

THE NEWS SUN

S E R V I N G N O B L E A N D L A G R A N G E C O U N T I E S

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 11, 2023

Kendallville, Indiana K P C N E W S . C O M \$1.50

Bid BUSTED

Bid Package 1

215-217 S. Main St. and 105-109 N. Main St.

Bid: \$708,000

Bid Package 2

106 S. Main St. and 119 W. Mitchell St.

Bid: \$330,000

Bid Package 3

101 N. Main St.

Bid: \$391,000



Facade prices come in high, two buildings get no bids

BY STEVE GARBACZ

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KENDALLVILLE — What should have been an exciting time for Kendallville as it opened bids for its \$2 million downtown facade project instead turned into a bid bummer.

Prices were a concern going in due to heavy inflation in the construction market, and bids did indeed come in high. More than double in some cases.

But another factor that was concerning to city leaders Tuesday is that two of the downtown's biggest buildings, two of its statement pieces, weren't bid at all.

More than a year in the making, Kendallville finally opened bids for its \$2 million PreservINg Main Street facade project during

Tuesday's Board of Works and Public Safety meeting.

The \$2 million PreservINg Main Street grant project is being funded by state money earmarked to do historic restoration and preservation of downtown buildings.

Kendallville was one of two communities to win the grant, which is a new state program in its first even award cycle. Small Brookville in southern Indiana was the other community selected for the state's trial run of the new program.

Kendallville asked building owners to put up 15% of the construction cost toward their projects, with the grant covering the other 85%.

The original, hyper-aggressive

timeline called for the project to be bid in early 2022, but that proved to be way too optimistic as the city and state worked together throughout last year to prepare and put out a bid package.

The city had originally identified its Top 10 buildings it would bid, then if any money was left over, it could seek to pick up at least another five.

During 2022, Treehouse Realty at 129 S. Main St. had to drop out, leaving nine buildings on the listing. Furnishings store 100 S. Main also dropped out just before bids went out and was not included, leaving eight properties for consideration.

Instead of clumping all of the buildings together into one package, architect MartinRiley and

the city split the project into five different bid packages.

That decision appears to have bitten Kendallville now, as it received bids from two firms only covering three of the five packages on Tuesday.

Advanced Restoration Contractors of Indianapolis bid three of the packages and was the lowest bidder on all three.

It was the only company to bid Package 1, covering Love Me Two Times on Main antique shop spanning 105-109 N. Main St. and then the Jeny's Tacos/Kropp Insurance shared facade at 215 and 217 S. Main Street, at \$708,000.

Advanced Restoration Contractors was the lower bidder on Package 2, including Hosler Realty at 106 S. Main St. and the old post

office building at 119 W. Mitchell Street, bidding \$330,000. Shawnee Construction and Engineering also bid the package, but was much higher at \$595,000.

For Bid Package 3 — 101 N. Main St., the former Relaxation Station building — Advanced Restoration again beat Shawnee, bidding \$391,000 compared to \$455,000.

In total, Advanced Restoration Contractors' three bids totaled \$1,429,000.

What got left out were two statement projects for Kendallville.

Bid Package 4 was for 101 S. Main St., the Kendallville Auto Value, which was expected to be the biggest and most expensive

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LaGrange eyes registration fee hike

BY PATRICK REDMOND

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LAGRANGE — Roads, and what it's going to cost to repair them, took up the bulk of Monday morning's LaGrange County Council January meeting.

Two representatives of a Fort Wayne Engineer Consulting firm hired by the county to help create a detailed plan to repair local roads told council members they've rated most county roads bad. After driving every paved road in the county, Brad Stump, a representative of Butler, Fairman and Seufert, a Fort Wayne-based Civil Engineering firm, said his firm scored local roads at 4.5

on average on a scale of 1 to 10. Stump told the council members anything below 5 is considered bad.

Road repairs cost money, and council members met with the county's financial advisor Jeff Peters to talk about ways to pay for those repairs.

One recommendation from the financial advisory is for the council members to raise the county's wheel tax and surtax. Peters told the council members that LaGrange County wheel tax and surtax rates are lower than any other surrounding county.

