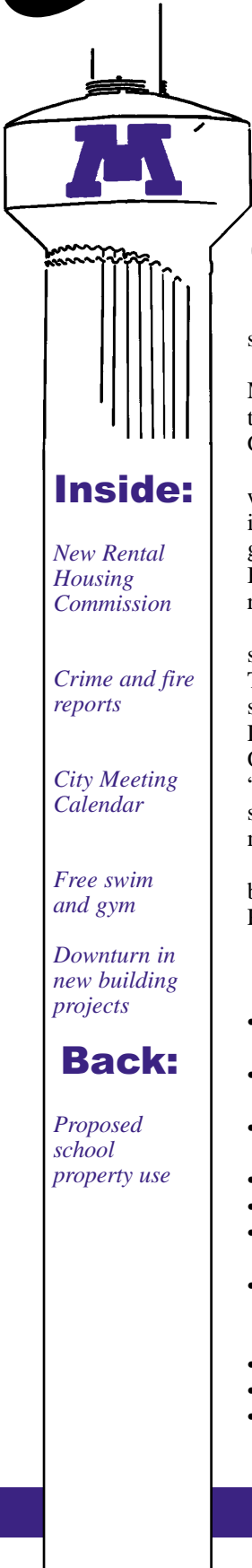


City Connection

A seasonal newsletter
for the City of Morris

March, 2008

Volume 8, Issue 1



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City sets five-year capital improvement plan

The City has set a schedule of water, sewer and street improvements for the next five years.

Most of the work will be done on the east side of Morris. Within the next ten years, the city also plans to replace the main sanitary sewer trunk line along Green River Road.

As part of the capital improvement plan, the city will evaluate the condition of all the city's water, sanitary sewer and storm sewer lines, as well as curbs, gutters and sidewalks, says Morris City Manager Blaine Hill. Street maintenance needs will also be reviewed and ranked.

In July, the city will begin rebuilding water and sewer lines and streets on the east side of Downtown. The work will affect Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh streets between Atlantic Ave. and Oregon Ave. Downtown alleys will also be redone, as well as Oregon Ave. between Fourth St. and Seventh St. "Businesses will remain open during the work," Hill says. The Downtown project is estimated at about \$2 million.

College Avenue will also be redone this year between Fifth Street and Second Street, plus Circle Pines. That project is valued at about \$900,000.

Future improvement plans include:

- **2009**
 - Highland Homes Addition
 - **2010**
 - East Second St. from Atlantic Ave. to College Ave. and beyond to the city wells
 - Pacific Ave. storm sewer
 - **2011**
 - East Eighth St. from College Ave. to Columbia Ave.
 - East Ninth St. from Arizona Ave. to Columbia Ave.
 - Arizona Ave from Seventh St. to Ninth St.
 - **2012**
 - Nevada Ave. from Fourth St. to Park Ave.
- Plans for 2013 and subsequent years include:**
- Montana Ave. from Seventh St. to Tenth St.
 - Colorado Ave. from Eighth St. to Tenth St.
 - Sanitary sewer trunk on Green River Road

- Oregon Ave. from Fourth St. to Elm St.
- Brook St., North Court, South Court and Thomas St.



STORY TIME at the Morris Public Library: Pre-school children can enjoy stories and activities every Thursday morning at 10:30 at the Morris Public Library. Story Time is presented by TREC, a cooperative program from UMM and Morris Community Education. Participating in Story Time activities are (from top) Alex Denzer, 4, Ben Denzer, 2, and Noah Luthi, 1. The boys go to Jackie Dripps's daycare.

Morris building projects plummet in 2007

Downturn part of a statewide trend

The value of Morris building projects dropped sharply in 2007, to the lowest level in a decade.

Building permits totaled \$2.1 million last year. That compares to \$21 million in 2006, \$5.6 million in 2005, \$27 million in 2004, \$6.8 million in 2003, and \$5.8 million in 2002. The downturn in Morris building projects reflects "a statewide trend," says Morris Building Official Mike Jacobson.

The city wrote 122 building permits in 2007, compared to 182 permits in 2006. There were five new single family homes built in the city last year, valued at \$860,000. That's the lowest number in many years, Jacobson says. Morris added 10 single family residences in 2006, 8 in 2005, 14 in 2004, 6 in 2003 and 12 in 2002.

As of mid-February, "I haven't talked to anyone yet who wants to build a new house in town," Jacobson says. "Typically, I would have talked to a few people by now who wanted to get the process started."

Now is not a bad time to build a new house, Jacobson adds. "Interest rates are



**Morris Building Official
Mike Jacobson**

good, materials costs have come down, even the price of labor is down because of competition for jobs," he says. However, credit has tightened, so fewer people "are qualifying for financing to build a new home nowadays."

