

Trail board, department heads review insurance options, clash on pay raises

By COLE SHORT

Trail County commissioners raised doubts Tuesday about whether the county could afford to cover a larger percentage of its employees' health insurance costs next year.

County leaders had been asked earlier this month to consider ramping up the county's contribution toward family health insurance policies in 2024.

However, County Commissioner Tom Eblen of Hillsboro told fellow commissioners and department heads Tuesday that he doesn't believe the county has money to pay those costs.

The county's preliminary tax levy for 2024 – which can be reduced further but not increased before Oct. 10 – called for a slight reduction in the county's mill levies.

Despite the small decrease, Trail County should pull in an additional \$517,000 in property taxes next year from increases in the valuations of homes and commercial and ag land.

Those funds would allow the county to cover the cost of single health insurance policies – as well as offer still-to-be determined raises to county employees – but wouldn't be sufficient to cover the price of more expensive family plans, Eblen said.

Trail County would need to increase its mill levy 6.5 to 10 mills in 2024 in order to contribute more to those health insurance premiums, he said.

"There's no 6.5 or 10 mills available to us in any way, shape



Eblen

Haugen

or form," Eblen said. "We have about \$500,000 (in increased property taxes) to work with."

"So, in my world, I can't recommend any kind of changes to our health insurance because there no dollars to do it. It can't be done."

Discussions about employees' health insurance costs eventually shifted to back-and-forth conversations with department heads about raises for county employees in 2024.

Eblen kicked off the salary talks by pointing out that roughly 52 percent of the county's tax money gets set aside to pay for employees' salaries and benefits.

If the same percentage was tapped from the county's \$517,000 increase in taxes next year, Trail County would have \$269,000 to spend on pay raises and benefits next year, he said.

A 3 percent cost-of-living raise for employees would cost the county \$100,000 while increases in single health insurance plans would require \$65,000 more, Eblen said.

County Auditor Glenda Haugen and Deputy Auditor Heather Hovey presented the findings of

a \$30,000 salary study from the consulting firm Gallagher late last year that found the wages of Trail County employees were fairly comparable to their peers across the state.

After the initial study, Hovey collected supplemental salary data from more counties, including ones that had similar population counts to Trail, and shared with the county board.

Haugen and other department heads have supported the implementation of a stepped salary scale like the one outlined in the Gallagher report, which would require the county to move away from its usual approach of providing across-the-board raises for employees.

In a tense exchange near the end of Tuesday's meeting, Haugen pointed out that Trail County's commissioners rank sixth among their peers in the state in annual salaries.

Employees and their supervisors in Trail County wish they were in the same boat, she said.

"I would like to be sixth in the state. I am elected just like you guys are," Haugen said. "Why is it OK for the taxpayers to pay you five guys to be the sixth-highest paid while the rest of your employees are below" the salaries offered to their counterparts in the state.

"Just think about that and look at the salaries. We are all here doing our job 40-plus hours a week," Haugen said.

"You are all doing a good job," said County Board Chair

Larry Young of Mayville, seconds before wrapping up Tuesday's commission meeting.

Last year, county commissioners approved 5 percent raises for a majority of the county's full- and part-time employees, although workers were given the option of taking an additional \$150 per month if that amount exceeded 5 percent of their salaries.

Commissioners indicated a similar pay option could be presented to employees in 2024.

Jody Schill, Trail County's clerk of court, said county commissioners have discussed repeatedly whether to beef up employees' salaries the past 18 years.

However, no major changes have been in that time frame as county leaders repeatedly have chosen to approve cost-of-living raises every year, she said.

"We have a great community. We have great people. We have got to do something to fix this," Schill said. "Every year, I think 'Wouldn't it be easier every year to not have to address this issue every year?'"

Eblen responded that the back-and-forth talks about salaries will persist, no matter how county commissioners decide to proceed with their budget discussions.

"Every year, it's going to need to be addressed," he said. "There will have to be meetings just like this one with the same amount of discussion that goes on."

Reese: Hillsboro planning and zoning opposed to shipping container houses

By COLE SHORT

The Hillsboro City Commission and its planning and zoning committee may not be willing to allow residents to convert shipping containers into tiny homes in the city.



Reese

City Commission President Levi Reese told city leaders on Monday night that the city's planning and zoning committee has been discussing outlawing the conversion of shipping containers into private residences in Hillsboro.

"(The committee believes) cargo containers and shipping containers should only be in commercial zones and not residential zones," Reese told city commissioners.

Although city officials haven't received a formal request seeking permission to turn a cargo container into a tiny home, the idea has found an audience in other U.S. states as housing

prices surge and Americans seek cost-effective alternatives to traditional homes.

Cities in Texas, including Austin and Fort Worth, have building regulations in place that allow homeowners to convert shipping containers into alternative dwellings.

California, Louisiana, Oregon and Missouri had similar laws in place earlier this year.

In addition to discussing planning and zoning issues, city commissioners on Monday tackled a wide variety of subjects during a 2.5-hour marathon meeting.

In other business Monday, the Hillsboro City Commission:

■ Learned from Sara Myers, the city's utilities auditor, that some residents in the city incorrectly received late notices after paying their utility bills.

