

Update: The Old Junior High

Turning Our Largest Blighted Property Into a Productive Asset

Demolition of the old junior high came to completion on Friday, March 8. Our winter weather cooperated nicely and the entire process was well-executed with only a few minor issues. The Wisconsin DNR made a site visit on February 1 and had no complaints.

The security fencing will remain in place to ensure the site is safe until and through development.

The Village's focus now pivots toward site redevelopment in alignment with our 2022 Comprehensive Plan, earmarking multi-family use. To facilitate this, the Community Development Authority (CDA) has crafted a Request for Proposal (RFP) for developers. A draft of this RFP was reviewed at the February CDA Meeting and was given a final re-

view at the March CDA Meeting. It went to the Board and was approved at the April Board Meeting.

Highlights from the RFP include:

- Proposed housing development can be multi-family, condos, single-family, zero-lot-line, among others, or a mix of types.
- The Village's goal is for a well-designed development that fits within the neighborhood and helps to resolve the increasing need for housing in the community.
- The proposed design and scale should fit the surrounding area.



- Proposed development will need to generate the necessary tax increment to pay for the financed demolition.

The RFP timeline is being finalized. It is expected to be published soon and to be open for approximately one month. Final developer selection will be made by the Village Board.

COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Kim Johnson is making a profound impact on the lives of local children through her organization, Basics for Local Kids. Founded in 2010, Basics for Local Kids has been a lifeline for thousands of children in Pierce and St. Croix counties, providing essential winter-wear and basic necessities to those in need.

Kim's journey with Basics for Local Kids began with a desire to address the needs of vulnerable children in our community. Drawing inspiration from her involvement in the Wheelin' for Warmth program, and under the guidance of Karen Meyer, Kim embarked on a mission to continue and expand these vital services.

The cornerstone of Basics for Local Kids lies in its two primary programs. The first program focuses on providing winter-wear to children in need. Since its inception, the organization has served nearly 7000 local children. What sets this program apart is its accessibility – no referrals are required, making it easier for families to access the support they need.

The second program addresses the broader spectrum of basic necessities required by children during times of crisis or emergency transitions. Operating on referrals from caseworkers and school staff, this program ensures that children facing challenging circumstances receive essential items to maintain their well-being and dignity.

In March, Kim was honored with the Community Impact Hero award from the American Red Cross of Northwest Wisconsin, recognizing her exceptional contributions to the welfare of local children through Basics for Local Kids. This recognition is a testament to Kim's unwavering commitment to making a tangible difference in the lives of those around her.

For Kim, the greatest reward lies in offering a sense of stability and relief to children facing adversity. Providing them with basic necessities not only meets their immediate needs but also allows them to experience the simple joys of childhood.

The success of Basics for Local Kids relies heavily on the support and generosity of the community. There are various ways to contribute, from following updates on social media and offering suggestions for grants or funding opportunities to making monetary donations.

Contact Kim at basicsforlocalkids.org or 715-821-1623.



VILLAGE OF ELLSWORTH

Newsletter

SPRING 2024

HOURS

Monday through Friday
8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

CONTACT INFO

130 N Chestnut Street

Village Hall
(715) 273-4742

Police Department
(715) 273-3275

Ellsworth Public Library
(715) 273-3209

DROP BOX

A 24-hour drop box is available on the front of the Village Hall.

PAYMENTS

We accept cash, check, and/or online payments. Paperless billing and auto-payments now available!

So, What Can We Agree On?

Message from Becky Beissel, President, Village of Ellsworth



Dear fellow community members,

In recent times, the call for the Village Board members to "listen to the residents" has echoed persistently throughout Ellsworth. Yet, amidst these de-

mands lies a perplexing question: which segment of our community should we prioritize listening to? This question underscores the complex mix of opinions, beliefs, and perspectives that form the fabric of our village. With every issue that surfaces, whether it pertains to taxation, community development, or policy-making, the voices we hear range from staunch advocates to vehement opponents, with countless landing somewhere in between.

