



Pen City Current

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Franchise fee may be part of city budget lifeline

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – A franchise tax on gas and electric consumption in the city appears to be the favored option of Fort Madison city officials to bring the city out of its financial pinch.

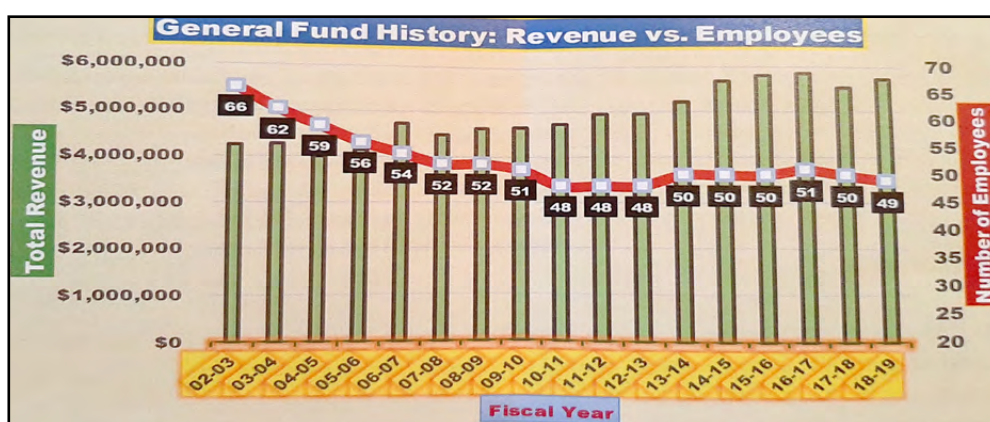
City Manager David Varley presented about five options Tuesday night to current councilman and council members-elect following the council's regular meeting. The options looked at the next five budget years.



VARLEY

In two of those options, Varley included a franchise tax was at 2% with an increase to 3% in the third year in one of the options.

Iowa code caps municipal franchise taxes at 5%. According to Alliant Energy, a franchise fee typically takes up to six months



to be implemented after the franchise fee has been adopted by the city council by ordinance. Varley said it will take at least six months to educate the public on the issue.

He said the city could limp through another year under current budget conditions, but it would be difficult.

A third option presented by City Manager David Varley Tuesday night shows a positive cash flow through 2025 and additional funds for capital improvement projects. The plan also includes a 2% franchise fee on gas and electric in year one, which increases to 3% in the following four years. Graphic courtesy of Fort Madison

City Hall Mayor Brad Randolph asked if it would be an easier sell to the public if there was a sunset clause on any ordinance implementing the franchise tax.

“What if you got up to your numbers up at 2024 or 2025 and sunset the franchise fee? But then how do you sustain it,” he said.

“You’re hoping that something happens for a better budget, better balance, other revenue sources. If it’s a tough pill to swallow, you’d only have to swallow it for a certain period of time.”

Varley said he didn’t think it would be possible in just five years for revenues to increase enough to offset

funds the franchise tax would bring in.

“I don’t think, through property tax or anything other source, or property or sales tax combined, I don’t think by year five we could make up enough to equal a 3% franchise on both electric and natural gas. I just don’t see it,” Varley said.

Randolph said a sunset would at least force another conversation on the issue.

The franchise tax cannot, by Iowa code, be collected concurrently with a Local Option Sales Tax, which is in place in Fort Madison. A 2% tax on gas and utilities would generate roughly

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County adds weight limits to more bridges

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

MONTROSE – A recent inspection of county bridges has resulted in additional weight restrictions being placed on 15 county bridges.

At Tuesday’s regular Lee County Board of Supervisor’s meeting, supervisors approved a resolution restricting the weights on the bridges bringing the total to 28 bridges in the county that have restrictions.

According to Lee County Engineer Ben Hull two of the bridges are currently closed due to severe decay. The first bridge is on Henry-Lee Street west of 130th Avenue in extreme northwest Lee County.



FOLLUO

The other is just south of Primrose Road and 120th Avenue in western Lee County.

The board voted earlier this year to have Calhoun-Burns and Associates out of West Des Moines inspect the county’s bridges and the firm returned a report in September with the recommendations.

“Consultants took a look at a lot of our bridges and most of them are in the 40- to 50-year-old range,” Hull said.

“For the most part those are bridges that are in OK shape and are doing what they were intended to do, but not up to modern standards, evidently.”

