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County credit rating is poor

Moody's new report labels RI County as A3

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ROCK ISLAND — The county's credit rating remains poor, according to a recent report by Moody's Investor Service. Moody's July 26 credit-rating report gives Rock Island County an A3 score — or upper medium grade rating with a negative outlook. The top rating is Aaa, followed by Aa1, Aa2, Aa3, A1, A2 and then A3. The rating scale declines further with a variation of B and C grades. The county was downgraded four years ago by Moody's from an Aa3 to A3 rating for its outstanding debt.

In its report released Friday, Moody's notes the county has outstanding general obligation unlimited tax (GOULT) bonds of \$17 million and and \$31 million of lease revenue bonds with a GOULT pledge outstanding.

According to the report, Moody's said the A3 rating "reflects the county's large tax base with weak demographic and labor market trends, low debt burden and above-average pension burden."

Treasurer Louisa Ewert said \$17 million of the county's debt belongs to Hope Creek Care Center, the county-owned nursing home, while \$31 million is from construction of the justice center annex.

"A portion of that debt is probably the balance owed for the justice center," Ewert said.

In an email to county board members on Friday, county administrator Jim Snider wrote: "The credit opinion is disappointing, but not unexpected."

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Nikki Newberry, Moline, stands on the Schwiebert Riverfront Park's dock Monday in Rock Island. Newberry's 2-year-old son, Hawk, went missing after falling from the dock into the Mississippi River on July 24. A makeshift memorial for Hawk has been arranged on the dock.

Child's family asks for help

Uncle believes body is trapped in debris under dock

BARB ICKES LEE NEWS NETWORK

ROCK ISLAND — The family of the boy believed to have drowned last week after falling off a dock at Schwiebert Riverfront Park in Rock Island say they think his body is still under the dock.

Hawk Newberry, 2, fell into the Mississippi River on July 24, and emergency crews have been searching the area in boats for nearly a week.

But divers who searched under

the dock encountered considerable debris, including a log that temporarily trapped one diver, said John Bell, the boy's great uncle.

"I've been out here every day, and I strongly believe he's right under here — just about where he went in," Bell said Monday.

He pointed to a section of dock that is attached to and directly across from the spot where Hawk fell. The section contains a long board — nearly the width of the dock — that has trapped debris on the downriver side.

"As you can see, there's no way for debris to get out of this area," Bell said. "I stuck a long hook pole down against the board, and I couldn't feel the bottom of it."

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A makeshift memorial has been set up for Hawk Newberry, 2, on the dock near Schwiebert Riverfront Park. Hawk went missing on Tuesday, July 24, after falling into the river from the dock.

Timeline announced for RI County Courthouse demolition



Rock Island County State's Attorney John McGehee walks into the Rock Island County Courthouse on Monday, July 16. A timeline for razing the 123-year-old structure has been announced.

Annex work ahead of schedule

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ROCK ISLAND — A timeline for demolishing the Rock Island County Courthouse has been released by Gilbane Building Co., the contractor overseeing construction of the Justice Center annex.

The annex, estimated to be completed in October, will officially be referred to as the courthouse once the current structure is down.

The timeline comes before the public building commission has approved an intergovernmental agreement with the county. The commission will meet Aug. 9 to vote on the agreement.

The agreement, approved by county board members July 17, states the county will hand over the deed of the historic

courthouse to the commission for demolition.

The timeline anticipates opening bids for demolition on Sept. 26. The recorder's office and court services would vacate the building on Nov. 12, with all furnishings removed Nov. 13-23. Asbestos abatement would begin Nov. 26. Demolition would begin Dec. 31.

Rock Island County Administrator Jim Snider said Gilbane was simply providing professional guidance.

"Obviously the PBC reviewed the agreement prior to the board approving it," Snider said. "They are in agreement, even if they haven't officially acted on it yet. I think it is a straight-forward matter."

Snider said the PBC likely reached out to Gilbane project manager Phil Thiele to guide them in the process of crafting requests for proposals for the demolition.

"Gilbane has expertise in this process," Snider said. "I don't

see anything unethical about them guiding (the PBC) in this."

"The (PBC) has a professional contract with Gilbane to oversee construction of the annex," he said. "This is a normal process of using the talent you have; it's a normal administrative function."

Snider said razing the courthouse would not affect construction on the annex.

Thiele said there was no cost in providing PBC with a demolition timeline.

"All of my time is free," Thiele said. "The only cost we'll have is if we stay beyond our (annex construction) timeline, which is past the end of the year. We won't be providing any of the work."

Thiele said construction of the annex was ahead of its original scheduled completion date of Nov. 10.

"Now we will be done sometime in October," Thiele said.

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