As nice as it would be sometimes, the pursuit of consensus remains an unattainable goal. Even

within the closest circles of companionship, be it friends, family, or spouses, complete agreement is a rarity. Thus, expecting unanimity from any community, full of varying backgrounds, experiences, and expertise, is both impractical and unattainable.

Yet, amidst this chorus of differing voices lies an invaluable asset: diversity of thought. It is this very diversity that serves as the melting pot for new ideas and innovations to emerge. In celebrating our different opinions, we see the potential for transformative change, paving the way for a vibrant and resilient community. But we must remain respectful of each other's ideas and opinions. Do not vilify someone for having a different perspective than you. Let us spend more time listening to one another instead of evaluating one another. This is where the magic can happen.

Admittedly, navigating controversial issues can evoke a sense of negativity and friction, where consensus appears non-existent. However, amid the turbulence, when it feels like we can't agree on anything, I like to believe there are fundamental truths that we can all connect on:

1. Our profound love for our community. This serves as a common thread that binds us together. We are driven by a collective desire to witness Ellsworth flourish, to see it evolve into prosperity and vitality.
2. Our deep care for our children – their safety, happiness, and future success. Ensuring a nurturing environment where our youth can thrive, learn, and grow is paramount.
3. Our appreciation for the business community. This underscores our recognition of their pivotal role in driving economic growth and strength. Their contributions, offering essential goods, services, and experiences, enrich our village.
4. Our commitment to respect and kindness. Upholding these values fosters a community where individuals feel valued, appreciated, and included, promoting a culture of mutual respect and understanding among all residents of our community.

In essence, while discord may momentarily cloud our collective vision, it is through embracing the richness of our differences that we chart a path forward. Let us cherish the mix of voices that contribute to the betterment of our community, for this is where our strength truly lies. As we navigate the complexities of governance and community discourse, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to fostering a culture of dialogue, understanding, and respect.

Together, we shall continue to work towards the vibrancy of Ellsworth, ensuring a future that is inclusive, kind, and prosperous for all!

Water Utility Rate Increases

Our Water Utility has been operating at a deficit since 2017

The Village of Ellsworth presently maintains relatively modest water rates compared to neighboring areas. However, recent audits of the Village Water and Sewer Utilities have revealed a concerning trend: revenues have failed to match expenses since 2017. While the community has benefited from lower bills, this situation poses a growing challenge that could potentially impact utility services and Village finances over time.

In response to this issue, the Village Board approved an agreement with Ehlers at their December Board Meeting to conduct a comprehensive Water and Sewer Rate analysis. The analysis initiated with an examination of the Water Utility's status and the potential necessity for a Conventional Rate Case with the Public Service Commission, employing a long-term cash flow assessment. This evaluation projected future operational expenses, capital funding requirements, and anticipated rate adjustments. Ehlers scrutinized capital planning, three years of previous audits, as well as current year financial data.

Phase One of the Water Rate analysis was subsequently concluded and presented to the Water and Sewer Com-

mittee on February 21, followed by a presentation to the Village Board on March 4 and again on April 1.

The findings indicated that since 2017, the water utility has been operating at a deficit, as revenues have failed to adequately cover expenses. Additionally, during the period from 2019-2023, revenues increased by 8%, while Operation and Maintenance expenses escalated by over 40%. With these mounting expenses, the existing rates are deemed unsustainable and require adjustment.

Before implementing any rate changes, public utilities must obtain approval from the Public Service Commission. Significant alterations necessitate an application for a Conventional Rate Case. Ultimately, the Public Service Commission conducts a financial review and audit of the Water Utility to determine the revised rate. The most recent Conventional Rate Case was completed on March 29, 2007, with three subsequent Simplified Rate Case increases resulting in a cumulative 9.3% rate increase since 2007.

While the final rate adjustment rests with the Public Service Commission, Ehlers will collaborate with the Village

throughout the process, offering recommendations and guidance. Anticipating a rate increase of over 60%, it is acknowledged that this is



OUR WATER UTILITY IS FACING A
\$380,989
DEFICIT IN 2024 IF RATES ARE NOT INCREASED.

not the preferred scenario for the Village. However, proactively addressing this challenge will establish the Water Utility on a firm financial footing. The objective is to keep the rate increase as minimal as possible while ensuring effective and efficient utility operations, maintenance of existing infrastructure, and necessary improvements.

