

County supervisors hear annual reports

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Friday, August 14, 2015 9:02 am

JEFFERSON — The Jefferson County Board of Supervisors looked back at a variety of projects this past year as it heard annual reports from the Highway, Fair Park, Land and Water Conservation and Parks Departments on Tuesday.

Each report was presented by the head of the respective department and highlighted the main expenditures, revenues and events or projects from 2014.

The Highway Department report was given by Bill Kern, the Jefferson County highway commissioner.

“Looking through our report this year, I came to the conclusion that we’re basically a \$10 million department,” Kern said. “We were just under this year and, as I look back over the reports from the last five years, that seems to be a number we’re hitting almost every single year.”

The 2013 year-end total revenue, grants and aids for the department was \$10,670,504.46.

The 2014 total expenditures were \$9,853,967.17, bringing total revenues for last year to \$816,537.29.

“So far in 2015, we’ve actually been running under budget,” Kern said. “It’s the first time in quite a while.”

Operating expenses for 2013 include, but were not limited to, local road and bridge aid costing \$138,311.58; county highway system maintenance costing \$1,339,791.48; county highway system road construction costing \$4,006,264.03; county highway system winter maintenance costing \$845,729.26; state highway system routine maintenance costing \$1,650,887.27; state highway system road and bridge construction costing \$151,145.35; other local roads maintenance costing \$352,581.52; and local road and bridge construction costing a total of \$178,597.79.

“I look at winter maintenance and every year, we’re going over budget,” Kern said. “It seems like we’re hitting more snow and more storms and. More storms has led to higher salt costs.”

This marked the seventh of the past eight years that the department has been over budget for winter maintenance.

“General maintenance (county highway system maintenance) is all the work we do on county highways outside of winter maintenance,” Kern said. “So it includes all the mowing and brushing, signing, shoulder repairs, pavement repairs, crack sealing and all that kind of stuff.”

The roughly \$1.3 million in general maintenance is below average.

“It’s pretty typical that if we’re above average in our winter maintenance, we’re going to be below average in our general maintenance,” Kern explained. “When we’re running over on our maintenance, we try to take any discretionary item out of our general maintenance that’s not necessary.”

Kern said that work the done for other departments, towns, villages and the state Department of Transportation (DOT) can be telling and is a large part of the budget.

The approximately \$1.8 million spent on the state highway systems is about average, Kern said. That cost includes winter and general maintenance and special projects for the DOT.

“Last year, we did about \$4 million worth of work on our county highway system,” Kern said. “It was all in basically three projects: on County Highways G, W and M.”

In the Highway G project, which was west of Jefferson, the road between U.S. Highway 18 and State Highway 89 was “pulverized and paved.”

Off Highway W is the new Highway Department facility.

“We actually did some work on that last year and are finishing up this year,” Kern said. “We still have a few things going on in the new facility as far as construction.”

The salt sheds basically are complete, but work such as paving and installation of a brine system that goes along with the salt shed is still under way. Kern also said that equipment was continuing to be brought in to the site.

He expects the work to be complete within the next six to eight weeks.

“Our large project for the year was on Highway M,” Kern said. “We did about four miles worth of construction work on that project last year. We hoped to get it all done last year but came up about a half a mile short and are finishing that project up this year.”

Kern said the goal going into the next year is to stay on pace with the Highway Departments projects.

Also Tuesday, Jefferson County Fair Park director David Diestler presented the Fair Park’s report.

“In 2014, the Fair Park had 233 days of the year we hosted an event,” Diestler said. “So basically, every weekend we had an event. The only weekends we didn’t were after Thanksgiving, Christmas and the first weekend in January.”

The Fair Park hosted 130 paid events, 82 4-H events and 27 interdepartmental events in 2014.

Diestler said that the Fair Park is looking into having multiple events going on during the same day and week.

“The Fair Park is involved in a lot of fundraising,” Diestler said. “It’s either through the Jefferson County Fair itself or we’ll have the chamber of commerce come in and they’ll take a percentage (of profits). We also have the car show, raise funds for the Lions Club, Rotary Club and then there’s Tomorrow’s Hope.”

