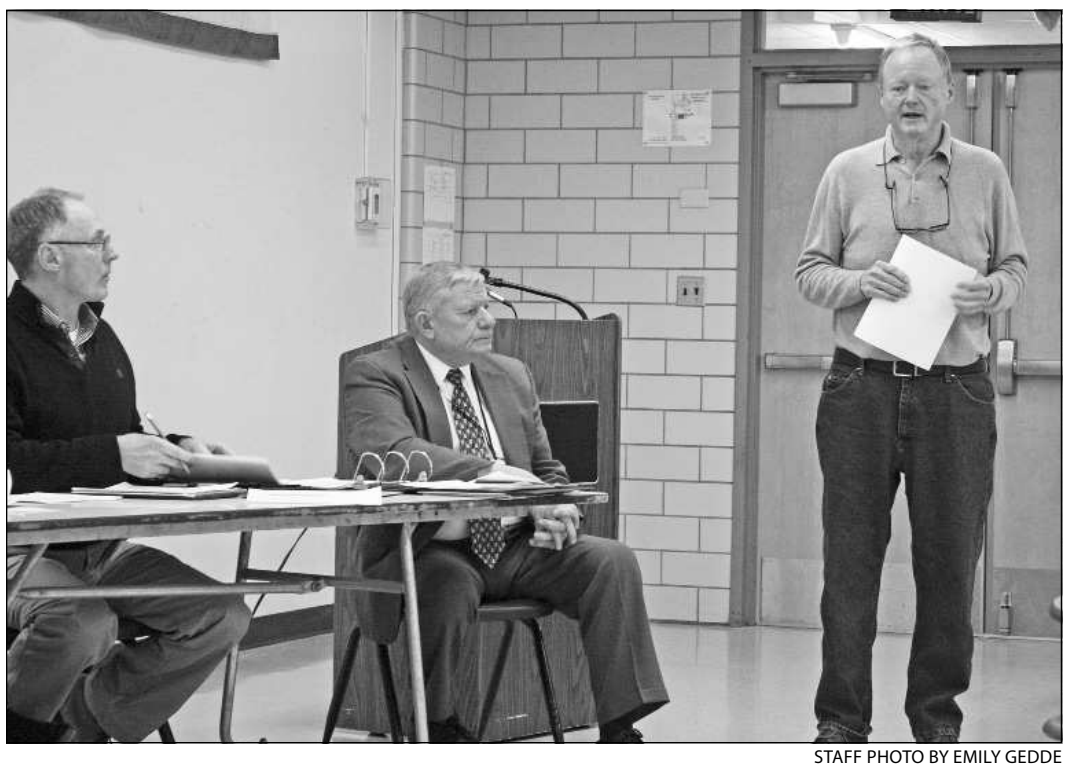
During the last legislative session, Dill said the state was able to pay off all of its debt and surface with a $1 billion projected surplus. He expects dollar signs to pop up in the eyes of some of his colleagues' with many bills being introduced on how to spend the money. But, Dill said the surplus will need to take on priorities.

"We need to increase our rainy day and reserve funds," he said. "Then, we have to start looking at where we can get the most value for every dollar spent. We'll be looking at health care and education...We hope then to be in a position to add some additional money in education."

Dill concluded that he welcomes questions and suggestions from board members, teachers, staff and parents of the Falls school district by calling his cell phone: 218-278-2278 and or emailing him at: david.dill@house.mn.

"I have hope that in the coming years, we'll be able to get on a better footing in my hometown and I will do my best to deliver that," he said.

Meanwhile, the board will hold a special work session addressing cost adjustment options at 5 p.m. Monday in the Falls High School cafeteria.



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Falls School Board member Willi Kostiuk, left, and Falls Superintendent Nordy Nelson, center, listen to Rep. David Dill Tuesday. Dill said he needs a grassroots effort from community members to help lawmakers improve the loss of state funding and enrollment at district schools.

OTHER BUSINESS

In other business Tuesday, the board adopted a weighted-grading policy for high school juniors and seniors.

In October, the board agreed to implement the grading system to certain classes at the 11th and 12th grade levels beginning second semester. A weighted grading system offers an equal credit for a lower grade in a more difficult class. The system would add 0.5 points to grades A-C.

While some students taking classes through the Post Secondary Enrollment Option Program at Rainy River Community College opposed implementation of the system, administration said it felt it would give students more of an incentive to enroll in a more rigorous class for a chance to improve grade point averages.

The board also agreed to change the district's prom policy and allow high school juniors or seniors to bring a date who is out of high school as long as they are not over 19 years old.

Previously, the school's prom policy allowed students in other schools who are juniors or seniors in high school to attend the FHS prom. Cory Netland, the board's student representative, in November, asked the board to consider allowing students who are out of high school to attend prom if they are up to age 19.