"As you're well aware, the cost of inflation has outpaced revenues, and lots of communities like you are

looking at wheel taxes," Peters told the council members. "Wheel tax and surtax is obviously the most direct because it applies to the vehicles on those roads you're looking to improve and maintain."

LaGrange County surtaxes are taxed as a percentage of the vehicle registration fee, with a minimum of \$10. It annually raises about \$325,000 a year, and that money is shared between the county and the incorporated towns.

Peters suggested the council member consider shifting to instead charge a flat tax of \$50 per vehicle.

SEE TAX, PAGE A6



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10 DAY FORECAST

TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU
30%	20%	60%	30%	0%	0%	0%	30%	30%	30%
41	47	47	33	34	39	44	48	51	48
33	39	28	24	26	30	41	39	41	

Tuesday's Statistics

LOCAL
HIGH 41
LOW 31

FORT WAYNE
HIGH 44
LOW 31

SOUTH BEND
HIGH 44
LOW 33

INDIANAPOLIS
HIGH 51
LOW 33

Slightly warmer temperatures with a slight chance for precipitation. Highs expected to reach mid 40s Wednesday and Thursday. Chance for rain Thursday.

Sunrise today 8:05 a.m.

Sunset today 5:30 p.m.

Chicago 45/36
South Bend 51/41
Fort Wayne 49/43
Lafayette 47/43
Terre Haute 50/47
Indianapolis 49/46
Louisville 57/55
Evansville 57/54

Pressure High Low
Showers Rain T-storms Flurries Snow Ice
NATIONAL SUMMARY: Steady rain will continue in the West tomorrow, especially in Northern California and Oregon. Some of this rain will remain heavy, with a threat for flooding remaining in place. In the central Rockies and the High Plains, accumulating snow will arrive by the afternoon, with rain farther east across central Nebraska and Kansas.

Today's drawing by:
Destinee Suarez

Submit your weather drawings to:
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P.O. Box 39, Kendallville, IN 46755

STEVE GARBAZ

No one bid on proposed improvements to the Strand Theatre at 221 S. Main St.

FACADE: No bids on auto parts store, Strand Theatre

FROM PAGE A1

transformation in the project.

Also skipped was Bid Package 5 covering work on the Strand Theatre at 221 S. Main St., which is one of the city's main historic anchors downtown.

Following the meeting, Kendallville Board of Works President Jim Dazey said he was concerned both about the cost and that contractors didn't even bid a full package.

"It is higher than we anticipated, I think," Dazey said. "We were hoping we would be able to do some additional buildings, but it's within the parameters of what we've got to work with. I think it's a beginning and we need to continue moving forward."

Main Street Manager Kristen Johnson at first said she was pleased that the bids fell within the city's \$2 million grant, as city leaders had been fearing the price would overrun significantly.

However, after Johnson realized a couple buildings were left out — and discovered that the 101 address that was bid was the Relaxation Station on North Main and not Kendallville Auto Value on South Main — she had more concerns, specifically noting that Relaxation Station project looked significantly higher than originally expected.

Construction costs have gone way up compared to when the city was first awarded the grant back in summer 2021, so prices were a big concern.

Back in March 2022, initial estimates were that the city could do all of its Top 10 within about \$1.4-\$1.67 million and possibly explore tackling up to five more.

That's likely not going to happen now.

The Kendallville Auto Value had been identified early on as probably the most expensive project on the list due to its size, with estimates initially running about \$350,000 for that building. The Strand Theatre was also one of the more expensive projects, with original estimates of \$200,000 to \$250,000 for renovations to that building.

Neither got bids, but based on what happened with the other packages, one could expect those estimates are going to run way low.

As for the ones that did garner bids, all three were over budget, with two of the packages excessively so.

Bid Package 1 is severely over, with the initial estimate to do Love Me Two Times on Main, Jeny's Tacos and Kropp Insurance running \$190,000 to \$270,000, meaning the bid price is 162% over the initial high-end estimate.

Bid Package 2 was actually the closest, with estimates of \$230,000 to \$285,000 for Hosler Realty and the old post office, making that only, about 16% over.

And the Relaxation Station project in Bid Package 3 is also budget busted. Estimates for that work was \$150,000 to \$170,000, with the actual bid price more than twice that, 130% over the initial high-end estimate.

The city does have enough money to tackle the six buildings if it chooses to pay the hefty overruns it's facing against the original budget.