Of the fifteen bridges that will be getting new weight restrictions, 10 are in the north half of the county. The county will pay about \$800 per bridge for new signage, according to Supervisor Gary Folluo.

Hull said the most of the bridges have a straight truck limit of 28 tons with some going as low as 18 tons. Many of the bridges are also limited to one lane traffic.

Hull said he believes, in talking about the five-year program, there will be some increase in bridge replacement funding that will come as a result of the recent restrictions.

“The square feet of deficient bridges in your county is one factor that determines what share we get of all the state money. It should go up some,” Hull said.

Folluo asked if there was any federal money available and Hull said the county did just get a grant that’s going

See COUNTY, page 5

OFP looking for players for “Drinking Habits”

BY DOLORES SCHULTE
Old Fort Players

FORT MADISON – Old Fort Players, Fort Madison’s community theater is looking for actors to fill the cast of their February 2020 production of “Drinking Habits” written by Tom Smith. Drop by the theater on December 1st or 2nd starting at 6 pm to get in on the act! There’s nothing to memorize for the audition and no previous experience is required.

Director Ty Clute is looking for five women and

three men. Sister Philamena, Sister Augusta & Mother Superior (age 20-50), Paul, George, Sally & Sister Mary Catherine (mid-20’s), and Father Chenille (age 40-50).

Accusations, mistaken identities, and romances run wild in this traditional, laugh-out-loud farce. Two nuns at the Sisters of Perpetual Sewing have been secretly making wine to keep the convent’s doors open, but reporters Paul and Sally, are hot on their

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Obituaries

OBITUARIES

NICHOLAS CHARLES JACKSON

Nicholas Charles Jackson, 58 of Davenport, IA, formerly of Keokuk, IA died Thursday, October 24, 2019 at his home.

He was born October 22, 1961 in Keokuk, IA, the son of Corydon and Donna Teller Jackson.

Nicholas graduated from Keokuk High School with the Class of 1980.

He had been employed as a supervisor at Fruehauf in Ft. Madison, IA and later as a brick mason in Davenport, IA.

Nicholas was an outdoorsman at heart and enjoyed fishing and riding motorcycles. He loved hanging out with his friends and always enjoyed a good, cold beer.

He is survived by his mother, Donna Riddle of Montrose, IA, one sister, Patty Jackson of Ft. Madison, IA, one brother, Mike Jackson of Montrose, IA and one niece, Carlie Jackson.

He was preceded in death by his father, his stepfather, Victor Riddle, his grandparents, one nephew, Tony Jackson and one niece, Nicole Jackson.

A private family graveside service will be held.

The Vigen Memorial Home in Keokuk, IA is assisting the family with arrangements.

Online condolences may be left for the family at www.vigenmemorialhome.com.

Pen City Current obituary policy

The Current runs obituaries one time at no charge to funeral homes and they run the day they are submitted in most cases. They are also run as submitted by the funeral homes.

#HyperLocalSuperFresh

OBITUARIES

SANDRA KAY DECK

Sandra Kay "Sandy" Deck, 74 of Donnellson, IA, formerly of Keokuk, IA died Wednesday, November 20, 2019 at the Ft. Madison Community Hospital in Ft. Madison, IA.

She was born May 19, 1945 in Carthage, IL the daughter of Vincent Sr. and Eva Mae LeClaire Brown.



Sandy graduated from Hamilton High School with the Class of 1963.

On August 16, 1963 she was united in marriage to Stanley Deck in Elvaston, IL. He preceded her in death.

Sandy had been employed by Cramer Real Estate in her younger years and later by the Keokuk High School in the lunchroom, from 1979-1989.

She was a member of the Board of Realty and also of New Testament Christian Church.

Sandy enjoyed to play Bingo and read religious books and the Bible. She liked to watch political shows on television and Price is Right. Sandy was an Elvis Presley fan.

Sandy is survived by one son, Douglas R. Deck of Keokuk, one daughter, Darcy Coffman of Nauvoo, IL three grandchildren, Eric Boyer, Tyler Boyer and Kelsey Coffman, and several great-grandchildren, two brothers, Vince Brown, Jr. (Starr) of Des Moines, IA and Tom Brown of Keokuk and nieces and nephews.

Besides her husband, she was also preceded in death by one sister, Beverly Spencer.

A graveside service will be held at 1 p.m., Friday, at the Oakland Cemetery in Keokuk with Father Marty Goetz officiating.