A software glitch appeared to cause the issue and city officials are working on a fix, she said.

"If you paid your bill and received a red card, give us a call and we'll look into it," Myers told audience members Monday.

■ Agreed to use a \$12,500

cyber security grant the city received to purchase new laptops, docking stations and security cameras for city-owned buildings in Hillsboro.

The money previously had been earmarked to purchase a new dedicated server for the city, but Joe Kramer, owner of Remark Technology Consulting, said the grant wouldn't cover the nearly \$20,000 price tag for the equipment.

Kramer said city officials could reapply for additional grant money from the state with assistance from Ben Gates of Mayville, who serves as Steele County's emergency manager.

■ Approved a request from Jim Anderson, the city's public works superintendent, to ear-

mark \$30,000 for the purchase of a farm truck to help city crews with snow removal this winter.

■ Approved the city's liquor license renewals for 2024 for Tap That bar, Goose River Brewing, the Vets Club and Casey's General Store in Hillsboro.

A liquor license renewal request from AnR Bar wasn't included in Monday's city packets, although a representative from the bar said that a request may be filed this week.

■ Awarded a bid for grass mowing inside city cemeteries to Darrell Crotty of Hillsboro.

A separate bid for removing snow outside the city armory and the city hall building along Main Street was awarded to Wayne Manthey of Hillsboro.

KARAOKE NIGHTS

Saturday, Oct. 7
9 p.m. - 1 a.m.

Halloween Party
Saturday, Oct. 28
Prizes for top three costumes

A&R Bar
Hillsboro

Back by popular demand, it's the
REINPOLD KIDS' PUMPKIN STAND!

Charlotte, Rudy, Lillian and new addition, Josephine, will be at the **Mootz Construction parking lot, 22 1st St. North, Hillsboro, on Saturday, Sept. 30, starting at 10 a.m.**

Jack-o-lanterns, pie pumpkins, squash, mini pumpkins, gourds and more! Free-will offering to help pay for college!

Daily specials at
A&R Bar
Hillsboro
701-436-5869

6pm to Close

Monday
\$3⁰⁰ Morgans

Wednesday
\$1⁰⁰ off whiskey

Friday
\$3⁰⁰ Chuck Shots
\$3⁰⁰ Dr. McGillicuddies
\$3⁰⁰ Fireball

Tuesday
\$4⁰⁰ Jag Bombs
\$3⁰⁰ Domestic Beers

Thursday
Ladies Night
\$1⁰⁰ off your call-it

Saturday
\$4⁰⁰ White Claws

Sunday
Bartender's Choice!

Pull-tab during happy hour to decide what you pay
Each Day, Everyday
\$3⁰⁰ Busch Light Pounders
\$3⁰⁰ Kinky shots
\$2⁰⁰ Mystery shots

IN LOVING MEMORY

Mom and Dad

John O. Hovey
Sept. 26, 1898
Mar. 24, 1990

Maggie Hovey
Sept. 28, 1911
Jan. 20, 1999

Rest In Peace

Trail County Historical Society

Preservation Grant Program

The Trail County Historical Society is offering a grant program in 2023. The monies are for non-profit organizations in Trail County, willing to undertake historic preservation projects within the County.

Requirements of the grants are as follows:

1. The grant must be used for historic preservation in Trail County.
2. No group can apply for more than one grant each year. If this grant is not used during the year, it must be returned.
3. An in-kind or cash match of 20% of the grant requested is required.
4. Applications must be neatly printed or typed on the application form provided by the Trail County Historical Society

Applications must be received by October 31, 2023.

Please send applications to:
Trail County Historical Society
Attn: Preservation Grant Committee
PO Box 173
Hillsboro, ND 58045

For more information or for an application, contact Ed Laxdal at 701-430-9233.

WHEN YOUR
AGENT HAS
ANSWERS
YOU DON'T HAVE TO.

Lower price, better service!

Nodak Insurance Company gives you reliable local service from a North Dakota insurance company. You'll work with people who know our state (and might even know you).

Give your local Nodak Insurance agents a call!

701-636-5285

nodakins.com

Nodak Insurance Company

LOANS FOR WHEREVER THE ROAD TAKES YOU

Amanda Schreiner
Branch Manager
701.788.2479
NMLS #1152474

FC CU First Community Credit Union

213 Parke Ave | Portland

Federally insured NCUA. Loans subject to credit approval.

Fall Mowing Maintenance Reminder

Landowners Responsibility to Maintain Right of Way:

N.D.C.C. 63-05-01 (Cutting weeds and grasses on highways) states it is the duty of landowners or operators with land adjoining regularly traveled County roads to cut all weeds and grasses along the regularly traveled County roads adjoining their lands, including weeds and grasses growing within the public right of way bordering the highways and their lands. Further, N.D.C.C. 63-05-03 states that any cost the County incurs due to a landowner's failure to mow can be levied against the land for the ensuing year and shall be collected in the same manner as other real estate taxes are collected, and placed to the credit of the respective subdivisions entitled thereto. Per the Steele County Commission and this Ordinance, all weeds and grasses along these County roads shall be cut by July 1 of each year. The final cutting shall be completed no later than October 1 of each year.

Call Reed Oien, Steele County Superintendent with any questions – 701-789-0536.