Updates to the Fair Park include two new electrical peds to help with electrical demands from camping and fair, new gravel spread in the northwest parking lot and repainting of the Activity Center lobby. A new drag and water wagon, Bobcat VersaHandler and three flat screen televisions were purchased.

“The parking lot was getting worn down, so we fixed that,” Diestler said. “We added some televisions in the Activity Center because we’re doing some more advertising of the events going on at the fair and also people can advertise on the televisions — sponsors and businesses.”

Goals for the next year include expansion of camping areas, updating the electrical system, adding new pens, expanding in winter storage, increasing revenues through corporate partnerships and additional revenue streams, and developing consistent rental policies and fee structures.

The Jefferson County Land and Water Conservation Departments annual report was given by its director, Mark Watkins.

“The approval of the Land and Water Resource Management Plan by the state Land and Water Board took place on Aug. 4,” Watkins said. “That is our driving plan we have to put together once every 10 years, and halfway through the plan, apply for an extension for approval by the board.”

Approval means that the department is eligible for just over \$800,000 in staffing operations and grants over the next five years. A full plan rewrite will be required in 2021 for the following 10 years.

“We have a current participation level of 668 farms in the Farmland Preservation Program,” Watkins said. “It covers 110,435 acres. We have 100 percent of those farms under a nutrient management plan and we did not have any waste complaints in 2014 through this part of 2015.”

More than 200 site inspections were completed under the program, 13 new farms were added since January 2015 and \$828,263 worth of tax credits were returned to the landowners of Jefferson County.

Data on soil conservation was collected from nearly 500 locations with 780 active farming locations.

The findings showed that 86.7 percent of the cropped acreage was at or below tolerable soil loss; 40 percent of cropland was planted corn; 27 percent to soybeans; six percent to small grains; and 16 percent to hay. Approximately 61 percent of cropland was either not tilled, minimum tilled or had an alfalfa or hay crop.

“We’re also looking at some new rules for producers that are going to be participating in local, state and federal farm programs coming up in 2016,” Watkins said. “There’s going to be a tillage setback rule; we have to index for phosphorus and their processed wastewater handling.”

Watkins also spoke about grants and budgets, saying that much of the funding for the Land and Water Conservation Department comes from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection.

“We will be looking at a few new grant revenues that might be available near the end of 2016,” Watkins said. “We’ll start applying for those. We’ll be looking to increase non-metallic mining fees — it’s a slight increase and we haven’t increased those for the last 10 years.”

Joe Nehmer, director of the Jefferson County Parks Department, presented the final report.

“Use of the parks system is strong and growing,” Nehmer said. “We attribute a lot of that to our partnerships with the generous businesses in Jefferson County. We also find great support in the foundations in the county.”

The Parks Department is made up of 16 full- and part-time employees who oversee, manage and maintain approximately 971 acres at the 17 county parks, 31 miles of the Glacial River Trail and 182 miles of public snowmobile trails. Multiple grant applications were submitted over the year.

For the Interurban Recreation Trail, grants were submitted to We Energies, People for Biles, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Stewardship, Tyson Foods, Watertown and Oconomowoc Rotary Clubs and Private Foundation.

The DNR Stewardship, Tyson Foods and Private Foundation are pending notification. The Watertown and Oconomowoc Rotary Clubs awarded the department \$15,000.

Grant applications for the Watertown Outboarders went to the DNR Stewardship, which is pending notification, and the Quirk Foundation, which awarded them \$28,000.

On the Glacial River Trail, the trail was paved and completed from Rock County to Dodge County; parking lot and landscaping at the Rock/Jefferson County line was completed; a parking lot and connector trail was installed at County Highway W in Jefferson; and an Eagle Scout project of planting trees and installation of a bench was completed.

At Carlin Weld County Park, a nine-hole disc golf course is nearing completion. At Pohlmann Park, a new playground and benches were installed by volunteers and paid for, in part, through donations by a local Eagle Scout candidate.

At the Rock River County Park, the School District of Johnson Creek has been utilizing the park for education purposes. There were improvements to the handicapped-accessible pier and boat launch, planned in part due to a \$25,000 contribution from the former Watertown Outboarders.