

PEN CITY CURRENT

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Tuesday, March 7, 2023 | 6 pages | Volume 7 • Issue 51



www.pencitycurrent.com

District levy dips slightly

FMCS D: General fund levy goes up 15 cents; increased valuation causes overall drop

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

FORT MADISON – Preliminary tax levy rates for the Fort Madison School District are slightly down from a year ago, but the general fund levy rate increased about 15 cents.

District Finance Director Sandy Elmore told the Fort Madison School Board Monday night at a workshop, the increase is predominantly due to the increase of 55 students projected for the 2023-24 school year.

“It’s always good when we have more students to educate,” she said.

Preliminary numbers indicate the overall tax levy for the Fort Madison School District will be \$11.504/\$1,000 of assessed valuation, down from \$11.61 in 2022-23. However, the Aid and General Levy ask will go from \$9.31/\$1,000 to \$9.46 in the next school year.

The rest of the rate consists of Voted Physical Plant and Equipment levy of \$1.34/\$1,000 and a regular PPEL levy of

See **LEVY**, page 4

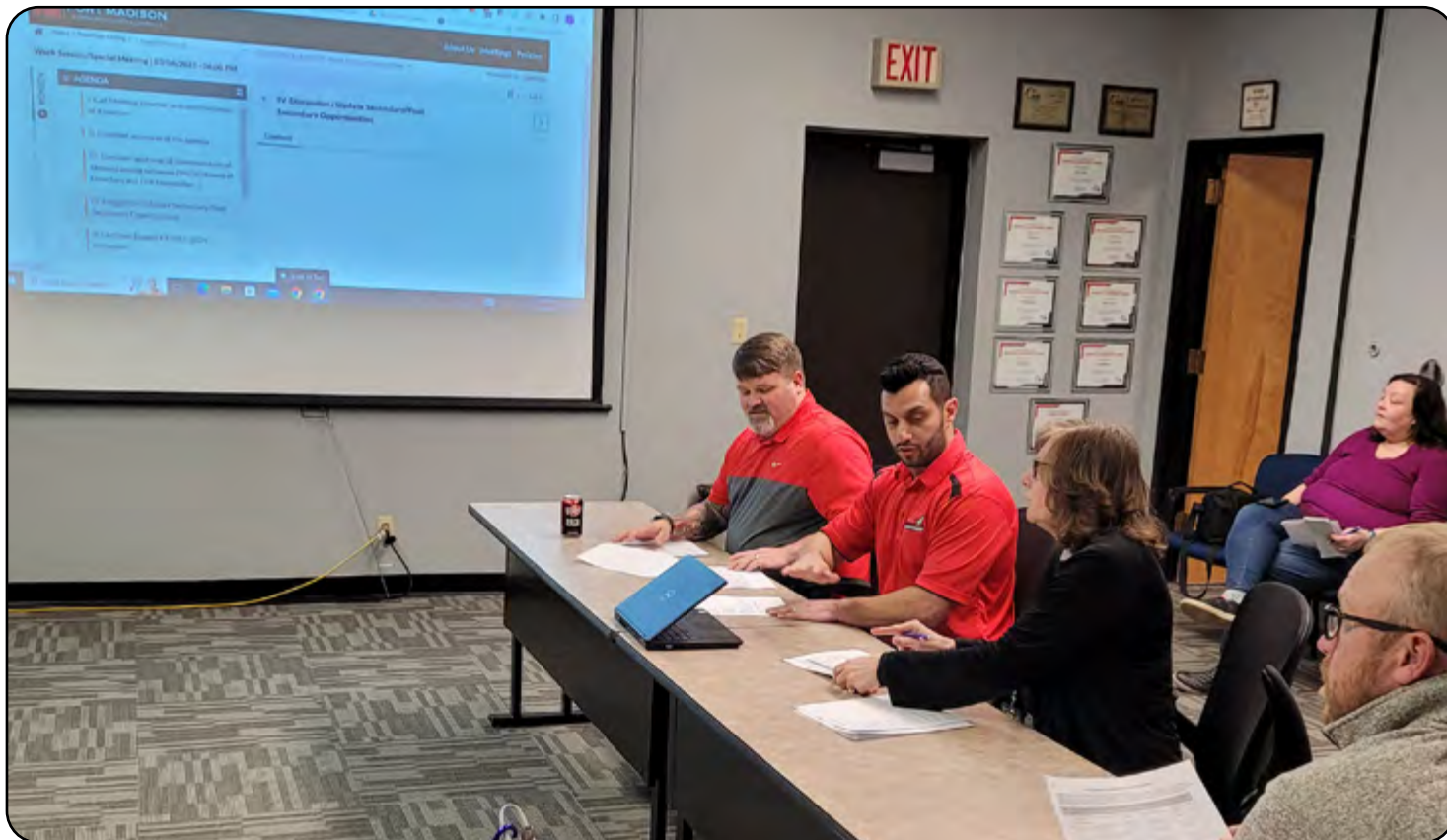


Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison High School co-principals Aidan McKay and Patrick Lamb, left, talk with Fort Madison School Board members about concurrent college and high school curriculum.

VOTE TODAY

Voters decide EMS measure for county

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY - A critical levy vote will take place on Tuesday in a special election in the county.

Voters will go to the polls to decide whether the county will be able to assess a levy to help offset the costs of the county-owned ambulance service.

If approved, the measure will allow the county to collect up to .75/\$1,000 of assessed valuation to help offset what’s currently about a \$2 million annual deficit in spending. The law allowing the measure was created by the state last year, and allows county supervisors to designate ambulance services as essential services and levy for budget support.

The law also requires a panel to convene to determine the exact amount of funding needed under the levy allowance.

According to Lee County EMS Director Mark Long, the proposed budget for the ambulance service for the budget year starting July 1, 2023, will be close to \$4.5 million, with revenues projected at about \$2.4 million.

