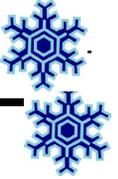


# ARDEN HILLS

## notes

The Official City Newsletter for Arden Hills Residents

January/February 2015



## Tax levy to increase less than originally proposed in September

by Kristine Goodrich

The City Council decided to use some of the City's reserves to reduce the proposed property tax increase to 3.1 percent.

The 2015 property tax levy was set at \$3.36 million. Funding from the regional fiscal disparities pool will contribute \$249,000 of that, and City property owners will contribute a total of \$3.11 million.

The 3.1 percent increase the Council decided upon in December is less than the maximum preliminary levy increase of 5 percent that the Council set in September. That means your City property tax bill will be a bit less than what was listed on your notice of proposed taxes.

After a lengthy discussion at its December 8 meeting, the Council reduced the levy increase by trimming spending and deciding to dip more into reserves. It was a 3-2 decision. There was some concern about the use of additional reserves, which typically help fund road improvement projects. Assuming revenues and expenses in 2015 are equal to what was budgeted, the City will use a little more than \$58,000 of its reserves.

### General Fund

Higher contract fees for public safety services are the most sizable increases in City spending. The Sheriff's Office contract for law enforcement protection and animal control increased nearly 5 percent. The required contribution to the Lake Johanna Fire Department increased 6.5 percent, in part to fund 24-7 station staffing. The fee for 911 dispatching jumped nearly 15 percent, as the County is upgrading to a new dispatching system. Combined, the public safety services will cost an extra \$86,000 in 2015, which accounts for a 2.6 percent increase in the levy.

The other notable General Fund spending increases are an additional \$40,000 for road maintenance and a 1.5 percent cost-of-living wage increase for City employees. A 2 percent wage increase was proposed, but reducing it to 1.5 percent was one of the Council's budget-trimming measures. Staffing levels are relatively unchanged, except for an intern to work 10 hours a week in the finance and administrative service departments. The intern had been cut from the 2014 budget.

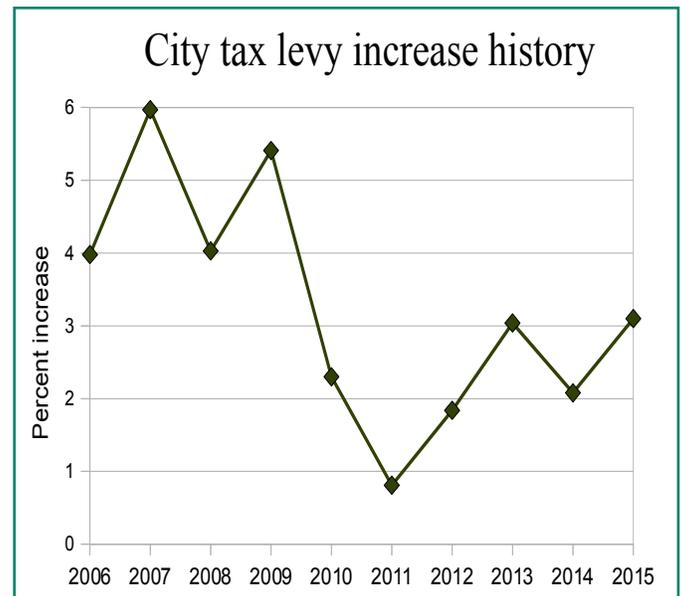
City staff proposed to restore it to a half-time position, but the Council opted to Fund only a .25 FTE (full-time equivalent) intern position.

Overall, the General Fund budget increased by \$42,000, less than a 1 percent increase.

### Other Funds

In addition to the tax levy, utility fees are increasing slightly. The water and sewer rates are increasing 2 percent, and the surface water management fee is increasing 3 percent.

The 2015 Capital Improvement Plan, approved by the Council on December 15, includes \$6.24 million in projects and equipment funded via a variety of sources, including property owner assessments for road projects. Most of the spending is for roads, including the annual summer road improvements (\$2.65 million), improve-



ments to County Road E (\$1.65 million), and contributions to state bridge projects (\$600,000). Other funding will be used to replace Public Works vehicles, construct the first section of trail along Lake Valentine Road, purchase a new voting system mandated by the State, maintain sewer and storm sewer lines, and more.

