



Garretson School Board talks new bus and food service

Garrick Moritz,
Gazette editor

The Garretson School Board met in regular session on March 11, 2019. This meeting was mostly about policy issues as well as trying to get the best deal possible on both food service and the purchase of a new bus.

The board first approved their consent agenda, granting requested vacation days to Tim Hughes and Kari Stoltenberg. They also accepted the resignation for Andrew Ter Wee as Oral Interp instructor and Angela Bly as junior high volleyball coach with the contingency that they would continue in the role until someone was hired to replace them.

There was no old business and no conflicts of interest to report so the board moved on to promoting their school



Supt. Guy Johnson presents the March PRIDE award to Sonya Swanson, Special Aide Paraprofessional.

PRIDE award.

This month the award was given to Sonya Swanson, Special Aide Paraprofessional. Supt. Guy Johnson read two glowing nomination letters to the board, recognizing her for her patience, kindness and professionalism both with her students and her fellow staff

members.

Next the board talked about a Request for Proposals (RFP) regarding the school's contracted lunch services. The school has contracted food services to a private company for the last five years in the form of Lunchtime Solutions.

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Garretson City Council has equalization meeting

Carrie Moritz, Garretson Gazette

The Equalization Meeting for the City of Garretson was held on March 18, 2019 at City Hall. Two owners had filed petitions with the City to reduce or change their property tax values.

After the Pledge of Allegiance and roll call (Mayor Greg Beaner was unable to attend and council member Bill Hoskins stood in his role, and School Board member Rachel Hanisch attended as a representative of the Garretson School District), the council began with petitioner Art Jones.

He had noted a 16% increase in the assessment of his building value from 2018, bringing it from \$183,000 to \$213,288. He shared that he had appealed the year prior, as his value had gone from \$162,290 to \$204,059. In 2018, the council had approved a decrease in assessed value down to \$183,000. The council reminded Jones that each year, the county reverts back to the initial assessed value, and if that was taken into account, the jump was not quite so high. The City of Garretson, as a whole, saw property value increases of 4% across the board. City Finance Officer Anna Uhl pointed out that Garretson's increase was the lowest in the area, as most of the small towns had seen an increase of 5-6%. Jones was displeased with the overall increases above the cost of living and stated as such, stating this was unfair to property owners who

continued to see increases in taxed amounts but no increases in infrastructure and benefits from taxes across the state.

After some questions about any potential remodeling that had occurred and re-affirming the size of his finished square footage, council member Dave Bonte proposed placing the value of the building at \$209,000 in order to bring the assessment to a better compromise. Council member Dwayne "Jake" Jacobson seconded, and the council approved the proposal. The newly assessed value will then be sent to the county for final approval.

Next, the council moved to petitioner Nicole Higgins, who had filed with the statement that values were too high. She had noted in her research that the values for their building and land were higher than any of her neighbors, even those of the two largest landowners in the area.

Upon comparison, the council found that her building assessment of \$509,223 was comparable to other houses in the area, and it was receiving a \$30,000 tax break due to a listed renewable energy source. However, she was being assessed at \$2.09 a square foot for land, and the two largest landowners nearby, Nordstrom's and Petrick's, were being assessed at \$1.10 a square foot. Council member Richelle Hofer questioned why their values had not increased when the market value

of the neighborhood had increased substantially, but there were no answers. The council did note that the county does set assessment levels initially when land is purchased by using the purchase value, but that there must have been an oversight. After council member Bonte proposed potentially splitting the difference between 2017 and 2018 total assessed values, decreasing the value by \$8000, the council discussed potentially having the issue deferred to the county without a recommendation. This could do one of two things: either call attention to undervalued properties, or negotiate a better price for the Higgins' property.

After council member Hoskins pointed out that if the local board recommends a value then it carries more weight, council member Hofer then made a final proposal of bringing the land valuation closer to the \$1.10 a square foot. It was seconded, and the council passed the recommendation with one nay vote from council member Bonte, who stated that bringing values down that far set a bad precedent. Uhl then spoke with Higgins, stating that the county may not accept the recommendation, but that they would let Higgins know via letter.

The council then voted to adjourn. The next equalization meeting will likely be held the third Monday in March 2020, watch the Gazette for further details.



FFA Advisor Alysha Kientopf with a new lightcart planter from a USDA Cohort grant. The FFA has been very busy this year.

FFA in the public eye, with new cool tools and student innovations

The Gazette sat down with FFA Advisor Alysha Kientopf this past Monday to recap some of the awesome success that the program has enjoyed lately.

"First of all, I want to say that it's all about the students," she said. "They did this! It was their ideas, and their successes that deserve recognition. My job is simple, it's to give them the support they need to succeed."

This year was the first year the students had tried anything like the FFA Meals of Hope program.

"This was brand new, and totally student driven," Kientopf said. "They came to me with this. They wanted to do this, and even had a workable plan to make it happen. So my job was simple, do everything I could to make it happen. We did it, and we were super successful. Seventy-eight volunteers prepared more than 53 thousand meals. We made the nightly news on both KELO and KSFY! Great exposure for our Chapter, for our School and for our community! To say I'm super proud of our students just doesn't capture the feeling. I am humbled and awed by them, and grateful to all the volunteers who made it possible."

Though the blood drive had to be postponed because of bad weather that Wednesday, the new date for the event will be Thursday, March 28 from 7:30 am to 10:30 am and 12:00 pm to 2:30 pm at Garretson High School.

The FFA petting zoo, as always, was super popular, and the FFA's pancake breakfast was also a solid success. "We like the Legion and the Legion likes us," she said. "We're pretty certain that we'll host the event there in the future. It's easily accessible and the setup and take-down is easy, and we don't have to worry about conflicting with other events at the school. The Legion is a great community partner for our FFA chapter."

Now that the hectic activity of FFA Week has died down a bit, Kientopf wanted to share with our readers several other interesting

items going on in her classroom and shop.

First of all, is for her prospective welders.

"I'll be the first to admit that I'm not strong in this area, and we have a lot of students that are, with some experience already," she said. "But we have other students who are not ready to work with live electricity and open flames. Hence we've got stations for six virtual welding programs. They aren't perfect, and Mr. Matt Shrank (technology coordinator) has been helping us work out the kinks, but they're an exciting hands-on learning tool that can help our students gain practice skills outside of coursework."

These welding simulators came from a Perkins Resource Grant to augment shop classes in schools. Also because of a partnership with a Briggs & Stratton curriculum, our students get access to 10 Briggs & Stratton engines, with all the textbooks and gadgets that go with them. In the course work, students will be taking them apart piece by piece, seeing how they tick, and putting them back together.

Through a partnership with Harbor Freight, the shop has gotten new or new-to-us tools, updating or replacing old tools; or adding new tools the shop has never had before. With the greenhouse heater currently down, ag experiments have been difficult as well, but because of a USDA cohort grant they've gotten both a light cart and new fish tanks to do planting and water experiments.

In short, it's a good time to be in the FFA program.

"The biggest thing I've emphasized to the students since I started is that this is their program, they choose what direction they want to take," Kientopf said. "All I ask is that they learn both responsibility and respect, and the rest just follows through from there naturally. They might not know or understand all the technical and logistical details, but that's what they're here for. To learn by doing, and trying new things."