Memorials may be made to the St. Jude Children's Hospital.

Online condolences may be left for the family at www.vigenmemorialhome.com.



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For the Record/Lottery Numbers

For the Record

Fort Madison Police Report

11/20/19 – 1:46 a.m.
 – Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a burglary in the 1200 block of 35th Street.
 11/20/19 – 7:53 a.m.
 – Fort Madison Police responded to a report of vandalism in the 2000 block of Avenue J.
 11/20/19 – 9:03 a.m.
 – Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a larceny/theft in the 700 block of Avenue G.
 11/20/19 – 10:22 a.m.
 – Fort Madison Police responded to a report of a larceny/theft in the 1900 block of Avenue H.
 11/20/19 – 8:32 p.m.
 – Fort Madison Police cited Anthony Paul Thomas Ourth, 28, of Fort Madison in the 3200 block of Avenue J, on a charge of driving under suspension. He was released upon citation.
 11/20/19 – 8:40 p.m.
 – Fort Madison Police arrested Kimmi Jo Nelson, 21, of Fort Madison, in the 3200 block of Avenue J, on warrants for failure to appear. She was taken to the Lee

County Jail and held.
 11/20/19 – 8:51 p.m.
 – Fort Madison Police arrested Pele Oscar Wise, 41, of Fort Madison in the 3200 block of Avenue J, on a charge of possession of a controlled substance. He was released on a promise to appear.
 11/21/19 – 12:02 a.m.
 – Fort Madison Police arrested Antoine Pierce, 34, of Fort Madison in the 2200 block of Avenue L, on a charge of possession of a controlled substance. He was released on a promise to appear.
 11/21/19 – 2:21 a.m.
 – Fort Madison Police arrested Mathew Rohan Boon, 34, of Fort Madison on Airport Road, on a warrant for failure to appear. He was taken to the Lee County Jail and held.

Lee County Sheriff's Report

11/20/19 – 9:44 a.m. – Lee County Sheriff's deputies responded to a two-vehicle accident at the intersection of 265th Avenue and Hwy. 16. According to the report, a vehicle driven by Jason Michael Steffensmeier, 32, of Fort

Madison, was stopped northbound on 265th Avenue and pulled onto Hwy. 16 striking the rear-end of a vehicle driven by William Burl Tucker, 60, of New London. No injuries were reported at the scene. Steffensmeier was cited for failure to yield upon entering a through highway.
 11/20/19 – 11:54 a.m.
 – Lee County Sheriff's deputies arrested Jaclyn Nicole Parmeter, 33, of Keokuk, in the 2300 block of 340th Street in Keokuk, on a warrant for probation violation. She was taken to the Lee County Jail and held.
 11/20/19 – 2:18 p.m. – Lee County Sheriff's deputies arrested Stephanie Ileene Thacher, 28, of Keokuk on 320th Street on a warrant for failure to appear. She was released on bond.
 11/20/19 – 10:53 p.m. – Lee County Sheriff's deputies arrested Jacob Dustan Mills, 33, of Keokuk, no location given, on charges of public intoxication and disorderly conduct.
Those listed above are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.



IOWA LOTTERY WINNING NUMBERS

Lotto Drawings

Game	Draw Days	Sales Cutoff Time	Approx. Drawing Time
Lucky for Life®	Mon & Thu	8:30 pm	9:38 pm
Mega Millions®	Tues & Fri	8:59 pm	10:00 pm
Powerball®	Wed & Sat	8:59 pm	9:59 pm
Lotto America SM	Wed & Sat	8:59 pm	10:00 pm
Pick 3 - Midday	Daily	Noon	12:20 pm
Pick 3 - Evening	Daily	9:40 pm	10:00 pm
Pick 4 - Midday	Daily	Noon	12:20 pm
Pick 4 - Evening	Daily	9:40 pm	10:00 pm



11/20
 7 15 39 40 57
 Powerball: 12
 Power Play: 2



11/20
 1 4 29 46 47
 Star Ball: 10
 All Star Bonus: 2



11/20 MID-DAY
 9 2 4
11/20 EVENING
 5 2 6



11/20 MID-DAY
 1 9 2 7
11/20 EVENING
 9 4 1 3

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Pen City Current encourages you to play responsibly.

From the Front/Weather

Varley says without added revenues, city facing wide ranging cuts

FUNDS - Continued from Page 1

\$560,000 per year. However the utilities would not be able to collect the 1% LOST or about \$81,000 per year, for a net gain from the franchise tax of approximately \$479,000 per year. A 3% tax would net the city \$759,000 per year.

