

Homeless shelter asks to revise permit

Removal sought for continuous supervision

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The organizers of Our Neighbors' Place soon ask the city to make a change in the homeless shelter's special-use permit held for an 8-plex apartment building on West Johnson Street it wants to buy.

Essentially, ONP asks that the provision for 24-hour on-site supervision of the residents living inside the building be removed from the shelter's special-use permit conditions.

ONP board member Carole Mottaz attended the Sept. 14 City Council meeting to give the city an update and some background on the request.

"We understand very, very clearly that we're existing by virtue of a special-use permit," began Mottaz.

She explained that when ONP organizers began to research how to establish a shelter in River Falls, they studied as a model the homeless shelter Grace Place in Somerset, the only such facility in all of Pierce or St. Croix County.

She said the physical building used to be a convent and has 22 rooms. An entire family lives in each one of the rooms, taking meals in a common area and sharing bathrooms and living areas.

"They felt like you needed 24-hour-a-day supervision," said Mottaz.

As the local shelter evolved in concept and strategy, organizers realized there probably wasn't a need for 24-hour supervision.

They found another model in the Northwoods Homeless Shelters organization serving Polk County and northwest Wisconsin. It offers guests private living quarters and does not have round-the-clock

supervision.

Mottaz said the shelter has very tight requirements for "getting in" and has operated without incident for many years.

"Potential guests are screened carefully and monitored on a regular basis," Mottaz said about ONP in a letter to the council.

Mottaz said families in private quarters will be less stressed than when they share common areas with many others. Also, having a supervisor living in one of the apartments reduces the shelter's capacity to house the homeless.

Mottaz says another way ONP differs from its original model is that Grace Place accepts single people and takes in the homeless from all over the region. ONP accepts only families coming from Pierce or St. Croix County.

She emphasized the detailed 11-page questionnaire about the whole family, which includes a background

check and list of rules by which each family must abide.

Among other things, the residents must agree to regular inspections, which Mottaz says are just about equivalent to 24-hour supervision. She serves on the family-support teams and says she's usually in residents' homes three times per week.

"Each family is assigned a family support team," she said, which consists of at least three people who each meet with the family at least once a week.

The team members visually inspect the home and help the family pinpoint the reasons it is homeless as well as help with personal goals. Mottaz said the family support team might go over and bring food or furniture; they might help residents produce a resume or make small life improvements.

A Plan Commission staff report sums up the body's recommendation: "Around-the-clock supervision should be imposed only if Our

Neighbors' Place has demonstrated that its tenants require it."

Mottaz said the Plan Commission held a public hearing at which nobody spoke for or against the permit change.

The final decision on modifying ONP's special-use permit lies with the City Council. Mottaz expects the issue will be decided at one of its January meetings.

FUNDRAISING CHUGS ALONG
Mottaz said the Campaign for Hope — meant to raise \$100,000 by Dec. 31 in order to take advantage of \$300,000 in grants and low-interest loans — is going slowly.

"It is unlikely we will be able to raise enough money to buy the 8-plex in the time frame we have," she said.

ONP sought to raise \$500,000 by the end of the year to buy the Johnson Street building. Mottaz said if the shelter can't reach the

fundraising goal for buying the 8-plex, it might look into buying a 4-plex instead.

She thinks donors might be fatigued in such a bad economy but says either way things go, the 40 or so volunteers running ONP are determined to make it work.

In a year's time, the shelter has evolved to include the Day Center on Riverwalk alleyway, the Backback Program to feed hungry kids and the homeless shelter.

ONP's shelter has a waiting list and gets phone calls every day, according to Mottaz. She feels confident it is needed and is a benefit to the city.

And she said the people living at ONP are amazing. They follow the rules and take good care of their places because they're both glad and proud to have it.

Mottaz said, "They are thrilled to have a warm, safe place to stay."

Why don't county plows run all night?

Highway Department workers answer frequent questions

ELLSWORTH — As we move into winter, Pierce County Highway Department workers have some advice for drivers, and they answer some common questions.

Because conditions vary on roads due to many factors, including terrain, wind and temperature, Highway Commissioner Chad Johnson and Patrol Superintendent Al Thoner advise drivers to refrain from using cruise control during inclement weather. Roads that seem dry and safe can quickly turn icy.

They also remind drivers to remain vigilant about road conditions and warn them to expect some inconveniences and modify their driving practices according to road conditions.

Johnson and Thoner responded to these frequently asked questions:

Why don't the plows run all night?

