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166TH YEAR

Henry County taking a look at future of townships

Will merging produce any benefits?

BY LISA HAMMER
rlhammer15@gmail.com

The Henry County Board's executive committee on Saturday is expected to discuss the possibility of consolidating some of the 24 townships within the county.

Board chairman Roger Gradert raised the subject in August, after Gov. Bruce Rauner signed a bill authorizing referendums on either dissolving or consolidating township government. According to the law going into effect Jan. 1, 2018, a referendum to consolidate townships would be approved by a simple majority of voters in each township.

Townships in Henry County are responsible for 1,034 miles of roads, with Colona and Hanna having the fewest, 31 miles each, and Clover Township having the most, 55. Townships also provide general assistance for residents in need and provide assessors to evaluate property's value for real estate tax purposes.

Earlier laws provided that the same assessor could serve multiple townships, which Henry County residents used over the years to combine 14 townships into just 5 assessment districts.

Whether to continue the trend is the issue. Board member Kippy Breeden, chair of the executive committee, said much remains to be discussed. Ms. Breeden, who is married to Geneseo township supervisor Mark Breeden, said, "Personally I don't think the county should be involved in this.

This is a township issue." She said questions about how many townships they would want to see combined, or whether how to combine would be up to the townships. "We don't have that ironed out yet," she said.

Mr. Gradert, who lives in rural Andover Township, said he thinks consolidated townships could possibly get by with smaller equipment and less of it. "Every township has a backhoe. Could two get by with one?"

Mr. Gradert said townships haven't built roads in years, but culvert replacement is a pressing need for many and might be less expensive after consolidation. He also said it's harder to find road crews to work for a part-time salary of \$14,000.

Mr. Gradert would like to see the topic voted on, to find out what more people think.

"It's one way we can get a voice from the public and not just the administration," he said. "We have the ability to speak up; we don't have to look to the state to fix our problems.

A smattering of opinions solicited from various township supervisors were mostly against consolidation.

Colona township supervisor Joe Swan, however, said he would be "happy" to see township consolidation, and he hasn't heard a good argument why townships shouldn't.

"It can be done, and it should be done," he said.

Mr. Swan notes if four townships were combined, there would be one audit instead of four; one road commissioner instead of four and four trustees instead of 16.

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RI firefighters save man from burning home



Meg McLaughlin / mmclaughlin@qconline.com

Lester Mark Lewis, 58, left, watches firefighters battle flames inside his home at 1104 18 1/2 St. on Thursday in Rock Island. Crews responded to the home at 4:10 p.m. and were able to rescue Mr. Lewis from the roof. No other occupants were inside the home at the time of the fire. The cause of the fire is under investigation.

President says enough hurricane help

Trump lashes out at PR as House passes aid package

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump lashed out at hurricane-devastated Puerto Rico on Thursday, insisting in tweets that the federal government can't keep sending help "forever" and suggesting the U.S. territory was to blame for its financial struggles.

His broadsides triggered an outcry from Democrats in Washington and officials on the island, which has been reeling since Hurricane Maria struck three weeks ago, leaving death and destruction in an unparalleled humanitarian crisis.

San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulin Cruz, with whom Trump has had a running war of words, tweeted that the president's comments were "unbecoming" to a



Associated Press

In a series of tweets, President Donald Trump said FEMA and the military can't stay in Puerto Rico "forever." He added, "electric and all infrastructure was disaster before hurricanes." He blamed Puerto Rico for its looming financial crisis and "a total lack of accountability."

commander in chief and "seem more to come from a 'Hater in Chief.'"

"Mr. President, you

seem to want to disregard the moral imperative that your administration has been unable to fulfill," the

mayor said in a statement.

The debate played out as the House passed, on a sweeping 353-69 vote, a \$36.5 billion disaster aid package that includes assistance for Puerto Rico's financially-strapped government. House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said the government needs to ensure that Puerto Rico can "begin to stand on its own two feet" and said the U.S. has "got to do more to help Puerto Rico rebuild its own economy."

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders praised the House action Thursday night and promised the administration "will continue to work with Congress to provide the resources necessary to recover and rebuild from the hurricanes" and the wildfires in California.

Forty-five deaths in Puerto Rico have been blamed on Maria, about 85 percent of Puerto Rico residents still lack electricity and the government says it hopes to have electricity restored completely by March.

River conference provides overview of Mississippi

Climate, floodplains, funding at forefront

BY ANTHONY WATT
awatt@qconline.com

MOLINE — Education about the Mississippi River and its ways was a big part of the final conversation as this year's Upper Mississippi River Conference

wrapped up Thursday.

The conference, in its second year, is designed to bring together nonprofits, utilities, scientists, government officials and other stakeholders to find ways to improve the Mississippi River. Areas of focus include infrastructure, tourism and ecological health. River Action, Western Illinois University, Exelon and Stanley Consultants were the conference sponsors this year. The event was Wednesday and Thursday at the TaxSlayer Center, Moline.

"We need to let people know about the floodplain," Kathy Wine, executive director of River Action, said during the final hour of the event, which included a broad overview discussion of the conference's topics.

Providing river education is important for elected officials dealing with a flood mitigation project, Anthony Heddlesten, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said.

"You need to get everybody on the same page," he said.

For members of the public, knowing where and how a river floods is important for protecting themselves and their property, even if there are levees and other flood defenses.

It takes time to get flood insurance, he said as an example. Leaving such protections until an imminent flooding threat could mean not getting the coverage in time.

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WEATHER

High: **73** Low: **63**
Chance of thunderstorm.
South wind 5 mph.
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