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Proposed land exchange debated

Jane Howard
The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) sought comments on proposed land exchanges at two public hearings Wednesday, August 26, 2009 at the Community Center in Grand Marais, but one hearing involved much more controversy than the other.

The first hearing was short, with no one commenting after DNR Realty Program Coordinator Katherine Giel read a statement regarding the exchange. Opposition was raised during the second hearing, attended by six Lutsen residents as well as the landowners in question.

At issue was the proposed exchange of two large parcels of Hovland land owned by Larry and Leanne DeWester for three parcels of land owned by the state. If the exchange takes place, the state would receive 440 acres of private land in exchange for 320 acres of public land. Both sets of land are valued at \$700,000.

The DNR is proposing to exchange two 40-acre parcels off the Gunflint Trail along the Gunflint Transfer Station road, two 40-acre parcels on either side of the Caribou Trail near the Murmur Creek Road in Lutsen, and four 40-acre parcels on the east side of the Caribou Trail north of Holly Lake.

Discussion focused on the 160 acres north of Holly Lake and its potential for development, and those present did not agree on exactly how much of that property is wetland.

DeWester offers exchange rationale

DeWester read a statement he had written, saying he was asked by the DNR in 1998 if he would be willing to sell his 440 acres in Hovland to help the state consolidate its holdings in the Grand Portage State Forest. "While I was willing to assist the state in their desire to acquire my lands," he said, "I expressed my wish to explore a land exchange rather than an outright purchase in order to attempt to keep some parcels on the local property tax rolls.

"It is my belief that in a county with such substantial public land holdings as we have here in Cook County, it is important to try to maintain enough private tax base to provide adequate funds for the provision of quality local government services and education without overtaxing the few private land owners that remain."

DeWester said he has worked with the DNR to come up with an exchange that "would satisfy both our needs while also being sensitive to the wishes of other citizens

"These groups will not find any exchange acceptable."

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Photo by Sandy Updyke ~ moosevalleyphotography.com
This beautiful young buck paused for a drink at the bird bath in the Hovland yard of Sandy and Bruce Updyke. Sandy noted that it is a rare treat to see a buck in velvet in one's yard.

City considers biomass and business park funding

Jane Howard

How to meet financial obligations regarding Cedar Grove Business Park was the first topic discussed Friday, August 28, 2009 when members of the city council, the county board, and the Cook County-Grand Marais Economic Development Authority (EDA) met with financial consultants Carolyn Drude and Bruce Kimmel of Ehlers & Associates.

Also discussed was how the city might come up with matching funds if it is awarded a federal grant for a biomass-generated energy plant.

In January 2006, the city took out a three-

year bond in the amount of \$1,630,000 for installation of the infrastructure at Cedar Park. Over the course of three years, interest has caused the debt to grow by about \$40,000. This bought the city some time to sell its 37 lots at Cedar Grove Business Park, but only three have sold. The city must pay off the bond by January 9, 2010 and could by law issue one more temporary bond to buy it more time.

Carolyn Drude of Ehlers & Associates estimated that another three-year bond would cause the city's Cedar Park debt to grow from \$1,670,000 to over \$1,785,000.

Another option would be for the city to bond for a longer time, although longer-term bonds generally carry higher interest rates, Drude said. Paying off those bonds could be done through special assessments through the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), property taxes, or funds set aside by the Public Utilities Commission. City Administrator Mike Roth said the city has money in its sewer fund, but a lot of the city's sewer lines will need to be replaced in the next 20 years.

According to Roth, the city's original plan was to pay off the bond by assessing each Cedar Grove lot \$60,000 for installation of the infrastructure. A market analysis was recently completed, and it priced the lots at between \$10,000

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Grand Portage community celebrates at Oshki Ogimaag