For county highways, the Pierce County Highway Department follows the Wisconsin Department of Transportation policy for the state highways in Pierce County, for which the department does the plowing and maintenance.

The state highways are Category V, or "18-hour" roads. Plowing and maintenance are restricted to the hours between 4 a.m. and 10 p.m. For numerous reasons, including resources and safety to the public and workers, there is no activity between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m., except when authorized by the DOT.

How do the plow drivers know when to go out?

Beginning after Thanksgiving, weather depending, the Highway Department has two night maintenance workers who monitor road and weather conditions, each with a separate shift. The two night shifts go from 3 p.m. to 6 a.m., providing 24-hour coverage for the roads beginning Sunday night and ending Friday night.

Each weekend, a manager is on call. Much of the road information during off-hours is provided to the Highway Department from the Sheriff's Department, which has vehicles traveling throughout the county.

Based on current conditions and forecasts, maintainers are dispatched from the Ellsworth and five outlying shops to respective state and county beats.

How many plow trucks does the department have?

There are six county and seven state beats, or routes,

each with a dedicated truck. There are three townships that the county provides maintenance services for, and three backup trucks, making a total of 19. In addition, three motor graders are equipped with V-plows and wings.

If the plows are out, why is there snow accumulating on the roadways?

In a normal winter event, it will take a maintainer three hours to complete a round on the state beat (average 25 miles or 50 lane miles) and four hours on a county beat (average 44 miles or 88 lane miles). A heavy event will require more time, so if a storm is dumping an inch an hour, there will be noticeable accumulation before a maintainer gets back to that location.

Why is there a difference in the roads at county lines?

Again this relates to the amount of time it takes a maintainer to make a round and where the county line falls on his beat. For example, if St. Croix and Pierce Counties both begin plowing at 5 a.m., Pierce will hit the county line on Hwy. 63 north of the Red Barn at about 5:15 a.m., while St. Croix will be there at about 6:15 a.m.

Why does the county use sand instead of salt?

The sand that is used to increase roadway abrasion is actually salt/sand, a mixture of 5% salt combined with screened sand that the county produces at the Stogdill Pit in the town of Trenton.

The cost of salt/sand is around \$15 per ton, as opposed to around \$60 per ton for straight salt. In certain situations, straight salt is used. Also, in advance of freezing rain or similar conditions, a liquid anti-icing agent is applied in strategic locations such as hills and bridge decks.

How far should a vehicle stay behind a snow plow?

Snow discharged from a plow can create a cloud that limits visibility. A snow plow is considered an emergency vehicle that, by law, should not be followed closer than 500 feet. If the lights of the plow are not flashing, and snow is not causing a visibility problem, 200 feet should be allowed.

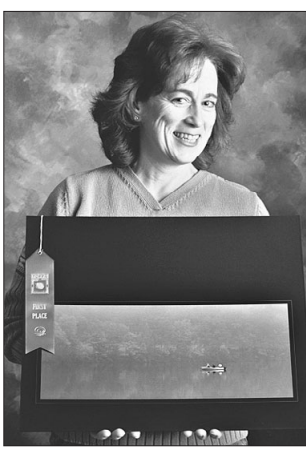
What is the department's mailbox policy?

If a mailbox is dislodged or knocked down by the force of snow or slush thrown off the plow or wing, repair is the responsibility of the owner.

If there is evidence that the plow or wing actually struck the box or post, a representative from the Highway Department will inspect the mailbox and replacement costs, as approved by the insurance company, will be assumed by the county.

STRICTLY BUSINESS

PEOPLE ON THE JOB



Nita Dusek is shown with her prize-winning photo.

Nita Dusek

River Falls photographer Nita Dusek was recognized recently for her image, "A Quiet Morning Fishing With Dad," taken at Brunet Island State Park on the Chippewa and Fisher rivers near Cornell.

The outdoor picture was judged by a panel of five eminent jurors from across the country at the annual print competition Nov. 8 in Minneapolis for working professional photographers of

the upper Midwest. About 150 images were entered in the contest.

They were judged using 12 standards of excellence, both on technical and subjective merits. Dusek's image won a first-prize ribbon because her score exceeded 80. That was high enough to be ranked in the "excellent" category, which is the third highest.

"A Quiet Morning Fishing With Dad" now advances to a regional contest this spring in Kansas City, which is a prelude to the International Print Competition later in summer.

Last year another picture of Dusek's, "Morning Dew," won at the international competition and was reproduced in the prestigious 2009 Loan Collection book by Marathon Press.