The overall budget, including the General Fund, Utilities Fund, Capital Fund and a few others, was set at \$17.81 million. That's more than \$2.7 million less than 2014, primarily because there were more capital projects last year.

Because the Council finalized the increase at less than the preliminary levy set in September, homeowners will find that their property taxes will be a bit lower than what was listed on their notice of proposed tax from Ramsey County.

## Arden Hills Service Directory

1245 West Highway 96  
Arden Hills, MN 55112-5734

### Office Hours

Monday through Friday  
8:00 a.m. — 4:30 p.m.

### City Contact Information

651-792-7800

[www.cityofardenhills.org](http://www.cityofardenhills.org)

Sheriff and Fire  
911

Water and Sewer Problems  
(During non-business hours)  
651-767-0640

### Mayor:

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[dgrant@cityofardenhills.org](mailto:dgrant@cityofardenhills.org)

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### Communications Committee

Editors: Susan Cathey, Tina Kulzer,

Member: Emma Theis

Council Liaison: David Grant

Staff Liaison: Amy Dietl

Desktop Publisher: Mary Nosek

Council meetings are held at City Hall on the second and last Monday of the month at 7 p.m. Meetings are televised live on Cable Channel 16. Meetings of the Planning Commission are televised as well. Visit [www.cityofardenhills.org](http://www.cityofardenhills.org) for information about taped meeting playback.

Arden Hills Notes is the official newsletter of the City of Arden Hills, an equal-opportunity employer.

## City Park Profiles--a series

### Freeway Park

1370 W. County Road E

by Tina Kulzer

It has been a somewhat uncooperative winter so far for outdoor recreation enthusiasts.

Though you may have thrown in the towel after the rain and snow melt in December, it is now time to sharpen your skates and head to your nearest neighborhood skating rink, if you haven't already. For many City residents, their skating destination is Freeway Park, which is this month's park profile.

#### "Upper" Freeway Park

The upper level of Freeway Park was the first park developed in Arden Hills. Six lots were purchased by the City from John J. and Mary T. Kenna in 1957 for \$10,000. The Minnesota Highway Department purchased 70,095 square feet of this land, leaving one lot and half of another lot at the intersection of County Road E and Highway 51 (Snelling Avenue) to be developed by the City as its first park.

As noted in a Parks and Recreation Department archive file, "The size and state of this park is best suited for high intensity uses requiring less area..." Rather than reimagine this first park acquisition with extensive landscaping, the City developed Freeway Park by adding amenities the land was suited for. A skating hub in the middle of the City was born.

By 1965, both hockey and free skating rinks were available to residents. Hockey boards and lights were installed; the skating area was fenced in for safety; and a small parking lot was cleared at the park's main entrance off County Road E. That same year, Arden Lumber Co. built the park's first (semi-portable) warming house.

(Fun fact: The warming house that currently stands in Freeway Park is a "transplant"—it is the same warming house that was first built for and used at Cummings Park.)

A neighborhood petition was signed and submitted to the City in 1968 requesting a fenced-in, year-round playground facility at Freeway Park. The following year, playground equipment consisting of a sandbox, double swings, a merry-go-round, and a slide were installed in a small corner of the park—all enclosed by fencing for safety purposes.

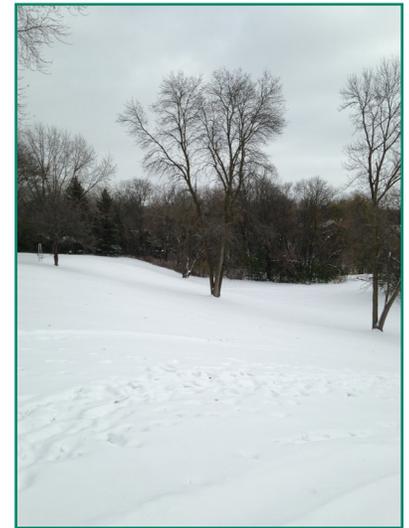
#### "Lower" Freeway Park

In 1968 the City Council began looking into the purchase of an adjacent lot for use as a parking lot to accommodate the number of residents using the park, which increased significantly during the winter months.