Commercial building down sharply, too
Commercial and industrial construc-

tion also fell off dramatically in 2007, compared to recent years. There were three commercial building projects in 2007, totaling \$380,000. They included a new building at Westmor Industries, valued at \$100,000, and new construction at West Central Environmental Consulting, valued at \$145,000.

In 2006, commercial projects totaled \$3.5 million, and Stevens Community Medical Center began a \$10 million expansion. Commercial projects in 2005 totaled \$2.1 million, in addition to a \$19 million school. In 2004, commercial projects were valued at \$2.3 million.

Morris Fire calls down in 2007

The Morris Fire and Rescue Department responded to 50 calls in 2007, down from 74 calls in 2006.

Calls last year included 23 fire alarms, 7 structure fires, 6 vehicle fires, 3 cooking fires, 1 grass fire, 1 power pole fire, and 8 car accidents.

In 2006, there were 51 fire alarms, 7 structure fires, 5 grass fires, 3 downed power lines, and 2 car accidents with extrications.

In 2005 there were 64 calls, including 17 fire alarms and 12 false alarms, 9 structure fires, 5 grass fires, and 11 car accidents with extrications.

City Meeting Calendar

March, 2008

March 11	City Council	5:15 p.m.	Council Chambers
March 12	Park Board	5:00 p.m.	City Hall
March 18	Planning Com.	5:15 p.m.	Council Chambers
March 19	Human Rights Com.	Time, place varies; call City Hall	
March 25	City Council	5:00 p.m.	Council Chambers
March 31	Library Board	5:00 p.m.	Library

April, 2008

April 8	City Council	5:15 p.m.	Council Chambers
April 9	Park Board	5:00 p.m.	City Hall
April 10	Board of Review	11:00 a.m.	Council Chambers
April 15	Planning Com.	5:15 p.m.	Council Chambers
April 16	Human Rights Com.	Time, place varies; call City Hall	
April 22	City Council	5:00 p.m.	Council Chambers
April 28	Library Board	5:00 p.m.	Library

May, 2008

May 13	City Council	5:15 p.m.	Council Chambers
May 14	Park Board	5:00 p.m.	City Hall
May 19	Library Board	5:00 p.m.	Library
May 20	Planning Com.	5:15 p.m.	Council Chambers
May 21	Human Rights Com.	Time, place varies; call City Hall	
May 27	City Council	5:00 p.m.	Council Chambers

Clip and Save

Open swim, gym at RFC

Membership or daily pass not required

Mon., March 10 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Sat., April 12 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Sun., May 18 1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

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

Morris Rental Housing Commission established

The Morris Rental Housing Commission was established in January to review disputes and advise the City Council on rental housing issues. Morris has about 900 rental units — more than 40 percent of the city's total housing stock.

The rental commission is composed of landlords, renters and community members. Three non-voting city officials also serve on the commission. They are Steve Rudney, Morris rental property inspector; Bill Storck, City Council member; and Blaine Hill, city manager.

The commission is now writing bylaws and establishing procedures. The effort is being coordinated by Greg Thorson, a UMM political science professor, and his assistant, UMM student Alex Murphy.

Meet the Rental Commission

John Amundson, a Morris merchant since 1993, owns John's Total Entertainment. He grew up in Westbrook, and graduated from UMM. Amundson is a Blandin Community Leadership alumnus and has served on the boards of the Morris Area Chamber of Commerce and the Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth program.

Cheryl Brevig is a homemaker. She worked for many years for non-profit organizations before retiring in 2003. Brevig grew up in Elbow Lake and was educated at UMM. She serves on the Morris Area Arts Boosters and is chairman of the 2008 Morris Area High School Post Prom Committee.

Noah Clark is a senior at UMM, majoring in political theory. He's from Stanton, Iowa.

Henry Fulda is Assistant Vice Chancellor for Student Life at UMM. He oversees UMM's residential life, health services, and student counseling programs. Fulda grew up in Port Arthur, Texas and went to college at LaMar University in Beaumont, Texas. He earned a PhD in counseling from Texas A and M University. Fulda was the director of Health Services and Counseling at South Dakota State University before coming to UMM in 2001.

Daniel Johnson is an owner and manager at Johnson Property Management LLC, which manages commercial and residential real estate, primarily in Morris. Johnson grew up in Morris. He managed Benson Market Co., a country grain elevator in Benson, for 20 years. He got into the property management business about six years ago. Johnson has been active on grain industry boards.