Dusek, 45, runs a business out of her town of Troy home called Nita Dusek Photography. It's three years old and has evolved from what started out as commercial and architectural photography. She now specializes in family portraits, high school senior portraits, boudoir photography and portrait parties. Her website is

www.ritadusek.com and she can be reached at 612-928-5050.

Nita Dusek and her husband, Al, who works at Andersen Corp., have two children: Andre, 12, who attends Meyer Middle School, and Natasha, 15, who attends River Falls High School.

Christopher Burns

Christopher Burns, a partner at Henson & Efron, P.A., in Minneapolis, has been named to the Dean's Council at the College of Business and Economics at UW-River Falls.

Burns, a Woodbury, Minn., resident, is a 1995 graduate of UW-RF.

The Dean's Council will advise Dean Glenn Potts on the structure and content of academic programs; fundraising; the needs of

the business community and the mission and strategic

plan of the college.

The council members will also identify internship and job opportunities, be a resource for classroom teachers and help support the college in its accreditation process.

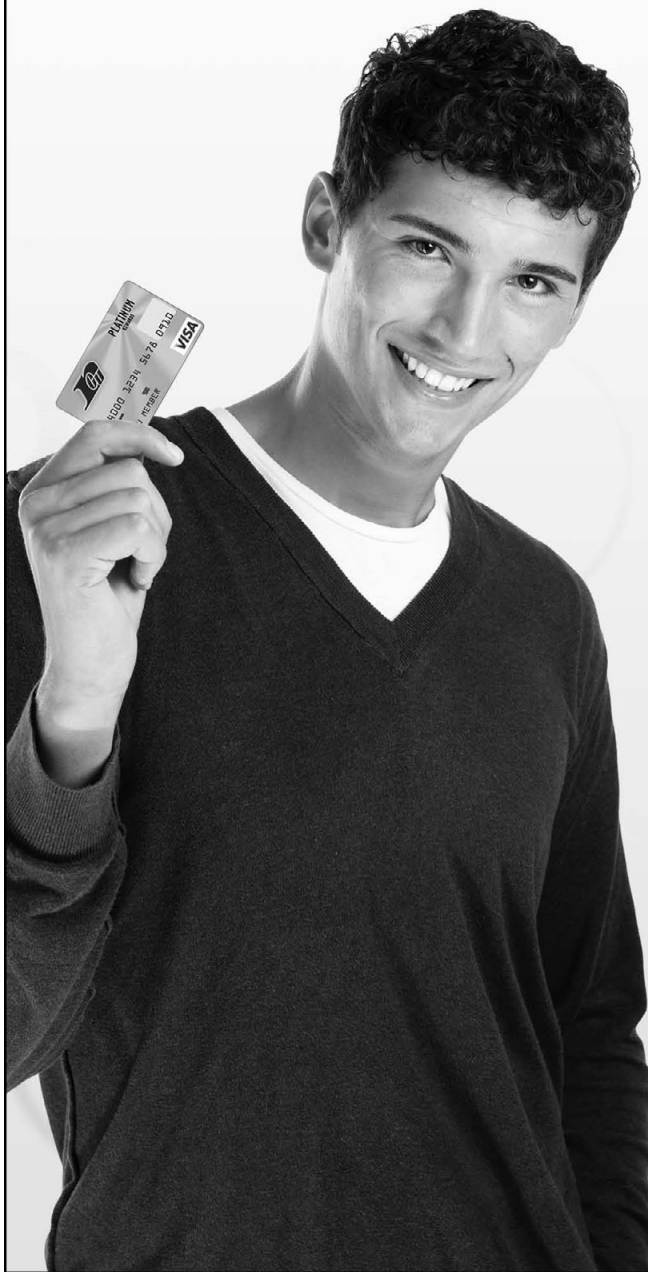
Burns was recently elected to the Woodbury City Council. He is a commissioner of the Woodbury Economic Development Commission and chair of the Woodbury Business Development Committee.

He was recently elected to the Board of Trustees of the Lutheran Social Service Foundation, which provides the financial resources for Lutheran Social Service to carry out its myriad of service activities in Minnesota.

At Henson & Efron, P.A., Burns heads up the Estate Planning, Probate and Trust Administration Practice Group. He practices in estate planning, prenuptial agreements, business succession planning, elder law and estate administration.

In addition to graduating from UW-RF, Burns is a 1999 graduate of the Syracuse University College of Law.

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