One advantage to the franchise tax is that every penny would stay in Fort Madison, paid quarterly. The city only gets about 30% of the sales tax collected in the county. Sales tax is paid to municipalities based on the amount collected in the entire county, split up by a complicated formula of population and valuations.

The average residential monthly cost increase for electric would be about \$1.25 according to city projections. No natural gas projections were provided.

Varley said about 64% of Iowa cities currently have combined electric and gas franchise taxes in place, and another 19% have one or the other. The average franchise tax rate for Iowa cities comparable to Fort Madison in population was 3.6%.

Without a substantial increase in revenues, Varley said the city is looking at some drastic cuts.

The first two options, Varley dubbed, "The Null Alternative" and "The Drastic Option" were presented to show what the city is looking at if they either do nothing or make drastic cuts to services, to offset losses in revenue.

The most significant losses are sales tax revenue and revenues from the riverboat casino that were phased out several years ago.

The county's valuation has gone up in the past 12 months and could result in additional property taxes for the city, but the state imposed a soft cap effective this budgeting cycle that caps revenue growth from property tax at 2%. However, local governments can override the cap with an extra public hearing to explain the reasons for the override, and then a 2/3 vote of the council, which would be five of seven council votes.

Varley said The Drastic Option was only put together to

show the level of cuts needed to balance the budget going forward.

He said that option puts the general fund in a very good financial position during the five years with funds left for capital improvements, but comes at the price of closing the library and the Old Fort and eliminates the Parks Department. It would also require closing the city pool.

The Null option puts the city in the red in year 2 and doesn't allow enough reserves to pay one month's bills.

Of the three other options, he said Option 1 could be considered, but it's not really viable because it requires reductions in public safety including both fire and police, library, parks, and the closing of the city pool.

The second option, which is the first to include a 2% franchise tax, would keep the city at current funding levels, but won't provide any additional funds for improvement projects in the city.

The third option, including the 2% franchise tax in year one, which goes to 3% in year two, Varley said puts the city in a "fairly healthy financial position." He said this option allows a build up of funds for emergencies and provides a modest amount of funding that could be used for improvement projects.

Varley also said if no increased revenues were considered, to balance the budget in year 1, the city would have to cut the Police Department budget by 15% and cut the Fire Department budget by 19%.

In lieu of those cuts, because many council members and recently elected council members have indicated they wouldn't support cuts to public safety, the city would have to cut the library and parks budget by 75%, or eliminate the Planning Department, the swimming pool and the cemetery operations combined.

That option, according to projections, would generate an additional \$1 million over five years for capital projects including streets, and put the city in a positive cash position through 2025.

Varley said there's been some sentiment that the city hasn't been operating within their means, and he said people only

need to look at the fact that the city has reduced staff by 17 in the past 16 years while providing the same level of service.

He said the biggest hope for increased revenue outside of the franchise tax would be online sales. He said the state has a new sheet on their revenue reports that show a "remote sales" line.

"Even that, it's not a drop in the bucket, but it's a couple drops in the bucket," Varley said.

"It's definitely a help, and assuming that's what were getting, but your talking, and this is a wild guess, maybe \$60,000 a year and it doesn't get you there."

Mohrfeld said it's critical to sit down with the industry and large consumers of utilities going forward. He also said the unique aspect is that anyone who turns on the lights or burns gas, pays the tax.

"If we feel new revenue is necessary, the one thing that is interesting about franchise fee is that it taxes the 40% of the properties that don't get taxed in town that we provide services to."

Council member-elect Rebecca Bowker said the tax disproportionately effects low income people who may have a \$1,200 monthly budget and would have to absorb an increase in their heat and gas bill.

Council member-elect Tyler Miller asked about revenue generated from tourism. Varley said the amount is small and a majority of the hotel/motel is from corporate stays from local industries.

Miller said his point was that the city is wasting all it's hotel/motel tax on the riverfront for something that will never make a profit.

Councilman Chris Greenwald said if the Old Fort has ever had value it's right now because it's a big draw for guests coming into town off the cruise lines.


Councilman Bob Morawitz said if the Old Fort were to disappear, the boats would disappear.


Mohrfeld asked to start the budget process earlier this year and Varley said he could have a budget presentation ready by mid-January.





