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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2021

CSD schools go virtual due to COVID

BY **REGAN KOHLER**
For the Review

The Chequamegon School District's middle school, high school and charter school went all virtual Monday as coronavirus cases have surged in the district.

As of Monday 100 of the district's 713 students were out, 12 of whom tested positive for COVID and 88 that were quarantined because they had been in close contact with a patient. Prior to the outbreak, none of the schools mandated masks but all were trying to keep kids as separated as possible.

District Administrator Ray Schulte said that in an effort to curb the spread, "the middle and high schools will meet virtually starting on Monday, Sept. 13 through Sept. 24. Teachers will email class instructions to students and copy parents."

All middle- and high-school extracurricular activities also are canceled through Sept. 24, and district facilities will be closed for all other youth programs including the community fitness center.

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MAILING LABEL ONLY

Paper mill sold again, future bleak



BY **KAREN DUMS AND REGAN KOHLER**
For the Review

The Park Falls paper mill has been sold again, this time to a company that liquidates and auctions off industrial properties across the globe.

Maynards Industries, also known as the Maynards Group, bought the mill for \$2.2 million. Representatives of the company headquartered in Livonia, Mich., did not return calls seeking comment on their plans for the property.

The deal was sealed in Price County Circuit Court Aug. 31, the second time in three years the mill has been sold, following receivership proceedings, this time initiated by the most recent owner, Niagara World-wide.

Once a mainstay for employment in the area with about 300 employees as of 2017, the mill has been shuttered since March 2021 after briefly resuming operations in September 2020 following near-total closure in October 2019.

Park Falls Mayor Michael Bablick said the new owners are looking to partner with an entity that would operate the mill or purchase it outright. The

Bablick issued a question-and-answer statement about the mill's purchase and future on Sept. 3, saying it is unsure when the community will know if the paper mill will run again. At present, the mill is in a "warm idle" status, with custodians in place doing maintenance on pumps and motors as well as "turning over" the No. 1 and 2 paper machines. The treatment plant also continues to operate. Bablick said this includes activities such as "keeping the wastewater treatment plant 'alive' (circulating river water to keep the microbes in the plant active and ready for restart of operations)."

"There continues to be employees on-site to tend to these efforts and to protect the Flambeau River and environment," Bablick said in the statement. "These activities, to the best of our knowledge, will continue as long as a dia-

logue between the purchaser and interested operators continues."

The city hopes that operations could resume before October, when cooler weather often hits the area. If the machines are idle, heating the buildings during a cold Wisconsin winter would be cost-prohibitive. If the facility goes totally "cold," chances of it reopening could be extremely poor.

"Dialogue between the purchaser and operators is ongoing," Bablick said. "One of the operator groups is the Park Falls Mill Cooperative. The city is pushing the different groups for a final decision to be made as quickly as possible, regardless of outcome, mostly to allow employees to plan accordingly and have some certainty."

Bablick said the city passed a comprehensive salvage/machinery removal ordinance in 2019 to provide significant financial protection and legal oversight to the city in case of liquidation.

"We have established a productive dialogue with the

purchaser to protect historically significant items and records, obtain valuable vacant real estate for redevelopment efforts and to reclaim as much of the city's waterfront as possible.

Regarding the sale, Bablick said the former loan agreement the city entered into with the previous owner included "backup" guarantees going beyond the assets of the paper mill.

"Simply put, we are confident in the recovery of outstanding loan liabilities, minus the sale proceeds," he said. "Price County was paid all of the outstanding property taxes owed by the mill going back multiple years, as well as delinquent water utility charges to the city."

The city of Park Falls also reached an agreement with the new owners regarding the office building located at First Avenue North. That portion of the mill is listed on the National Register of Historical Places and the city would have access to historically significant items stored there.

Park Falls to look at options for City Hall

Use of library shot down by Committee on the Whole

BY **BECKIE GASKILL**
For the Review

In recent months, the Park Falls Committee on the Whole and Common Council have been looking at options for the home of City Hall going forward. According to City Administrator Brent Michalek, the current building is in need of major renovations and, going into winter, the city is looking at the expense of restarting an aging boiler that may or may not serve their needs for the upcoming

season.

At this week's Committee on the Whole regular meeting, the committee gave consideration to a proposal from MSA for a Space Needs Study for city hall and the police department. Once that study was completed, a decision would be made on the future of the City Hall.

The fire department and library will not be included in the study.

Mayor Michael Bablick said the reason for not including the fire department was that if the police department was to have its own space, rather than using some of the fire department's space, the general feeling was the

fire department space would be sufficient for them to perform their work.

One of the options, Bablick said, would be to renovate the current building. Another would be to look at razing the building and rebuilding in the same location. Other options may include one of two sites in a different location, but neither of those sites was divulged in the meeting.

"I think our main emphasis should be on renovating this building," said Alderman Dennis Wartgow. "My preferred option would be to build a new city hall, but I don't think you'll ever get that passed."

There was discussion about what may or may not pass in a referendum. Bablick said if the difference was \$500,000, it may pass, but if it were \$2 million, for example, he also felt a referendum for a new building would not pass.

Alderman Mike Mader mentioned the city's library as a location that may accommodate city hall. However, Bablick said, in talking with MSA previously, the feeling was, without taking over part of the library itself, the space there simply would not accommodate those needs. Mader did make a motion to look at the library as a potential site.

"People might ask that question," Alderman Jim Corbett said. "Why didn't you look at that location? We have to be transparent, right?"

Bablick said the committee would need to solicit a new quote that would likely be drastically different.

In the end, the committee felt the current MSA contract for the Space Needs Study, as well as preliminary design work, which came in at \$20,500, was the right decision. This would include renovating the current building, building new at the current site or looking at two different sites for the future home of city hall.

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