

City Connection

A seasonal newsletter
for the City of Morris

December, 2008

Volume 8, Issue 4



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City Notes

More state aid money allows City to lower taxes But state could renege on the increase

City of Morris property taxes will fall about 5 percent next year. The proposed 2008 Morris tax levy for collection in 2009 is expected to decrease about \$64,000 to \$1.098 million.

The proposed tax decrease will be presented at a Truth in Taxation hearing on Tuesday, December 9 at 5:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers. The final 2008 tax levy and 2009 budget will be adopted by the City Council at its regular meeting on December 23.

Local taxes are going down thanks to an increase in state aid money, says Morris city manager Blaine Hill. Minnesota increased the City's Local Government Aid by \$365,518 for 2009. "Most of this money was allocated to costs normally picked up by local taxpayers," Hill says.

Total 2009 revenues are expected to rise \$505,776 from 2008, to about \$8.264 million, a 6 percent increase. Total 2009 spending is projected to rise \$383,709 to \$8.121 million, a 5 percent increase.

In conjunction with the tax decrease, the City will consider raising water and sewer rates about 3 percent. One reason for this, Hill says, is that "the State

of Minnesota is changing the way that aid money can be used."

Other key factors in the 2009 City budget decisions include:

- the use of franchise fees for road projects only;
- labor cost increases of 3 percent;
- a change in group health insurance carriers that froze the employer contribution for 2009;
- volatile fuel pricing;
- expenditures for major equipment purchases;
- disposition of the old elementary school;
- falling investment returns.

"The final major concern is the state of the economy in Minnesota and potential aid cuts," Hill says. "While the State provided additional aid in 2009, it appears they may not be able to afford to pay the bill." Morris will set aside about \$100,000 to cover that contingency, Hill says. "A state economic forecast will dictate what actions the State will take to balance its budget before the end of their fiscal year in June of 2009."

Storck, Carrington re-elected to City Council

Bill Storck and Matthew Carrington were re-elected to 4-year terms on the Morris City Council Nov. 4.

Carrington, a CPA at Morris & Associates, was first elected to the council in 2002. In 2006, he was appointed to fill the remaining two years of Sheldon Giese's term on the council after Giese was elected mayor. Carrington's priorities for his third term in office are developing the old elementary school property, exploring the possibility

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Nancy and Mike Sparby of Morris, and their daughters Sofia, 8, and Gabriel, 11, were among the many local volunteers who helped with a public tree-planting project this fall. See page 3 for more details.

Open swim, gym at RFC

Membership or daily pass not required
 Mon., Dec. 1 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Dec. 31 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
 Sat., Jan 17 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.
 Sun., Feb. 15 1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Free skating at the Lee Center

December

Wed., Dec. 3 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Dec. 7 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Dec. 10 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Dec. 14 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Dec. 17 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Mon., Dec. 22 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 Tues., Dec. 23 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 Fri., Dec. 26 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 Sun., Dec. 28 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Mon., Dec. 29 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 Tues., Dec. 30 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 Wed., Dec. 31 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

January

Sun., Jan. 4 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Jan. 7 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Jan. 11 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Jan. 14 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Jan. 18 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Mon., Jan. 19 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 (Martin Luther King holiday)

Wed., Jan. 21 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Jan. 25 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Jan. 28 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

February

Sun., Feb. 1 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Feb. 4 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Feb. 8 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Feb. 11 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Feb. 15 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Mon., Feb. 16 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.
 (Presidents Day holiday)
 Wed., Feb. 18 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
 Sun., Feb. 22 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.
 Wed., Feb. 25 7:00 - 8:30 p.m.

Funded by Morris Area Community Education and the City of Morris for residents of the Morris Area School District only.

New staff at the public library

There are two new faces behind the circulation desk at the Morris Public Library. Tammy Smith and Pat Rathke are library assistants.

Tammy Smith of rural Morris joined the staff in August. She's a native Minnesotan and a 1991 graduate of UMM. She worked for Prairie Community Services for 11 years and most recently was a substitute teacher at Morris Area Elementary School. Smith is working on her master's degree in library and information science through the University of Illinois, Urbana. She is married to Dave, an independent insurance adjuster. Tammy has three children, Joel and Bekah Larsen and Austin Smith.

Pat Rathke joined the library staff in September. She grew up near Alberta,



Tammy Smith



Pat Rathke

graduated from high school in Slayton, and attended Bemidji State College and UMM. She worked for many years as a heavy equipment operator for Johnson Brothers, based in Litchfield. Pat has lived in rural Cyrus since 1991.

Storck, Carrington re-elected to City Council

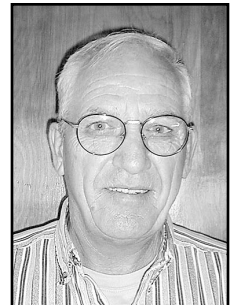
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of an outdoor swimming pool on the site, and holding down city property taxes. Contact Carrington at 589-2677 or mcarrington@fedtel.net.


Storck, the retired director of Morris Public Works, was first elected to the council in 2002. His priorities for the new term include demolishing the old elementary school and developing affordable housing on the site. He encourages citizens to approach the City Council with ideas and concerns. Contact Storck at 585-5318 or bdstorck@fedtel.net.



Matthew Carrington



Bill Storck



NEW RECYCLING DROP-OFF. You can drop off your recyclables seven days a week at the big blue recycling trailer, parked at the Morris City Garage, 101 South County Rd. 2, across from the Stevens County Fairgrounds. Curbside recyclables pick-up is the first Thursday of every month on the east side of town and the first Friday of every month on the west side of town.

