

New member joins
209-U board



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at their senior night



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Water loss issue sees resolution in Wilmington

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

In 2021, the city of Wilmington was facing a water dilemma. Each month, during the regular meeting of the water, sewer, streets and alleys committee meeting, public works officials told the city that as much as 50% of the city's water was unaccounted for, leaving the city with unexplained water loss of at least half the water it was producing.

But, things seem to have turned around, thanks to some new equipment and tracking.

Mayor Ben Dietz said the average monthly water loss has now been reduced to 10%, with efforts continuing to cut that even further.

"The water loss came from multiple different issues and while getting it down from 50% to 10% is a great improvement, and the staff should be very proud of the work they have

done, we are still focused on getting that lower," Dietz said.

Dietz said a portion of that previous loss came from meter issues, while some could be attributed to billing and some from correcting past mistakes.

One area where things were cleared up was in reading meters. Dietz said three years ago, the city was estimating water use for approximately 1,500 meters in town. Now, the number of estimated accounts is down to 211.

"We also have meters that are well beyond their life and the longer they are out in the system, the less accurate they can be," Dietz said.

"This year we also completed some upgrades at the plant with more to come next year. My goal right now is to continue working from the top users down and focusing on the more complicated issues. I would also encourage any user that is on an esti-

mated bill to get in touch with city hall so we can update your consumption estimate and get you scheduled to get a new meter."

The city's meter replacement program is, by design, ongoing, as meters have an estimated life expectancy of eight to 10 years.

Dietz said most of the water billing issues were not with the meters themselves, but rather with how they were read. If the radio communications that transmit the meter readings fail, bills are then estimated based on prior usage.

"This brings a couple of big issues," Dietz noted. "Users that have been estimated too low for too long and their meter gets replaced suddenly find themselves with a large bill. This is because the meter itself recorded every gallon used but couldn't transmit the read to the city, so it was estimated. After the communication issue is resolved the City now

gets the back usage as well as the current usage and the user gets an accurate bill of all the water they have used."

The problem then results in higher bills for some people, who then may have issues getting caught up.

"Right now we have about \$120,000 owed to the city that falls in this category. The city is working with anyone who is past due and waiving any fees or penalties as long as they are keeping current and paying down on the balance," the mayor said.

But, if there is one thing the mayor has learned in his time as both an alderman and then mayor, it's understanding how the city gets that water to its residents. Dietz said he has focused much of his attention on the entire water system from intake to sludge press, and has asked aldermen to tour the water and wastewater facilities to understand the process as

well.

Dietz said that while the issue of billing will always be frustrating to some residents, folks should rest assured that their water is safe and properly produced.

"I know not everyone is going to be happy about their bill, but we are making significant improvements to the issue," Dietz said. "An example of a significant cost saving is our water meter fees. Prior to 2021 this fee was the same for every user, including commercial and industrial users. The problem is that commercial and industrial meters are five to 15 times more expensive than residential meters and more expensive to install, so we were losing tens of thousands of dollars in meter replacement costs. An industrial user may have paid that \$2 per month replacement fee for years (\$240 over 10 years), but the

SEE WATER, PAGE 2



Photo by Eric Fisher

SPENT GRAIN is scooped away by head brewer Pauly Bidne at Rt 66 Old School Brewing, 110 Bridge St., Wilmington where 300 pounds or more is being used to feed local livestock. The malted barley and rice mixture is steeped in water to breakdown the grain's starch and convert it into a clear sugary liquid.

Four-legged customers like what's brewing, too

BY ERIC FISHER
PUBLISHER

In 2015, Joe Spurlock opened Spurlock Farms in Wilmington with his son Jared. He purchased the property from his wife's parents and together the two learned everything they needed to operate the successful animal farm. They raise pigs, goats, cows, chickens, turkeys, ducks and more, supplying to local buyers.

An avid home brewer, Joe always finds his way into local breweries. When Rt. 66 Old School Brewing opened in Wilmington in 2019, it wasn't long before Joe found himself talking to owners Steve and Tina Nelson and head brewer Pauly Bidne.

They talked shop—everything from farming to brewing—and quickly realized the synergy that could exist between their two businesses. Rt. 66 was amassing between 200 and 300 pounds of spent grain each week in the regular brewing process, and Joe was spending hundreds on grain feed for his animals.

Now, instead of that spent grain ending up in the landfill, Joe picks it up each week, redirecting the grain from the landfill and back to the Earth through his farming operations.

"All the good stuff in the grain ends up in the beer," shared Joe. "But there's real value in the spent grain, especially for farmers like me who require thousands of pounds



WHAT'S ON TAP? Up to 16 kinds of beer at Rt. 66 Old School Brewing where owner Steve Nelson surveys the refrigerated keg room.

a month of feed for the animals. There's a nice financial incentive, but it's more than that."

Bidne, head brewer at Rt. 66 Old School Brewing, said partnerships like these are an important step for breweries

who want to achieve zero waste.

"Our industry relies so much on the hard work and dedication of our farmers, and it's a delight to help a fel-

SEE BREW, PAGE 2

City on track for huge savings this fiscal year

BY MARNEY SIMON
EDITOR

At the close of the third quarter, the city of Wilmington is on track to end the current fiscal year significantly under budget.

Finance director Matt Hoffman updated the members of the City Council during the Jan. 18 meeting of the finance committee on where the city stands with its budget projections for the 2022 fiscal year (FY22), which ends on April 30.

"Right now, we'll be at about 82% below budget," Hoffman reported. "We initially thought we'd spend \$3.3 million, we're going to end up somewhere around \$600,000. So, there's a \$2.7 million difference."

Those numbers account for spending across all city wide funds. Hoffman said a portion of those savings is due

to a significant increase in sales tax revenue over what was projected for FY22.

"About \$600,000 is just due to increased sales tax, and building permits mainly from the TIF district," Hoffman said. "We also have about \$158,000 in sewer cap fees which is also related to the TIF district... The formulation is done to figure out the impacts it will have on the sewer system over time, and we charge a fee to buildings that are being built, so that's what that is."

Currently the city has collected \$912,119 of its budgeted \$1.05 million in state sales tax—which represents 86% of the budget with three months still to go in the fiscal year.

In building permit fees, the city has currently collected \$506,035, more than \$200,000 more than the budgeted projection of \$300,000.

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Parents await ruling on mask mandate lawsuit

STAFF REPORT

A lawsuit filed by parents across the state to try to overturn the statewide school mask mandate may get a ruling by the end of the week.

Districts Wilmington 209-U and Elwood 203 are among 145 school districts named in a lawsuit filed in October to end the mandate put in place this school year by Gov. JB Pritzker.

Circuit Judge Raylene Grischow heard oral arguments last week in a class action lawsuit against 145 school districts that was filed last year by Greenville attorney Thomas DeVore, who has unsuccessfully challenged the state's COVID-19 mitigation measures in several other lawsuits.

The lawsuit was filed on Oct. 20, 2021 in Macoupin

County by DeVore on behalf of dozens of parents across the state. The case is being heard in Sangamon County Circuit Court.

The lawsuit contends that school districts have "implemented and are illegally enforcing the exclusion directives" issued by Gov. JB Pritzker and enforced by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

The filing argues that state law requires that "no person may be ordered to be quaran-

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