One lot was purchased from Dorothy A. Johnson in November 1968 for \$4,000. This parcel is commonly referred to as "Lower Freeway Park" due to its lower elevation in comparison to the original parcel where the rinks are located, or "Upper Freeway Park."

The two lots are separated by a short but steep hill that is easily traversed but has no permanent path or trail to create connectivity between the two. This addition also provides a second, more pedestrian-friendly park entrance at Arden Place and Glenarden Road.

Though this lower lot was originally purchased to alleviate parking issues, residents and



## Benchmarks: a review of recent City Council action

### November 24, 2014

- Approved a gambling license for Catholic United Financial to hold a raffle on March 19, 2015. (5-0)
- Approved the Nextel lease termination for the Red Fox Water Tower since a new lease was recently completed and the old lease is no longer needed. (5-0)
- Approved accepting the liability coverage limits from the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT) for 2015. (5-0)
- Approved the application for a recycling SCORE grant from Ramsey County. (5-0)
- Approved ordering the County Road E (B2 District) improvements. (5-0)
- Approved the assessment roll for the County Road E (B2 District) improvements. (5-0)
- Approved the Plans and Specifications and ordered the advertisement of bids for the County Road E (B2 District) improvements. (5-0)
- Approved planning case 14-027 a variance for Transwestern, 1160 Grey Fox Road, to allow construction of additional parking. (5-0)
- Approved planning case 14-028 a

variance for Transwestern, 3728 Dunlap Street North, to allow construction of additional parking. (5-0)

### December 8, 2014

- Approved the 2015 Fee Schedule and authorizing the publication of the ordinance summary. (5-0)
- Approved the 2015 Liquor License renewals. (5-0)
- Approved the 2015 Tobacco License renewals. (5-0)
- Approved the 2015 Recycling Fee amount. (5-0)
- Approved pay estimate #6 for the Round Lake Road improvements. (5-0)
- Approved the Feasibility Report and ordered a Public Hearing on January 12, 2015, for the Venus/Crystal neighborhood road improvement (2015 PMP). (5-0)
- Approved the Feasibility Report and Ordered a Public Hearing on January 26, 2015, for the Grant, Noble, Lake Lane neighborhood road improvement (2015 PMP). (5-0)
- Approved the Quarterly Special Assessments for delinquent utilities. (5-0)

- Approved the 2015 Employee Compensation Plan for non-union employees. (5-0)
- Approved the 2015 City Budget (5-0)
- Approved the 2015 Tax Levy increase of 3.1%. (3-2 Holmes, Werner)
- Approved the 2015 City contribution for employee benefits. (5-0)
- Approved the purchase of a Jet/Vac vehicle. (5-0)
- Approved a contract with Kimley Horn to develop a comprehensive Sanitary Sewer Update and Comprehensive Plan Amendment to include TCAAP facilities. (5-0)

### December 15, 2014

- Approved the 2015-2019 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). (5-0)
- Approved cancelation of the December 29, 2014, City Council meeting. (5-0)
- Approved the appointment of Roberta Thompson as Chair of the Planning Commission. (5-0)

## Curbside recycling program to undergo changes

by Susan Cathey

The curbside recycling program in Arden Hills will undergo some changes in 2015. The current contract with Eureka Recycling is due to expire in March. Large City-owned carts will take the place of the bins presently in use.

In September, 2014, a Request for Proposals (RFP) for residential recycling services was developed and approved by the City Council and released to the public. Pro-

posals were received by five companies and were then evaluated by a review team based on the criteria in the RFP.

Following this review and a cost analysis, the team discussed each option relative to the recycling needs of the City and its residents. This led to a recommendation that a five-year contract for weekly service and City-owned carts be entered into with Republic Services.

Arden Hills is in the process of applying for a Public Entity Innovation Grant (PEIG) which could cover all or part of the cost of residential recycling carts. Depending upon the outcome of this request, the City may need to use recycling fund reserves or increase the cost of recycling services to fully fund the carts.