Rhonda Silence

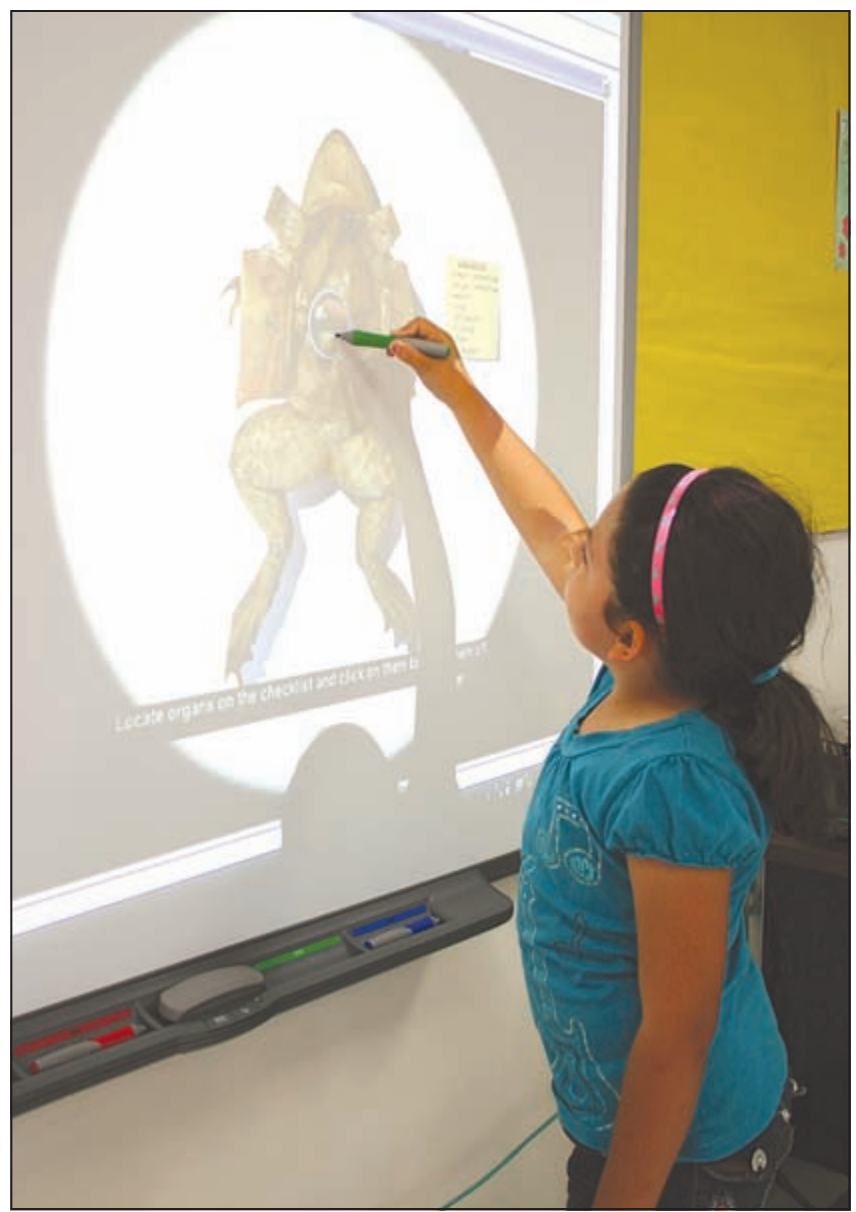
Before a ribbon cutting and tobacco offering ceremony at Oshki Ogimaag (School of New Leaders) Charter School in Grand Portage on Monday, August 31, students and parents excitedly explored classrooms and introduced themselves to teachers and staff.

Many children, parents, and grandparents have already been in the school building, which was formerly the Grand Portage Elementary campus of ISD 166. The charter for Oshki Ogimaag was approved by the Minnesota Department of Education in August 2008 and the last classes for ISD 166 were held last spring. Since then, the community has been preparing for this day. Oshki Ogimaag staff greeted everyone and cheerfully showed off their sparkling clean and ready-for-learning classrooms. Families checked out new computers and the high-tech chalkboard alternative white boards. Students happily perused their personalized binders of school information.

Rick Novitsky, known as "Grampa Ranger Rick" by many school students, was on hand, sharing information on the new construction underway at Grand Portage State Park. The park has hosted school field trips in the past and Novitsky said the new park visitor center will offer even more. He said the park will serve as the Oshki Ogimaag "eastern campus."

In addition to working with Grand Portage State Park, Oshki Ogimaag plans to interact with community elders and with the staff of Grand Portage Land Trust.

At 6:00 p.m., everyone gathered for a brief dedication of the school. Oshki Ogimaag founding School Board Member Bob Swanson welcomed the community and introduced the Stonebridge Singers—the drum group made up of students at Oshki Ogimaag—John Pierre, Brent



Staff photo/Rhonda Silence
Welcome to school! Samantha Scalise of Grand Portage "dissects a frog" using the new whiteboard technology at Oshki Ogimaag Charter School at a community open house on Monday, August 31. More on the new school on page B2.

Sorenson, Marcus Logan, David Logan, Tyler Deschambe, Trevor Deschambe, Patrick Pierre Jr. and their mentors Bob Vogel, Wally Deschambe, and Patrick Pierre.

the vice-chair of the Oshki Ogimaag School Board, said it has taken a lot of time and hard work to create the school. "We are so proud of our new

After the drum song, Al Aubid,

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Crosswalk concerns for school

Rhonda Silence

The community members working with the Arrowhead Regional Development Commission (ARDC) to develop safe routes to school (SRTS) have agreed on some short term measures to help make walking and biking to school safer, but it was also agreed that more difficult solutions are needed.

Following up on recent SRTS meetings, about 10 community members gathered at the School District 166 Jane Mianowski Conference Center on Monday, August 31 to hear the results of a SRTS parent survey.

Looking at the survey which showed collective concerns regarding the lack of sidewalks on most city streets, no crosswalks near the school, and traffic traveling too fast, Public Health Nurse Joni Kristenson noted that it was good for the group to get public input, "even if it simply confirms what we thought."

Lack of sidewalks appears to be the biggest barrier to safe walking to school. Not only does it mean children must walk on the sides of the roads, it also prohibits creation of crosswalks near the school. Bill Parish of the County Highway Department said a crosswalk must connect sidewalk to sidewalk. The only street near the school with sidewalks its entire length

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