“That leaves \$2 million we’ve gotta find somewhere. This will provide anywhere from \$1 million to \$1.2 million depending on (state) rollback changes,” Long said.

He said the EMS service is struggling like everyone with increased costs, but they are also suffering from low reimbursement rates in a high Medicaid/Medicare service area.

He said the county gets 18% to 22% of what’s billed through Medicaid for services. An advanced support ambulance call currently gets billed at \$735, but Medicaid only pays \$127.

Lee County EMS bills mileage at \$21/mile and Medicaid pays \$2.61 per mile.

“Costs are high and that’s a part of it, but it’s also we’re not getting paid for the services we’re providing,” Long said.

See **EMS**, page 4

COUNTY NEWS

County shifts to different LCHD construction plan

BY CHUCK VANDENBERG
PCC EDITOR

LEE COUNTY – County supervisors have pivoted slightly in the construction of the new Lee County Health Department and EMS bay.

The county has moved from a previously engineered steel-frame construction to a wood-frame construction as a

means to reduce the cost of the project by about 20%.

Carl A. Nelson is the Construction Manager on the project and originally projected a \$7.7 million price tag on the steel-frame building. Project managers looked for savings in the project in the area of windows, asphalt rather than concrete, and lower ceilings which brought costs down to \$6.9 million.

However, funding for the project has always been a factor in the process. In 2022, Supervisors passed a resolution to spend up to \$5.4 million on the building using America Rescue Plan Act funds, of which about \$3.8 million remain in an interest-bearing account.

Another \$974,000 has been secured

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WEATHER

TUE 07 Mar Partly sunny and gusty, 48° F/ 34° F ☀️

WED 08 Mar Cloudy with chance of snow, 44° F/ 34° F ❄️

THU 09 Mar Cloudy with chance of rain, 43° F/ 34° F ☁️

IOWA LOTTERY

LUCKY FOR LIFE 03/05.....1710 2543, Lucky Ball: 11

PICK 3 03/05 MIDDAY636

PICK 3 03/05 EVENING.....165

PICK 4 03/05 MIDDAY.....0408

PICK 4 03/05 EVENING.....7980

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For the Record/Local News

For the Record

Fort Madison Police Report

03/02/23 - 11:04 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 800 block of Avenue E.