The Republic Services contract is set to begin on May 4, allowing for delivery

of the approximately 25,000 residential carts to occur following the end of winter weather conditions. Eureka has offered to extend its contract until May to cover the gap. As part of its contract, Republic will work with the City to provide further information and directions to all residents.

### New Year's resolution? How about powering up your recycling?

There are lots of easy tips for increasing your recycling efficiency. Go to [rethinkrecycling.com](http://rethinkrecycling.com) and click on the Blog link at the top of the home page for ideas.



## Sara Grant named Recreation Coordinator

by Tina Kulzer

The Arden Hills City Council appointed Sara Grant to the position of Recreation Coordinator at its November 10, 2014, meeting. This appointment brings new leadership to the Parks and Recreation Department, as long-time Parks and Recreation Manager Michelle Olson resigned in August 2014 due to relocation.

As Recreation Coordinator, Sara's duties include coordinating the City's recreational offerings for youth, adults, and seniors; after-school activities; summer playground programming; special events; and the City's forestry initiatives. In this new role, Sara now also serves as the staff liaison to the City's Parks, Trails, and Recreation Committee.

Sara grew up in the Royal Hills neighborhood of Arden Hills and began working for the City's Parks and Recreation Department at age 15 when she got her first

job as a playground leader. At 18, she became the Summer Playground Coordinator and then began full-time work for the City in 2009 as Recreation Programmer.

The daughter of two teachers, Sara recalls the importance of teaching and leadership as formative influences in her life. She describes one of the greatest pleasures of her job is being able to teach, lead and coordinate recreational learning activities for children and young adults and be a positive influence in their lives.

With her long history of living in and working for Arden Hills, Sara has found great pleasure in getting to know resident families on a very personal level. She has watched neighborhood children grow up over years of participation in City programs and – in several cases – facilitated employment opportunities for those same kids who, as young adults, are interested in and qualified for employment with the

Parks and Recreation Department.

Going forward, Sara says one of her goals is to increase the variety of offerings that addresses the recreation needs and desires of the City's aging community. Some of the programs and workshops currently available for area seniors include freezer meal preparation, DIY holiday gift making/wrapping, foot care, and a new book club for seniors.

Sara is also participating in the selection of a Recreation Programmer, who, when hired, will assist her in the Parks and Recreation Department.



### Freeway Park, continued from page 2

visitors continued to park on County Road E despite the availability of the parking lot. In 1974, the City Council began discussions to reconsider the use of Lower Freeway Park as a parking lot, in light of neighborhood requests for expanded use of the park beyond skating.

The small play area near the skating rinks was dismantled, and a larger asphalt play area featuring a wooden climbing structure and sandbox area was completed at Lower Freeway Park by fall of 1975. That same year, extensive tree and shrub planting was completed to provide a buffer for road noise and increase overall aesthetics. By the end of the decade, the park amenities also included a hard court area with a ball board and two basketball backboards, and a swinging bench.

### Current challenges

Being the oldest park in the City does not come without its unique challenges. The aesthetic limitations of hockey rink infrastructure (which remains in place and unused the rest of the year) have an undeniable impact on the park's curb appeal. The issue of aesthetics remains at the forefront of most discussions surrounding Freeway Park.

Issues of capacity are relevant at Freeway Park as well. The development of the Lake Johanna East neighborhood outpaced the capacity of this small, one-acre park long ago. Following the initial land acquisition in the late 1950s, the City was unable to acquire additional neighboring properties and expand park acreage to fulfill the original Park and Recreation Department goal for park acreage per neighborhood resident (1/100).

So, the question of how to facilitate more year-round use of Freeway Park is perennial. Bituminous surfacing of most of Upper Freeway Park is proposed, so that it might be used for other activities (tennis, for example) in non-skating seasons. Another suggestion is converting the rink area into an off-leash dog area in the summer, following the positive response to the off-leash dog park trial at Hazelnut Park last year.

### The future of Freeway Park

The next few years will likely bring the most significant changes to Freeway Park since Lower Freeway Park was developed in the mid-1970s.