Elections of board officers took place Tuesday. Gordy Dault was elected to the chairperson position, Michelle Hebner will hold the seat of vice-chairperson, Willi Kostiuk will serve as the clerk, and Dena Wenberg will be the treasurer.

In the personnel consent portion of the agenda, the board agreed to:

- Hire Shannon Keeney as an educational support professional.
- Hire Paul Hjelle as the head boys track coach for the 2014 season.
- Hire Dan Zika as the assistant boys track coach for the 2014 season.
- Hire Sheryl Hendrickson as the assistant girls track coach for the 2014 season.
- Hire Kevin Gordon as the head girls softball coach for the 2014 season.
- Hire Katie Hamers as the assistant girls softball coach for the 2014 season.
- Hire Trever Estabrooks as a full-time custodian.
- Hire Jake Ruelle as a full-time equivalent custodian.

SHELTER

➤ continued from A1

unisex accessible bathroom, office, separate cat and dog kennel areas, an intake area, mechanical and janitorial area and an animal bathing area.

Constructing a new facility grew from discussions that started in 2010, when city and county officials joined with BHS volunteers to consider ways to remove the existing shelter from its location within construction of the community's sanitary sewer plant.

When more about state and federal requirements were known, it became apparent to the group the existing facility could not be temporarily moved and few places to locate the facility were available.

The new shelter is a bit larger than first anticipated in order to meet Americans with Disabilities Act and state shelter requirements.

The new site is expected to be surrounded by a public dog park and is not near residences.

STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

The site for a new shelter is surrounded by trees and located west of Menard's lumber yard.

COUNCIL

➤ continued from A1

Bob Anderson

Cynthia Jaksa

In separate meetings Tuesday, the Falls City Council and the county board approved providing $3,333 each, which will be added to the same amount from the CVB, for a TravelerFun action planner distributed in late March or early April. The information will be provided as an insertion in 400,000 Sunday newspapers in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana. The guide and the advertising will also be included in an accompanying website, which will be available for 12 months.

CVB President Joe Mershon and Director Pete Schultz met in December with council and county board committees to ask each government contribute $93,000 to market tourism opportunities through six projects. They said the CVB was prompted to seek additional money for marketing with the loss of 265 jobs from the local paper mill and tourism serving as the community's second largest industry.

Coming late in the planning for each government's 2014 budget, both city and county officials said it wasn't likely they could come up with that much money at that time.

However, both groups agreed the timing was right for additional investment in tourism marketing and asked the CVB representatives to consider downsizing their plans.

In response, Mershon and Schultz said the TravelFun planner is the best bang for the bucks available.

The south central states have not been a target for marketing the local opportunities in the past, however the CVB staff have noticed a number of people from those states are visiting the area to escape the heat in their home states.

The campaign will collect the names and addresses of leads for the advertisers and the CVB will be able to judge the success of the campaign by the number of leads generated by the print and online offerings.

The theme of the advertising will be the multiple recreational opportunities offered in Borderland, and will urge the audience to get more information by visiting the CVB's website or requesting printed material directly from the CVB through email, mailings or its toll-free phone number.

County board members cautioned the CVB an ongoing request for funding in the future may be difficult, and considering a funding request outside the normal budgeting process is a challenge.

Councilors and commissioners recognized the CVB's effort to promote the area and to help assist the community in recovering from the loss of paper mill jobs.

Schultz told the board and council he would make regular reports to both groups about the results of the campaign as referrals and requests for materials are received by the CVB.

OTHER CITY BUSINESS

In other business, the Falls City Council agreed on a 3-1 vote Tuesday to pay annual dues of $10,004 to the Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities. Mayor Bob Anderson voted against the motion; Councilor Paul Eklund was absent from the meeting.

Anderson asked the dues be pulled from the regular claims for more discussion. He questioned the need to belong to two organizations representing cities and said he believed membership in the League of Minnesota Cities, at annual dues of $5,888, was of more value.

He said the league is the premier organization representing cities in the state and is used for lobbying, webinars, research and education by elected officials and city staff.

"Why pay more to an organization that does less and only represents 10 percent of the cities?" he asked. "I can't support $10,000 for a group that does less and really don't need."

He said the league represents 800 Minnesota cities while the coalition represents just 85 cities.

But other councilors said the council had agreed in committee to maintain membership in both organizations and said the coalition represents smaller, rural cities, which often have different needs and concerns than the larger, more metropolitan cities.

Councilor Cynthia Jaksa stressed the coalition was instrumental in "meeting the needs of rural cities with low tax bases reliant on local government aid (LGA)."

She said some cities belonging to the league oppose the state providing LGA to some cities.

She noted she is a member of the board of directors of the coalition and said the city pays for other lobbying services, including for improvements to U.S. Highway 53.

Councilor Gail Rognerud said she saw no reason to withdraw from membership of the coalition and said the nearly $4 million in LGA the city will receive from the state may not have occurred without the coalition's input.

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