Hilda Parks is pastor of the Federated



MORRIS'S NEW RENTAL HOUSING COMMISSION. (Front from left): Steve Rudney, Bill Storck, John Amundson, Noah Clark. (Back from left): Blaine Hill, Carol Wilcox, Alex Murphy, Hilda Parks, Dan Johnson, Cheryl Brevig, Melissa Sherod, Greg Thorson. Not pictured: Henry Fulda.

Church. She grew up in Vernon Center and earned bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Minnesota. Parks was a school librarian before going to the seminary. She received a Master of Divinity from United Theological Seminary in New Brighton and a PhD in liturgical studies from Drew University in Madison, N.J. She was a pastor in Long Prairie-Grey Eagle and Blooming Prairie before coming to Morris in 2000. Parks serves on the boards of the Stevens County Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity.

Melissa Sherod is a sophomore at UMM, majoring in psychology. She also works in admissions and customer service at Stevens Community Medical Center. Sherod grew up in Morris and graduated

from Morris Area High School in 1998. She serves on UMM's Violence Prevention Program.

Carol Wilcox is a retired elementary school teacher. She grew up in Herman, and went to college at Moorhead State University. She taught in Moorhead and Hancock before joining the Morris Elementary School faculty. She retired from teaching in 1993, after 34 years in the classroom. Wilcox also served on the Morris City Council for 21 years — 9 of them as Mayor. She stepped down in 2006. Wilcox serves on the boards of the Morris HRA, Stevens County Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity. She's also a member of the Morris Park Board and volunteers at the Stevens County Food Shelf.

Property crimes rise in 2007

The number of serious property crimes committed in Morris rose in 2007, compared to 2006, according to year-end statistics from the Morris Police Department.

Robberies, burglaries, larcenies and auto thefts were all up. Serious violent crime in Morris is rare.

Among less serious crimes, vandalism incidents were up 70 percent last year, the Police Department reports. But D.U.I and disorderly crimes dropped in 2007.

"Of obvious concern are the increases in serious crimes," says Morris Police Chief Jim Beauregard. "There are a number of reasons for this trend: population changes, mobility, and technology just to name a few. What we have discovered is that Morris is not exempt from these national trends."

These are challenging times for local law enforcement, Beauregard adds, but "We

are committed to providing the citizens with educated professional officers dedicated to community safety."

Selected Morris Crime Statistics

Crime		2007	2006
Part I Crimes	Murder	1	2
	Rape	2	4
	Robbery	2	0
	Assault	10	9
	Burglary	31	10
	Larceny	105	91
	Auto Theft	12	1
Part II Crimes	Other Assaults	29	25
	Fraud	27	24
	Vandalism	98	57
	Narcotics	16	11
	D.U.I.	13	19
	Liquor Laws	32	30
	Disorderly	42	54

Eco-friendly housing proposed for abandoned school property

The Morris Elementary School property could become Morris's first "green" neighborhood.

In February, the Morris City Council approved a resolution seeking funds to develop the 17-acre parcel of land for affordable, environmentally-friendly housing. The Morris Eco-Friendly Affordable Housing Demonstration Project would be a model of sustainable residential housing practices, supporters say.

The city, which acquired the property in 2006, has applied for a \$23,750 grant from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to pay for planning and site design. In-kind contributions of \$13,000 have also been pledged for the project. The city is working with Dovetail Partners, a

Minneapolis-based non-profit group that helps rural communities plan competitively-priced green housing.

The proposed development would include phased construction of modestly-sized residential units, a small park and a pedestrian thoroughfare. Housing could include a mix of single family and multi-family residences, says Sue Granger, who wrote the planning grant request.

The development would showcase new, environmentally sustainable practices such as district heating, storm water management, and low-maintenance, energy-efficient housing designs. The city will investigate incentives to encourage green construction by private builders, says Granger. Materials from the deconstructed

school could also be reused in the development's new homes and park.

The idea for a green housing development arose from a long public planning process, which was led by the Redevelopment Committee, a local citizens group. After the Morris School District vacated the property in 2005, the group spent two years seeking new uses for the school building. That effort was unsuccessful, says Blaine Hill, Morris city manager.

"It would be nice to save the building," he says, "but the consensus of the Redevelopment Committee is that there are no investors willing to pump money into it."

The Eco-Friendly proposal "is still in the exploration phase," says Granger, a member of the Redevelopment Committee and the Morris Planning Commission. It would be the first time the city has done a neighborhood housing development itself, Hill says. One of the advantages of going that route is that "we could control what it looks like, and what goes there."

However, the economics of such a development are still unclear. Hill estimates that it will cost at least \$800,000 to tear down the old school. It's unlikely the city could recoup all the demolition costs through project revenues, he says. Adds Granger: "The Redevelopment Committee is actively seeking funds to offset the costs of tearing down the school."



The former Morris Area Elementary School property.