The City's current Capital Improvement Plan draft for 2015-2019 (available on the City's website) proposes \$65,000 in capital improvements for Freeway Park. The public works staff reviewed suggestions made by the Parks, Trails, and Recreation Committee and recommended improvements related to park fencing, parking lot size and surface, curb and gutter additions, drainage system improvements, and landscaping.

The timeline for implementation of enhancements is being affected by the planned reconstruction of the County Road E bridge over Highway 51 this summer. The City Council has taken recent action to table the improvement plan for Freeway Park, as the timeline for the bridge project and its potential impact on any improvements at the park is considered.



Above: a 1975 flyer promoting a tree-planting project in Freeway Park.

## Energy resiliency and TCAAP development

by Susan Cathey

As progress continues to be made on the TCAAP (Rice Creek Commons) development, attention is being given to energy concerns. In August, 2014, the Joint Development Authority (JDA) appointed an Energy Resilience Advisory Board (ERAB) whose purpose is to help City and County staff and consultants develop an Energy Integration and Resiliency Framework for the property. According to a memo to the City Council from the Ramsey County Manager's Office, the intent is to "establish a foundation for cost effective, energy-efficient alternatives and opportunities... (for TCAAP) over the next 50 years."

In phase one, ERAB has helped the project task force, which includes Ever-Green Energy, Burns and McDonnell, Center for Energy and Environment, and Fresh Energy, to prepare a Policy White Paper, which was reviewed and formally accepted by the JDA on November 3, 2014, and presented to the Arden Hills City

Council at its November 24 meeting. The White Paper includes a vision statement and guiding principles. Lyle Salmela, chairperson of ERAB, told the Council that it also explains options to meet the challenges of design, economic benefit and ability to implement an energy efficient system. Among these options are the use of solar and geothermal/thermal energy. As Michael Ahern of Ever-Green Energy described it, the White Paper identifies what's possible.

Ahern went on to explain the second phase of the team's task which is development of the framework, or taking what's possible and laying out plans for implementation. The team will look at how various ideas apply to the site, the environmental benefits and a cost/benefit analysis, while trying to plan for 50 years out. Greg Mark, project manager, noted that recommendations and requirements need to take a flexible rather than a prescriptive approach to allow for new technologies in the future.

The team will look at opportunities that are unique to TCAAP and the development of a greenfield site in the core of the metro area. These include:

- Infrastructure development
- Direct fiber broadband
- Developing partnerships with Xcel Energy, AHATS, and developers
- Geothermal energy
- Smart grid demonstration platform

The framework is expected to be completed in March, 2015.

During the Council's discussion, Mayor Grant asked that the project developers, who have the expertise in the energy field, help the City create flexible requirements. The White Paper does offer some specific suggestions for the City's code developments. The Council concluded by expressing support for the vision and principles in the White Paper. To read the Policy White Paper, go to the City's website.

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## Arden Hills' Cable Franchise Agreement with Comcast extended

by Emma Theis

Arden Hills' 15-year cable franchise agreement with Comcast was recently extended through 2016, after having expired in October 2013. The contract was not formally renewed pending both further negotiations between the North Suburban Communications Commission (NSCC) and Comcast and Comcast's attempted merger with Time Warner Cable.

According to Craig Wilson, the NSCC representative for Arden Hills, these contract extensions are just part of the renewal process. "We were coming up to the end of our 15-year franchise," said Wilson, "and we were not close enough to reach an agreement."

The North Suburban Communications Commission manages the cable franchise on behalf of Arden Hills and surrounding cities including Falcon Heights, Lauderdale, Little Canada, Mounds View, New Brighton, North Oaks, Roseville, St. Anthony and Shoreview.

Before a renewal agreement could be reached, the NSCC had to perform a community needs analysis, a technical analysis of Comcast's network, and a

financial analysis of the company's viability.

The community needs analysis consisted of focus groups, polls, and surveys to determine what the citizens, school districts, and local government wanted and expected from community and cable television.

The NSCC hired consultants to conduct the technical and financial analyses of Comcast, and according to Wilson, several problems came to light as a result. Low power levels, bad connections, subpar equipment, and financial irregularities were all issues that Comcast has agreed to resolve per the terms of the NSCC Resolution of Legal and Franchising Issues.

