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Two counties one gap to close

Billings, Golden Valley counties to iron out Buffaglo Gap details

By Gaylon Wm. Parker

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In what seems like a unique arrangement, the Billings County and Golden Valley County commissions will host a meeting in Medora on Monday, March 30 to figure out how the two can tackle the widening and rerouting of Buffalo Gap Road together. The effort is seen as mutually beneficial for a variety of reasons – both economic and functional – and could even alleviate travel for those wishing to visit the Petrified Forest north of town.

The road's current path takes it north from Interstate 94, Exit 18 and then northwesterly towards State Road 103 W in Golden Valley County. But the proposed path would divert almost due north and link up with 103 just west of the Knutson Creek Substation along the western edge of Billings County.

Monday's upcoming meeting was approved by both county commissions during a joint session on Feb. 19, and the ostensible future plan would see the two bodies split costs evenly between them. Meanwhile, as government funding generally takes a great deal of time to secure, both Billings and Golden Valley foresee the necessity of the diversion as a timely matter and will most likely not seek federal dollars.

Both county commissions attended the meeting in February, with James Haag, Steven Klym and Dean Rodne representing Billings and Adam Smith, Bob Schmelling and Rory Farstveit representing Golden Valley.

"Whatever will provide us better access to the rest of our county, and save miles and time and provide access to the Petrified Forest and other

parts of our county, then – whether it's fire or rescue or people headed to the Maah-Daah-Hey Trail – we're going to see what it could potentially cost and whether both counties can afford it, and that's kind of the step where we're at," Klym said.

As the process moves forward, the groups will be determining of the cost of engineering – and an engineering firm will be decided upon during the March 30 gathering – along with labor, materials and surveying. A bonus of the plan is that future roadway is on US Forest Service lands, and the proposed path would otherwise be diverted away from private property.

Currently, the route is on private property, and that circumstance has created difficulties in the past. Representatives of the US Forest Service also attended the Feb. 19 meeting and will be on-hand for those in the future, as they also will be an important part of the process.

According to the March 30 agenda, the commissions will, "Review proposals for engineering services and award engineering services for Buffalo Gap Road Extension project," and, "Following adjournment of the joint session, the Billings County Commission will immediately reconvene in a special meeting at the same location to review and act on purchase agreement for a 10.11 acre tract of land in the SE1/4 SE1/4 of Section 10-142-99."

Some controversy surrounded the original roadway – which historically had offered public access to county vehicles and travelers for more than 20 years – and whether such a diversion was necessary in the first place. Constituents also have questions about the ability of private property owners to limit or block access to roadways that have been used for decades, a subject that was heavily debated at previous Billings County meetings.

Many of these questions are likely to be addressed during the Monday meeting. But a roadmap will almost certainly be drawn towards the future, at least as a rough, pencil-sketch outline of the possibilities. And with the US Forest Service's willingness to participate, that could help pave the way and offer some conveniences.

For more information about the Billings County Commission, please keep reading the Billings County Pioneer and/or visit the website at www.billingscountynod.gov. For more information about the US Forest Service and US Department of Agriculture, please see www.fs.usda.gov.



Last call for the ballot

Belfield candidate filing
deadline looms on April 6

By Gaylon Wm. Parker

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There is a host of positions and opportunities available to those wanting to run for numerous civic jobs in Belfield, but the candidate filing deadline is closing fast for those wanting to throw their hats in the ring for city council, the park board and mayor. Residents have had since Jan. 1 to begin circling petitions and gathering signatures and thus far only one application has been submitted and subsequently validated.

Mayor Jeff Iverson is stepping down, as are Belfield City Council members Kyle Michels and Roger Decker – with all three of those positions being four-year terms – while two park board member positions that last four years and three two-year slots also are up for grabs. The 2026 election will be on Tuesday, June 9 and the deadline for candidates to have their names on a printed ballot is the close of business at City Hall on April 6 at 4 p.m.

"There's been a bit of a wave of interest, about 20 applications have been taken and only a handful of people have actually come into the office to grab one," Belfield City Auditor Sovi Herring said. "But I put quite a few packets at the bank and the post office – and they're being routinely taken – so I'm hoping that means people are go-

ing out and getting their signatures."

According to a recent public notice from March 6, "A candidate for a City office must complete and turn in a SFN 2704 Petition/Certificate of Nomination and a completed SFN 10172 Statement of Interests to their City Auditor by the above deadline date and time. All forms may be obtained at the City Auditor office in City Hall located at 208 Main Street North, Belfield, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m."

The public notice added, "Candidates for city offices are required to collect signatures of 10 percent of the electors who voted for that office in the last city election; however, no more than 300 signatures are required. Details of the number of signatures needed for the available positions listed above can be obtained from the City Auditor's office. All forms are available from either the City Auditor or can be obtained online at the State of North Dakota website at: <http://www.nd.gov/eforms/>."

The council meets on the second Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m.

For more information about the Belfield City Council, please keep reading the Billings County Pioneer and/or visit the website at www.cityofbelfield.com/2144/Government.