03/02/23 - 11:34 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 800 block of Avenue E.

03/02/23 - 3:31 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 700 block of Avenue G.

03/02/23 - 10:01 p.m. - Fort Madison police cited Heather Ann Pierre, 36, of Fort Madison, in the 1100 block of 28th Street, on a charge of driving while barred.

03/02/23 - 10:34 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of a hit & run in the 2800 block of Avenue J.

03/03/23 - 12:00 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Lori Marie Vincent, 57, of Fort Madison, 2 warrants for 5th degree theft and 5 warrants for unauthorized use of a credit card, and charges of possession of a controlled substance-1,2,3rd, possession of a controlled substance-marijuana 1st, and possession of drug paraphernalia. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

03/03/23 - 7:47 a.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of a property damage accident in the 1300 block of Avenue E.

03/03/23 - 4:42 p.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Dakota John McKeown, 29, of Fort Madison, in the 2700 block of Avenue J, on warrants for disorderly conduct and driving under the influence. He was taken to

Lee County Jail.

03/04/23 - 12:00 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Terri Bishop Hampton, 54, of Fort Madison, in the 2000 block of Avenue D, on a charge of domestic assault - bodily injury - 1st. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

03/04/23 - 12:00 a.m. - Fort Madison police arrested Larry Paul Whittemore, 53, of Fort Madison, in the 2000 block of Avenue D, on a charge of domestic abuse assault - 3rd sub. He was taken to Lee County Jail.

03/04/23 - 3:38 p.m. - Fort Madison police cited Lyndal Mark Colyer, 61, of Fort Madison, in the 2100 block of Avenue F, on a charge of city: dog at large.

03/04/23 - 3:39 p.m. - Fort Madison police cited Randy Jo Morgan, 44, of Fort Madison, in the 1500 block of Avenue E, on charges of driving under suspension and failure to obey traffic control device.

03/04/23 - 5:39 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of vandalism in the 1500 block of Avenue E.

03/05/23 - 12:16 a.m. - Fort

Madison police responded to a report of a property damage accident in the 900 block of Avenue G.

03/05/23 - 5:39 p.m. - Fort Madison police responded to a report of larceny/theft in the 1500 block of Avenue H.

Lee County Sheriff Report

03/01/23 - 1:15 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies responded to a report of a single-vehicle accident at the intersection of U.S. 61 N. and 280th Street. According to the report, a vehicle driven by Audrey Caroline Lambert, 56, of Keokuk, was traveling northbound near the intersection of Hwy. 61 and 280th Street when the driver suffered a medical emergency and the vehicle veered off the road, entered the median and struck a sign, and re-entered the northbound lanes, continuing on until stopped by deputies. The driver was transported to Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center by law enforcement. The vehicle suffered approximately \$3,500 in damages. No citations were reported.

03/03/23 - 2:54 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Desiree Lynn Bishop, 30, of Chillicothe, at the North Lee County Courthouse, on 3 warrants for violation of probation. She was taken to Lee County Jail.

03/03/23 - 2:58 p.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Johnnette Sue Williams, 45, of Sigourney, at the North Lee County Courthouse, on a warrant for failure to appear/contempt of court. She was taken to Lee County Jail and later released on bond.

03/04/23 - Lee County sheriff deputies had no activity to report.

03/05/23 - 12:02 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Clayton William Hocker, 27, of Charleston, at the intersection of 194th Avenue and Hwy. 27, Argyle, on charges of 1st offense OWI and transporting an open container. He was taken to Lee County Jail and later released on a promise to appear.

03/05/23 - 12:11 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Terry Wray Woodley, 60, of Montrose, on Hwy. 61, Montrose, on charges of 1st offense OWI and reckless driving. He was taken to Lee County Jail and later released on a promise to appear.