Highlights of the agreement include a refund of approximately \$49,000 to cable subscribers, one HD channel for the NSCC with provisions for channel placement and quality, and an extension of the franchise through December 31, 2016.

"It's a process," said Wilson regarding the negotiations with Comcast. "We did what we needed to do for the City's residents and cable subscribers."

According to a memorandum from Arden Hills City Administrator Patrick Klaers, the NSCC approved the franchise extension agreement at its October 9, 2014, meeting and recommended that the member cities approve the extension. The NSCC also advised the cities to approve Comcast's requested transfer of the franchise to GreatLand Connections.

A press release from Comcast on September 3, 2014 reported that GreatLand Connections is "the name of the new cable company that will be spun off from Comcast upon completion of the Comcast - Time Warner Cable merger."

The City Council approved the cable franchise extension amendment and transfer at its October 27, 2014, meeting. According to Klaers, the NSCC reported after its December meeting that all ten member cities approved the extension and transfer of the Comcast cable franchise.

According to the City Administrator, Arden Hills residents will not be affected by this franchise extension or transfer in terms of cable services provided.



Arden Hills, MN • 55112-5734

- I** Tax levy finalized
- n** Freeway Park
- s** Energy resiliency at TCAAP
- i** Cable Franchise Agreement extended
- d**
- e**

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### Notes from the Mayor

#### A roundabout topic for Arden Hills

The latest trend in traffic design to hit the US in years is the roundabout. It seems they are not just for Europe anymore. I have seen them pop up here and there, at lower traffic volume intersections. Not often do you see the large ones that are common in Europe, like the one portrayed in National Lampoon's *European Vacation* where Clark Griswold (Chevy Chase) can't merge left and keeps going round and round, seeing the same tourist site over and over.

So why are roundabouts becoming so popular, and why are two roundabouts being proposed for Arden Hills? First, there is the obvious advantage: nobody has to stop unless there is traffic. When traffic is light, it is easy to continue on without coming to a full stop. Besides the simple convenience of not stopping are savings on brake replacement and increased fuel economy by not having to stop and start moving again. With the increased fuel economy comes less emissions making the roundabout a bit greener than a traditional intersection.

The second reason leading to the increased use of roundabouts involves safety for both drivers and pedestrians. Entering a roundabout is a merge process for everyone, and as such, people slow down when entering and driving on a roundabout. Slower speeds mean vehicle accidents

tend to be less severe. Pedestrian safety is also increased by being able to cross intersections where cars are traveling at much slower speed than traditional intersections. Perhaps most importantly, since roundabouts are designed around a yield and merge into and out of a traffic circle, one of the most serious of all intersection accidents, the dreaded T-bone, is eliminated.

Another consideration in favor of roundabouts is possible design limitations due to lack of space or the number of roads that must connect at an intersection. Most of us have experienced intersections where five or more roads converge at one intersection. Just what are the rules at that intersection?

The first roundabout being proposed is at the County Road H entrance to Rice Creek Commons (TCAAP). This would be a dual lane roundabout, making it one of the larger ones in the Midwest. The primary reason that this needs to be a roundabout is one of design. The Rice Creek Commons entrance needs to have five roads converge at one intersection. Those roads are: County Road H, County Road H northbound 35W exit, County Road H northbound 35W entrance and a road for Rice Creek Commons going north and Rice Creek Commons going south.

While five-road intersections do happen occasionally, it is impractical for the esti-

mated 29,000 average daily trips needed at this intersection. The current dual lane design roundabout includes the ability to accommodate bus and semi-trailer traffic. The outside lane is extra wide allowing for the increased turning width needed for semi-trailer traffic. The inner lane is a standard width, but allows longer vehicles to surmount an inner curb apron with their rear tires if needed.

The second proposed roundabout is located at a new intersection on County Road I used to accommodate a new access road leading into and out of the northern area of Rice Creek Commons. This would be a single-lane roundabout and should allow County Road I traffic to flow well in its current east-west direction, while enabling access by the new road.

You can view the proposed designs by visiting the Arden Hills website.

Sincerely,

David Grant  
Mayor