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5-DAY WEATHER FORECAST

FRI 22 Nov  Light Snow
High- 38.5° F | Low - 30.7° F

SAT 23 Nov  Overcast
High- 41.1° F | Low - 32.5° F

SUN 24 Nov  Overcast
High- 45.3° F | Low - 38.6° F

MON 25 Nov  Overcast
High- 52.0° F | Low - 40.0° F

TUE 26 Nov  Snow
High- 40.5° F | Low - 32.4° F

[OpenWeatherMap](#)

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Local News/From the Front

Old Fort Players to celebrate 40th anniversary in 2020

PLAYERS - Continued from Page 1

trail. They go undercover as a nun and priest, but their presence, combined with the addition of a new nun, spurs paranoia throughout the convent that spies have been sent from Rome to shut them down. Wine and secrets are inevitably spilled as everyone tries to preserve the convent and reconnect with lost loves.

Not quite the type who likes being in the spotlight? You can still be a part of the fun. Old Fort Players is always looking for hard-working, organized people to be stage managers, set crews, sound and light technicians as well as costume/prop stylists and makeup artists. There's even a spot for those who enjoy working with the public by selling concessions during performances. Stop by on audition nights to volunteer or send us a message on Facebook.

"Drinking Habits" will be presented by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc. (www.playscripts.com). Performances run February 14-16 & 21-23, 2020. Evening shows begin at 7:30 and the curtain rises on Sundays at 2:00 pm. (Adult \$15; Senior, Military, Vet \$12; Student \$10.) Tickets will be available online at www.oldfortplayers.com just by clicking the 'Book Now' button.

Next season Old Fort Players will celebrate their 40th anniversary. The theater is located in downtown Fort Madison at 725 Avenue G. Send a Facebook message, send an email to oldfortplayersfm@gmail.com or call 319-372-9559 for more information. Like them on Facebook (Fb@oldfortplayers) or visit the website to keep up with everything that's going on at the theater.

DuPont raises \$31K for United Way

FORT MADISON - Every year DuPont kicks off their United Way Campaign with a Silent Auction and Campaign meetings in addition to employee and company pledges. This was a great year with 88% employee participation and raising a total of \$31,371.19 for the 2020 United Way of the Great River Region Campaign.

DuPont's campaign coordinator gives credit to the amazing employees that work at DuPont giving back to their community in the success of their campaign.



Pictured above: Tammy Hudson, RSVP of Lee County Program Director; Sue Prochazka, United Way Volunteer Coordinator; Julie Schilling, United Way Board Member; Brett Workman, DuPont Specialty Engineer; Karen Siefken, United Way Executive Director; Tammy Workman, DuPont Administrative Assistant & Campaign Coordinator; Jason Vallone, DuPont Quality Engineer; Larry Merschman, DuPont Maintenance Manager; Emily Biddenstadt, United Way Board Member; and Chase Hennigar, DuPont Shift Manager.

County could get more aid for aging bridges

COUNTY - Continued from Page 1

to help replace one of the bridges on the list.

He said the SWAP program which used to be federal money and is now funneled to states, gives the county about \$240,000 annually out of that program. He said Farm-to-Market routes are also eligible for funding.

Supervisor Matt Pflug said it's hard for counties to find money for bridge repair.

"That's what you have to look at. Where do you get all this money, especially if it's becoming a situation where it's got to be dealt with right away. I mean - you don't

have any money."

Hull said recent state mandated increases in weight limits for logging and propane industries isn't doing state counties any favors.

Hull said the county is adjusting to some new laws that are allowing heavier weights including 96,000 lb semis.

Gov. Kim Reynolds recently relaxed weight limits for haulers of propane to get more of the fuel into the state for farmers due to late harvests. The governor also signed legislation this year that allowed loggers to run trucks on more of the state's rural highways.

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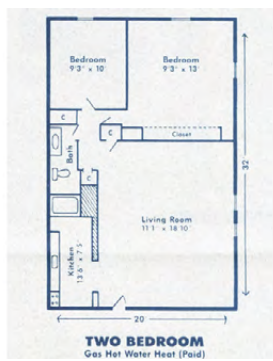
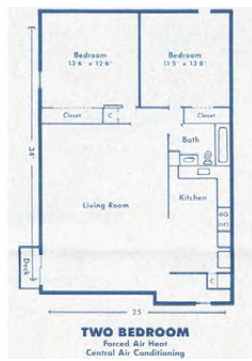
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