03/05/23 - 3:47 a.m. - Lee County sheriff deputies arrested Diego Henry Lozano, 21, of Fort Madison, at the intersection of 235th Avenue and 256th Street, Donnellson, on a charge of 2nd offense OWI. He was taken to Lee County Jail and later released on a promise to appear.

Those listed above are charged with a suspicion of a crime and are presumed innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.

PROMise sale on again

FORT MADISON - Volunteers with the SDA Community Service Center are excited to announce that Our PROMise, a prom assistance program for teens in need, will run for its third year in a row.

This program has been a blessing to local teens who prepare to go to prom. Our PROMise collects donations of gently used prom dresses and accessories for teens to come and "shop" for their prom attire for free.

The only stipulation is that they return the dress to us to be used again for future proms.

The group is collecting donations again this year at the SDA Community Service Center, located on 17th Street between Avenues H and I. They are open for drop-offs on Mondays from 10 am to 1 pm and on Tuesdays from 9 am to 4 pm.

Drop-offs at other times can be arranged by calling Janie Warner at 319-520-8592. All gently used prom dresses, shoes and accessories will be accepted. There is a need for dresses that are 2X and up.

Prom goers can come "shop" at 927 Avenue G (next to Aldi) on the following dates:

April 2nd and 9th from 1-6 pm, and April 3rd and 5th from 4 to 6 p.m.



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P.O. Box 366 | Fort Madison, IA

Obituaries

OBITUARIES

JUDY L. BEEBE



BEEBE

Judy L. Beebe, 53, of Fort Madison, IA, passed away at 1:15 a.m. on Monday, March 6, 2023 at Southeast Iowa Regional Hospice House in West Burlington, IA. She was born on July 31, 1969 in Fort Madison, IA, to Phillip A. & Mary E. Kline Fedler. She married Kenneth G. Beebe on October 16, 1993 in Fort Madison, IA. She worked at Jim Baier as a Customer Service Representative for 32 years. She enjoyed watching & coaching her daughters softball and volleyball games, cooking on her Blackstone Grill, relaxing in her garage watching movies and spending time with her dog, Coors. She is going to join her best friends in Heaven, Kari & Kim.

Judy is survived by: her husband: Ken Beebe of Fort Madison, IA; 2-daughters: Kendall & Alexis Beebe of Fort Madison, IA; her parents: Phil & Mary Fedler of Fort Madison, IA; 1-sister: Phyllis (Bob) Porter of Wever, IA; 1-sister in law: Jennifer (Danny) Jones of Lebanon, MO and several nieces & nephews. She was preceded in death by her grandparents.

Cremation has been entrusted to the care of King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory. A visitation will be held from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, March 9, 2023 at King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory. A memorial has been established for her daughters' education. Online condolences to Judy's family may be left at the King-Lynk Funeral Home & Crematory website: www.kinglynk.com.

Pen City Current obituary policy

Pen City 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. Reposting of obituaries due to changes can only be requested by the submitting funeral home and will be assessed a \$15 reposting fee.

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Respiratory Season is Here!

Complete with Influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and COVID-19!

The colder temperatures keep us all cozy and warm inside, but this closeness and the decreased indoor air flow only increase the spread of uninvited viruses.



Keep your family safe during Respiratory Season by following these tips:

- Stay home if you are feeling sick.
- Get a vaccination/booster for any viruses circulating. In our region this includes flu and COVID-19.
- Wash hands often, especially after sneezing, coughing, using a bathroom, or blowing your nose. It is always important to wash your hands before touching your face.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth whenever possible.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes or cough into your sleeve.
- Disinfect any surfaces you frequently use, such as doorknobs, faucet handles, children's toys and remote controls.

If you do catch one of these viruses, consult your medical provider for any symptoms that are severe or concerning.