Morris earns 'Tree City USA' honor

Efforts like the Highway 28 tree planting project helped make Morris a Tree City USA. The designation by the Arbor Day Foundation recognizes communities that invest in planting and caring for the urban forest.

In the last two years, local volunteers planted more than 300 trees along Highway 28. The planting effort was supported by a \$23,000 grant from the Minnesota Department of Transportation and more than \$10,000 in local contributions, plus hundreds of hours of volunteer time, says Sue Granger, a member of the Morris Tree Board.

Volunteers are continuing to seek donations to water the trees for the next three years. About \$2,000 is still needed to ensure that the trees are watered during the first three years, a critical period for successful establishment, Granger says. To contribute, contact Liz Morrison, 589-1342, morrison@info-link.net.

These private efforts supplement Morris's municipal tree programs. The City usually plants between 80 and 115 new shade trees each year. This fall, 105 boulevard trees were planted along city streets. Morris spent \$15,600 in 2008 on the shade tree program, says Jim



More than 130 local volunteers planted trees along Highway 28 on Sept. 20.

Dittbenner, public works director, and plans to spend \$17,600 next year.

The City also removed 32 diseased boulevard elms this summer. Another 17 diseased elms on private property were taken down, too. That's fewer than in previous years, Dittbenner says.

One reason is Morris's new cost-share

program, which helps property owners save elm trees from Dutch Elm Disease. The city will kick in 40 percent of the cost of treating approved trees on city boulevards. This year, the City spent \$8,797 on elm tree treatment cost-sharing, Dittbenner says.

Becki Jordan appointed to Human Rights Commission

Becki Jordan is the newest member of the Morris Human Rights Commission.

Jordan grew up in Dawson and Waubay, S.D., in a blended family with five younger brothers. She graduated from UMM in 2007 with degrees in sociology, women's studies, and human services. As a UMM student, she was co-chair of the Women's Resource Center and served on the Queer Issues Committee and the Commission on Women.

Jordan works as a victim advocate for Someplace Safe of Stevens County. She is also participating in the Leadership Morris program. She has a daughter, Kendalyn, 9 months old.



Becki Jordan

City Meeting Calendar

Dec. 2008

Dec. 9	City Council 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
	Truth in Taxation Hearing . . 5:30 p.m. Council Chambers
Dec. 10	Park Board 5:00 p.m. City Hall
Dec. 16	Planning Commission 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
Dec. 17	Human Rights Commission. . Time, place varies; call City Hall
Dec. 23	City Council 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
Dec. 29	Library Board 5:00 p.m. Library

Jan. 2009

Jan. 13	City Council 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
Jan. 14	Park Board 5:00 p.m. City Hall
Jan. 20	Planning Commission 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
Jan. 21	Human Rights Commission. . Time, place varies; call City Hall
Jan. 26	Library Board 5:00 p.m. Library
Jan. 27	City Council 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers

Feb. 2009

Feb. 10	City Council 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
Feb. 11	Park Board 5:00 p.m. City Hall
Feb. 17	Planning Commission 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers
Feb. 18	Human Rights Commission. . Time, place varies; call City Hall
Feb. 23	Library Board 5:00 p.m. Library
Feb. 24	City Council 5:15 p.m. Council Chambers

MAHS students are restoring Pomme de Terre Park shoreline

Morris Area High School students are restoring a section of river shoreline at Pomme de Terre Park.

Last spring, juniors and seniors in Environmental Science class, along with first and fifth grade students, planted native grasses and aquatic plants in the city's former earthen swimming pool. The pool, adjacent to the Pomme de Terre River, was closed in 2002. This fall, students weeded the 800-square-foot area and planted more wetland plants.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources supplied the native plants, mulch, and a special curriculum. The Stevens County Soil and Water Conservation District provided native grass seed and taught students about native plants.

The three-year wetland conservation project is one of several MAHS service learning projects with an environmental focus, says Cheryl Kuhn, Service Learning coordinator. "The students learn in the classroom and then put what they have learned in class to work in the community." Students in the Environmental Science class, taught by Gene Holmgren and Matt Balken, learned about native wetland plants, shoreline ecosystems, and water quality.

Other MAHS service learning projects have included electronics waste collection, recycling in school, and Kids Voting USA. The projects are supported by a three-year, \$40,000 grant from Learn and Serve America.



MAHS junior Maria Cin clips seedheads of barnyardgrass, an annual weed, as part of a shoreline restoration project at Pomme de Terre park.

City Notes

- Be kind to pedestrians: Please shovel your sidewalk this winter.
- Landlords, please make arrangements for sidewalk snow removal at your rental properties.
- Please don't shovel snow onto the road. It's a traffic hazard.
- Please avoid piling snow on boulevards or around fire hydrants.

Snow Alert Parking Rules

When a snow alert is declared, there's no parking on any city streets until they are plowed.

Snow alerts are announced by 5 p.m. on these area radio and television stations:

- Local Public Access TV
- KMRS Morris 1230 AM
- KKOK Morris 95.7 FM
- KUMM Morris 89.7 FM
- KQIC Willmar 102.5 FM
- KCLD St. Cloud 104.7 FM

• Or call Morris City Hall, 320-589-3141

• Or check the City website www.ci.morris.mn.us/pd/snowalert.shtml

