

(For December, 2017)

## Around the City . . . . with City Manager David Thayer

In the year 2000 during consolidation, it was decided to create four voting precincts and have one councilperson represent each precinct to ensure that all voices in the new city would be heard fairly. Today, not only have we administratively integrated the three municipalities into one city, we have also identity-wise integrated the communities together ensuring equal consideration of citizens in all four corners of Iron River.

Council is currently deliberating amendments to the city charter that would create two voting precincts and have the four councilpersons elected citywide. We have reached that point in time where this is the right discussion to have for several reasons.

Interest in running for Council has waned in recent years to the point that I was worried if we would have anyone step up and run for office in the two open seats that were vacated due to retirement. In the last week before the filing deadline, one person from each precinct filed and subsequently was elected. If indeed the pool of candidates for the two seats was citywide, possibly more people may have considered running for office. We never want to get to the point where there is little interest in serving on the Council.

Elections are getting more expensive to conduct each year. Currently, it costs approximately \$4,000 each election. We are required to have 12 certified poll workers, 3 for each precinct, at each election. Iron River's population is 3,029. Michigan law states that a precinct can contain no more than 2,999 people. If we reduced our city to two voting precincts, we could substantially save money. More importantly, is the difficulty of identifying 12 certified workers for each election. For the recent election, at the last moment, a twelfth person agreed to

work that day. If we had two voting precincts, we would only have to recruit six certified workers; a more doable task.

Although I cannot find that it is required, I have requested that we hold a public hearing to discuss potential changes to our charter. That scheduled date is January 17, 2018 at 2:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers in city hall.

The amendment process starts with the Council, with a 3/5 vote of its members, they will adopt a resolution proposing the new charter language and setting an election date. Then, the amendments are sent to the Governor for approval and a copy of the statement of purpose of the proposed amendments is sent to the Attorney General for review and comment. Thereafter, the amendments are published and an election is held. In this instance, the election would be scheduled no sooner than May, but more likely in August, if all parties in the approval chain agree to the amendments.

If the charter is changed, the members selected at the November, 2017 election would serve their four year term that concludes on December 31, 2021. The other two seats those terms expires on December 31, 2019, would be filled at the November, 2019 election. The two incumbents, if they choose to run for re-election, and any challengers that live in the city, would compete for the two seats with the top two vote getters being sworn in. This is a solid proposition for the community to consider.

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