OBITUARIES

ROSE M. PITFORD



PITFORD

Rose Mary Pitford, 80, of Keokuk, passed away on Thursday, March 2, 2023, at Southeast Iowa Regional Medical Center in Fort Madison.

Rose was born on June 30, 1942, the daughter of Frank and Rose Lily (Neuendorf) Neuman. On June 6, 1959, she was united in marriage to Robert Pitford, Sr., in Harrison, Arkansas. He preceded her in death on June 24, 2019.

Rose was a homemaker and drove a truck and worked at BTR in her younger years. She enjoyed playing games on the computer, traveling, cooking and painting. Rose will always be remembered as a spitfire with a heart of gold. She always lived life her way.

Rose is survived by her daughter Tammy Pitford of Keokuk; her son Robert "Bob-by" Pitford, Jr., of Keokuk; four grandchildren: Kristin Schlatter, Michael Hardman, Taylor Pitford and Makenna Gilpin; and seven great-grandchildren: Konnor and Blake Schlatter, Devon, Elizabeth and Donavon Hardman, and Silus and Milo Huston.

Rose is preceded in death by her parents.

No services will be held at this time.

Memorials may be directed to the American Cancer Society or the American Lung Association.

Tributes and condolences may be left at www.dejongsfuneralhome.com.

DeJong-Greaves-Printy Funeral Home of Keokuk is in charge of arrangements.

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From the Front

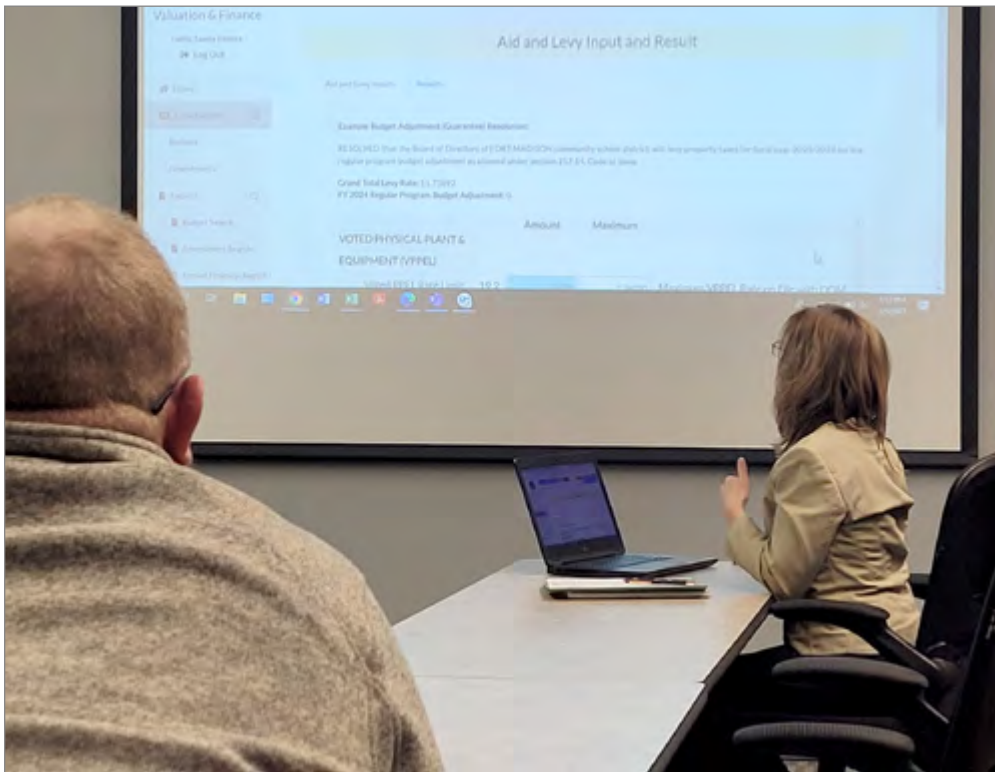


Photo by Chuck Vandenberg/PCC

Fort Madison Business Manager Sandy Elmore goes over some preliminary 2024 budget numbers with the Fort Madison School Board Monday night in Fort Madison.

