

# CITY OF WASHBURN

## QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Fall 2021

### FROM THE MAYOR'S DESK

All of a sudden, it's fall with cooler temps, beautiful leaves and alas, shorter days. Who would have thought that we'd still be in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic?

#### Making it Work

Another thing that is continuing is a shortage of people to respond to ambulance calls. The old system of relying completely on volunteers to take care of this responsibility is not working anymore. We had a recruitment event in July that had a helicopter and flight crew, virtual reality demonstration, current EMTs to answer questions, and instructors from Northwood Tech with information. With all of the effort that went into that, only one person showed up. Every time I hear a siren (which is often more than once a day), I think who it might be that is in need of assistance and then I think about how grateful I am that there are EMTs on the way. That isn't always the case, though. Sometimes there isn't anyone available and we have to look to Ashland or other neighboring communities to answer a call. That is happening more often as of late and that is not a sustainable system. There is no quick or easy solution to that problem, but we do need to try to find one.

#### WISDOT PUBLIC INPUT SESSION

This will be the first opportunity to see a draft of the Phase 1 plans for the Bayfield Street Project scheduled for 2024. It is a great opportunity to ask questions and express concerns while there is still time to make changes.

See details on back.



One scenario that is being seriously considered is to hire two full-time EMTs to cover the weekday hours when most of our EMTs are working their regular, paying jobs. If we don't do this, the problem will continue to worsen. It's time to fix the problem with a more permanent solution. It is our responsibility to make sure that our community is able to respond to emergency calls and there is simply no other way to turn.

This change, along with paying our police officers a wage that is more in line with our surrounding communities, would require a tax increase. Our property tax revenue for city operations is very limited due to state-imposed levy limits. One of the only sources of increased tax revenue is when there is new construction, and we have only seen about \$5,000 per year in new tax revenue annually. The only other ways the city gets revenue is from shared revenues from the state (which have declined over the past 20 years) and from fees such as building permits and camping. We used to have more police officers, more public works staff and a recreation department. Because costs keep increasing, we have had to continually cut the operating budget in order to stay afloat.

Due to levy limits, the only way to increase taxes is with a referendum. If the city council approves a resolution in October to have a referendum on the ballot during the spring 2022 election, you will see a lot more information about all of this. No one wants to pay more in taxes, but we all want the services that are needed to keep us safe. Stay tuned – and stay in touch.

- Mayor Mary Motiff