If it does, the city likely won't have much left over to tackle either Kendallville Auto Value or the Strand, especially since those two were the more expensive projects even before rising costs blasted the budget, much less additional buildings.

Because of the severe price hikes, too, Kendallville may also find owners dropping out if they can't or don't want to commit their 15% match. For example, the match required for the Relaxation Station renovation would now be nearly \$59,000, as opposed to around \$25,000 based on early estimates.

City leaders are scheduled to meet Thursday to pore over the bids and discuss next steps.

The Board of Works could award the project at its next meeting on Jan. 24, or may have to go back to the drawing board and consider alternatives.

DeKalb doesn't move on EDA

BY KATHRYN BASSETT
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AUBURN — The DeKalb County Council Tuesday declined to move forward with an initial step that must have been taken before tax abatement requests from two solar companies could be considered.

Thalassa Energy Project LLC and Sculpin Solar LLC each have submitted applications for tax phase-in on projects they hope to develop in DeKalb County.

However, before a tax abatement request can be considered by the council, the sites must be declared economic revitalization areas. The first step would be for the council to request its attorney, Donald Stuckey, to create a declaratory ERA resolution for its consideration.

The council delayed a decision on the initial step at its December meeting.

The issue came back for consideration at Tuesday's council meeting.

Councilman Robert Krafft made a motion to request Stuckey to prepare documents declaring the area an economic revitalization area.

"I'm not opposed to starting the process so we can make a vote 'yes' or 'no' on the revitalization, so this would be just a motion to get him (Stuckey) to draw it up and then we can vote it down or vote it up, either way," Krafft said.

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TAX: About 18,000 registered vehicles in county

FROM PAGE A1

That, he said, would increase revenue to about \$1.3 million a year.

According to Peters, there are approximately 18,000 vehicles registered in LaGrange County, as well as 4,600 trucks under 11,000 pounds, 4,600 motorcycles, and more than 500 trailers over 9,000 pounds.

The wheel tax is used to tax larger vehicles and raises about \$131,000 a year in LaGrange County. Peters suggested the council consider adopting a flat rate of \$80, it would increase that revenue stream to \$392,000 annually.

"It's not a great deal of money, but it would help you provide for some of those projects," he added.

Council members also talked with Tharon Morgan and Aaron Fugate, of the LaGrange County Highway Department about a comprehensive plan to start repairing LaGrange County roads.

The highway department engineer, working with a Fort Wayne civil engineering firm, has been taking a close look at LaGrange County's paved roads and has come up with a plan to start repairing some local roads, fixing those considered to be in the poorest condition first. That preliminary plan is estimated to cost \$11 million.

Last year, council members approved giving the highway department access to \$5.5 million in EDIT funds to pay for repairs on roads in the southwest and west sides of the county later this year. Monday, they started looking at a way to fund the remaining \$5.5 million needed and will look at taking that money from either the county's EDIT funds or its American Rescue Plan Act fund. Council will decide what funds to use at its February meeting.

Tinisha Weigelt, a highway department consultant with Butler, Fairman, and Seufert, a Civil Engineering firm in Fort Wayne, told the council members her organization is working to wrap up a comprehensive asset management plan for all county roads that can help the county make informed decisions about what roads to repair and how extensive those repairs need to be.

"We'll be able to give you the information you need to make data-driven decisions," she said.

Based on a survey of local roads conducted by her firm, Weigelt said 40% of the paved roads in LaGrange County were considered poor or below.

Council President Michael Strawser said while he dislikes raising taxes, the roads need to be repaired.

In other matters, LaGrange County attorney Kurt Bachman gave council members a final draft of a proposal that would increase the fees paid when filing for a tax abatement from \$1,000 to \$2,000. Bachman told the council the fee increase represents the real cost of researching and reporting back on an application for an abatement than the old fee, which had not been raised in more than 20 years. If an applicant asked for an abatement on both real and personal property, the filing fee will be raised to \$2,500.

Because Monday's meeting was the first meeting of the New Year, council members were first tasked with reorganizing. They voted to reappoint Strawser president and named Jim Young as vice president.

Monday just happened to be National Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, and Strawser and the council took a few minutes to salute local law enforcement officers.

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