District's valuation up more than \$9 million

LEVY - Continued from Page 1

.33/\$1,000. The district also gets revenue from an income tax surtax.

The district's valuation increased more than \$9 million at \$807,716,818 with properties in Henry, Des Moines, and Lee counties.

Board member Dianne Hope said the board always needs to be cognizant of any increases to financial burden on district taxpayers.

"I'm concerned as always when you see an increase to property tax rates," Hope said.

Elmore said the district is trying to keep the rate as stable as possible. The 2023 fiscal year rate of \$11.61 was down from the previous year's rate of \$12.19.

"We try to keep it as stable as possible. We really don't have a lot of wiggle room. It is mostly dictated by formula. You could adjust the instructional support income surtax rate, maybe, as a possibility," Elmore said.

Hope said she knows there's little room to maneuver in the levy formula, but asked the board to keep in mind every effort to try to keep property taxes down for district taxpayers.

"I know there's very little wiggle room."

The district has an additional 30 days to get the budget finalized due to an extension from the state to correct an error in assessment calculations for multi-residential properties in the state.

In other action, the board heard updates from Fort Madison High School co-principals Patrick Lamb and Aidan McKay about concurrent course work for students at the high school.

The district is looking at continuing to build its relationship with Southeastern Community College in an effort to help students get more college credit prior to graduation, which will help save parents money in tuition and better prepare students for post-secondary plans.

EMS levy will need 60% approval to pass

EMS - Continued from Page 1

"The biggest chunk of our patients are Medicaid. Medicare pays a little better but not much."

He said there are a lot of private pay patients that the county never sees a dollar from.

Long said there are no plans for expansion, and the funds won't be used in that respect, but this levy would help sustain current services. He said the county subsidized the ambulance operations at about \$900,000 in fiscal year 2021 before purchasing it at the start of fiscal year 2022.

We're back in the ballpark now where we were at at the end of that service. And now we have a service that the county has more control over.

Long said he was concerned that if the ballot measure were to fail, there would have to be some cuts.

"I don't see a model where we could provide the same level of service that we do now. We'd have to cut and I don't know if that means training, staff, equipment or a little bit of all three. There's going to have to be cuts somewhere. We're just not going to be able to maintain the level of service we have right now."

Long and Director of Operations Jason Dinwiddie said they have been out speaking publicly about the levy, and Long said he's seen mostly support for the measure.

Dinwiddie said one of the things that has surprised him the most is the number of people who don't understand it's a countywide ambulance service.

"There's a lack of understanding of how the ambulance service works. We hear them refer to it as the Fort Madison ambulance or the Keokuk ambulance or Donnellson ambulance," Dinwiddie said.

"They're all Lee County ambulances we're just referring to where they are stationed at. If there are three calls at the same time in Fort Madison, you're getting three Lee County offices. One will come from the Fort Madison station, one from Keokuk, and one from the Donnellson station. The three closest ambulances."

Long said historically, the ambulance service has done a nice job of staying under the radar.

"Right, wrong, or indifferent. Other than the Donnellson building, none of the other buildings are sitting out front with a sign," he said.

A company out of Michigan is looking at reopening the hospital in a yet-to-be determined capacity. Insight, out of Flint, Mich., has toured the abandoned facility in Keokuk, but has still yet to commit to plans or an opening date.

Long said even if the hospital is reopened it doesn't change the situation for the EMS service.

"Patients are probably going to go there, be stabilized, and then go to another hospital to be admitted. For an ambulance side of things, what it's actually doing is making one transport, two transports for us," he said.

"It's not going to decrease our need for resources, really, at all."

Dinwiddie said the closure of the Keokuk hospital didn't result in an uptick of calls.

"Our call volume didn't increase dramatically, with the lack of the transfers out of the facility, it equaled out. The problem we had was that the transport times from the time of the tone, until the time that ambulance was ready for the next call, went from 30 minutes to almost an hour and 30 minutes," he said.