We are planning for the Public Service Commission approval in September 2024, with new rates to follow.

Moving forward, diligent monitoring of rate adequacy will be crucial to prevent the need for drastic future increases.

Update: Grant & Piety Streets Project

Necessary updates to aging infrastructure

The Village Board remains dedicated to advancing the Grant and Piety utility and road reconstruction initiatives. Recognizing the pressing need for updated infrastructure in these areas, characterized by heavy usage and their pivotal role as main connectors within the community, the Board is prioritizing these projects.

Enhancing the utilities in these regions will not only address immediate needs but also contribute to the overall improvement of the utility system. The Streets and Sidewalk Committee has convened to deliberate on the initial design and layout of the roads and sidewalks, with final design and approval by the Village Board in the coming months.

The commencement and completion timeline for construction will be determined upon the projects being put out to bid. While funding details are still being finalized, the Village has secured low-interest loans from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Safe Drinking Water Loan Program and the Clean Water Program. It's worth noting that the utilization of these programs will impact water and sewer utili-



ty rates, as the Village was not granted loan forgiveness by the DNR.

Additional funding avenues, such as the extent of special assessments, are under deliberation. Information regarding special assessments can be found under Village Ordinances 3.08, 8.02, 8.025.

Maintaining the integrity of the infrastructure is crucial for the well-being of both residents and businesses within the community. The Village Board acknowledges the weight of these decisions and expenses and affirms the importance of these projects in propelling the community forward.

Thank You, Mindy Anderson

Trustee Mindy Anderson concludes her service on the Village Board this month when the newly elected trustees take their seats on April 16.

We thank her for her time, talent, energy, and leadership on the Village Board for the last three years. The Village has seen some major shifts during her tenure and Mindy's input, guidance, and thoughtfulness were invaluable.

Thank You, Wayne Lundgaard

After serving over 15 years as our Plan Commission Chair, Wayne Lundgaard has decided to retire from the position. We thank him for his time and energy in serving the community in this important role. The Plan Commission has seen many new faces in the last handful of years and Wayne's guidance has been much appreciated by staff and peers.

Reminder: Dog Licenses

Annual dog license renewals were due by March 31, 2024. If you have not licensed your dog(s) please do so as soon as possible.

All dogs 5 months of age or older must be licensed annually. All dog licenses expire December 31 of the year they were issued. A current "Proof of Rabies Vaccination" from your veterinarian for each animal is required along with your fee for licensing. New residents and pet owners have a 30-day grace period to license pets.

Fees are now \$15 for an altered animal and \$17 for unaltered animal.

Update: Ellsworth BioEnergy *Application has been withdrawn*

EDIT: The Village of Ellsworth received notice on Wednesday, April 3, 2024, from Ellsworth BioEnergy/Bigadan that they have withdrawn their special use permit application for an anaerobic digester plant. This brings this project to a close with no further action or agenda items to consider this application.

WRITTEN PREVIOUS TO WITHDRAW: A significant amount of new information has been presented, and the Board continues its efforts to gather pertinent details about the project. Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provided a presentation

to the Village Board concerning the permitting, monitoring, and regulatory aspects associated with the potential approval and construction of the digester.

Additionally, Trustees Hines and Borner, along with Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Roy, undertook a visit to tour Bigadan facilities in Denmark. A comprehensive report detailing their findings from the trip, along with other relevant information, can be accessed on the Village's website at

<https://www.villageofellsworth.org/our-community/pages/proposed-ellsworth-bioenergy-digester-project>.

The Village Board is in the final stages of drafting the Memorandum of Understanding. This document contains valuable insights that will be beneficial and informative for all individuals interested in the project. Upon completion, it will be made available to the public for review. It is strongly encouraged that everyone interested take the opportunity to thoroughly review all the documents on that webpage.