"Now you have that drive time from the tone to get the patient and then 20 miles up the road and 20 miles back when you're back in the zone for the next call. That's where it's really stuck it to us. To be straight up and honest, there were a lot of times where we didn't have enough ambulances to answer calls."

Polls are open throughout the county until 8 p.m. Tuesday.

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COMPLIMENTARY REVIEW

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PUBLIC NOTICES

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Meeting Notice
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BOARD OF ADJUSTMENT
Wednesday,
March 8, 2023, 6:00pm
Council Chambers
City Hall
811 Avenue E,
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1. Roll Call
2. Approval of Minutes

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– November 9, 2022 Meeting
3. Case File #23-01: Special Use Permit to allow for Pharmacy Services with two Drive-Up

lanes at 3032 Avenue L for Heritage Park Pharmacy.
4. Adjournment

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From the Front

New wood-frame design will save taxpayers \$1.5M

COUNTY - Continued from Page 1

from the USDA's Rural Emergency Health Care grant program. The county is also working with Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission to apply for a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant.

Last month, supervisors requested that Carl A. Nelson put together a cost estimate for a wood-frame building and those figures were released last week at \$5.5 million.

Supervisor Chuck Holmes said he's not quite sure why there is reluc-

tance to move toward the wood-frame design.

"We've seen many homes here in town made out of wood that are well over 100 years old. They're still in good condition.

100 years sounds pretty good to me," he said.

Ron Fedler said the new design is a large cost savings to the county.

"This a big deal and I agree with Chuck, if it's built correctly out of wood, it will last a long time," Fedler said.

Supervisor Garry Seyb said the savings was a

big enough topic that he wanted the get the whole board's input before giving Carl A. Nelson final direction.

"I have to be honest, I was not expecting the difference to be that large," Seyb said.

"This gets us back on track to where we were at additionally with funding. There will be little cost incurred in transferring over the architectural drawings, but the cost savings at this point is where we're headed."

The building is planned to be approximately 14,000 square feet with

two EMS ambulance bays on property that was donated to the county by the Glen Meller family. County officials will add the Meller name to the facility.

After Nelson revamps the design process, those plans will come to the county for approval and bids will be let on the project.

In addition to the USDA grant and the Community Development Block Grant, the county will also be submitting the project for consideration in Congresswoman Mariannette Miller-Meeks Community

Project Funding appropriations for the upcoming fiscal year.

The county will be focusing on the USDA Community Facility account which, if approved, could add additional funding equal to about 55% of the cost of the building according 7 CFR3570 63.b of the federal code is also working with Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission to apply for a \$600,000 Community Development Block Grant.

Last month, supervisors requested that Carl A.

Nelson put together a cost estimate for a wood-frame building and those figures were released last week at \$5.5 million.

Supervisor Chuck Holmes said he's not quite sure why there is reluctance to move toward the wood-frame design.

"We've seen many homes here in town made out of wood that are well over 100 years old. They're still in good condition. 100 years sounds pretty good to me," he said.

Ron Fedler said the new design is a large cost savings to the county.

"This a big deal and I agree with Chuck, if it's built correctly out of wood, it will last a long time," Fedler said.

Supervisor Garry Seyb said the savings was a big enough topic that he wanted the get the whole board's input before giving Carl A. Nelson final direction.

"I have to be honest, I was not expecting the difference to be that large," Seyb said.

"This gets us back on track to where we were at additionally with funding. There will be little cost incurred in transferring over the architectural drawings, but the cost savings at this point is where we're headed."

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DIAGNOSED WITH NEUROPATHY?

GABAPENTIN OR LYRICA NOT WORKING? TOLD NOTHING COULD BE DONE?



- PAINFUL HANDS/FEET?
- NUMBNESS & TINGLING
- COLD OR BURNING FEET?
- LOSS OF SENSATION?
- BALANCE PROBLEMS?

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