

## Community News

**FREDONIA** With incumbents bowing out, April election to shake up village. **5B**

**SAUKVILLE** Ozaukee Central fire chief reassures concerned residents. **5B**

**GRAFTON** Chick-fil-A project delayed but chicken is still coming to Grafton. **6B**

**BELGIUM** Town not alone in dealing with confusion over short-term rentals. **8B**

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## INSIDE:

Sigwart opts not to run in Port;

Uribe Harbeck

challenges Delorit

for village

president seat

in Grafton.

Inside this section



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Section B

# Massive data centers planned for Port

■ Complex built on 1,900 acres of town land annexed into city would cost billions, use more than a gigawatt of power

By KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM  
Ozaukee Press staff

Plans for a sprawling data center complex that would cost billions of dollars to develop, requires a gigawatt or more of power to run and is proposed to be built on roughly 2,000 acres in the Town of Port Washington — land that would be annexed to the City of Port — were presented to the Common Council Tuesday night.

The complex, which would double the city's valuation, will likely consist of multiple large buildings of one to three stories, the number of which would be determined by the amount of power available, and will be phased in over the next five to eight years, Aaron Bilyeu, chief development officer for Cloverleaf Infrastructure, told Ozaukee Press in an interview Monday. Each building would require an investment of about a billion dollars, he said.

The amount of energy needed would be so large that We Energies will build substations on the site, Bilyeu said.

A gigawatt is enough energy to power about 750,000 houses.

The complex would create a large number of jobs during construction, Bilyeu said, and between 50 and 100 permanent jobs per building. These jobs, he said, would be filled by skilled workers who are not required to have a college degree.

Cloverleaf has an aggressive timeline for the complex. Within the next 30 to 60 days, plans for the complex will be submitted to the city, Bilyeu said, and construction could begin this fall, with completion of the first phase in the next three years.

The city could begin the process of annexing the land in the next 1-1/2 to two months, Port Mayor Ted Neitzke said.

See **Data centers** on page 2B



THE QTS PHOENIX 2 complex in Arizona provides an example of modern data center design, but at 85 acres, the campus will likely be significantly smaller than the one planned for Port Washington, where as many as 2,000 acres of town land are reportedly under contract to be purchased for the data center complex. And while QTS advertises a 280 megawatt capacity, the Port campus would have a capacity of more than a gigawatt.

**BELGIUM** historian and author Kevin Wester visited St. Francis Borgia Catholic Church in Cedarburg this week to see a handful of relics purchased from the shuttered St. Mary's Church in Lake Church that have been given new life. St. Francis Borgia, which recently completed a renovation project of its south church, is using three altars, the statues of saints Peter and Paul that flank Jesus (center) and a tabernacle, which is believed to weigh about 1,800 pounds. The items were kept in storage until St. Francis Borgia recently placed them in the church.

Photo by Sam Arendt



## St. Mary's altars, tabernacle live on

■ Unbeknownst to many, 139-year-old icons from shuttered Town of Belgium church were saved, restored and now grace St. Francis Borgia in Cedarburg

By MITCH MAERSCH  
Ozaukee Press Staff

It turns out the bells of St. Mary's weren't the only elements saved from the Lake Church Catholic church.

Three altars, statues of saints Peter and Paul and a tabernacle were removed as well and have found a new home not far away.

St. Francis Borgia in Cedarburg bought the items in 2021 and kept them in storage until this year.

The church recently completed a multi-year restoration project of its south church that had the Catholic artifacts make their way from their northern Ozaukee County home with Luxembourg roots 20 miles south to a church founded by Jesuits in an area of Irish and German heritage.

St. Francis Borgia Director of Administrative Services Leif Nygaard said St. Francis Borgia Catholic School maintenance worker Gary Fatla made the connection to buy the items. Fatla lives

in Fredonia and attends Divine Savior Church.

The items, although they are 139 years old, still provided a surprise. St. Francis Borgia's plan was to paint the altars, but something interesting was found when some of the old paint was stripped away.

Original gold mosaics dating to 1885 revealed themselves.

"It's really cool that the mosaics were found. I never knew they were there,"  
See **Altars** on page 8B

## Possible sites for Saukville school are all in town

■ Land would have to be annexed into village if \$59.4M referendum is OK'd

By BILL SCHANEN IV  
Ozaukee Press staff

All three sites being considered for a new Saukville Elementary School are in the Town of Saukville and would have to be annexed into the village, Supt. Michael McMahon said in an interview Monday before the Port Washington-Saukville School Board met in closed session to develop a negotiating strategy for the land purchase.

The land deal is contingent on the approval of a \$59.4 million referendum in April, which also includes money for maintenance projects throughout the district, but school officials want to negotiate an offer to purchase one of the parcels prior to that so voters know before the election where the school would be built, McMahon said.

"Hopefully we'll have an accepted offer to purchase pending approval of our referendum," he said.

The district is working with a real estate agent as well as Bray Architects, the firm that conducted a facilities study for the district and would design the school, to find a site. It has identified a "priority" location but is still considering two additional parcels, McMahon, who declined to identify the potential school sites to protect the district's negotiating position, said.

See **School** on page 4B

# School: 10 to 15 acres is 'sweet spot' for district

FROM PAGE 1B

All three sites are between 10 and 15 acres, a size Bray has identified as optimal for an elementary school, McMahon said.

"We asked Bray about the size and they told us they're working on a school in La Crosse on less than two acres but they prefer 10 to 15 acres so you can design proper drop-off and pick-up areas and playgrounds," he said. "So that 10 to 15 acres is the sweet spot for us."

Construction of a new school on what is currently town land could mean a departure from the district's neighborhood school concept. All of its schools, including the current Saukville Elementary School on Mill Street, are in residential areas served by sidewalks, which means many students live near their schools and can walk or bike to them safely.

Access to the new school as well as the cost the district would incur if it has to bus additional students are considerations in the site selection process, McMahon said.

"We know we have to be mindful of busing costs, and we want kids to have that local school feel," he said. "It's part of the equation, although not necessarily the top priority."

The construction of a new Saukville Elementary School on a new site is estimated to cost \$45.8 million, which includes the cost of the land, and is considered the most important part of what will be the district's first referendum since 2015, when voters approved borrowing \$49.4 million for the renovation of Port Washington High School and an addition to Dunwiddie Elementary School.

The nearly 70-year-old building, which last underwent a major renovation in 1989, is in need of significant maintenance, and expanding it to accommodate what administrators believe will be an increasing number of students is impractical because it sits in a floodplain and is flanked by wetlands, according to Bray Architects.

The increasing enrollment projection, which comes at a time when the number of students in the district is shrinking, is based on a study conducted by the district and a local real estate firm that predicts 1,000 homes for families that have children will be built within the School District during the next five years.

But School Board member Brian Stevens, who last month voted against putting the referendum on the April ballot, said he believes the study exaggerates the number of children who will live in those homes.

"It sounds like they (the projections) were based on dated figures from the '70s and '80s," he said. "We all know the population has been declining. Birth rates have been declining. It peaked in 2017 and dropped about 20%, so I have a little bit of a concern with the projected new growth we would see at any school."

Beyond its size, Saukville Elementary School faces a host of challenges that range from its aging systems to its design.

"We cannot sustain that building any longer with the equipment that is there," Director of Business Services and Human Resources Mel Nettesheim said last month.

School officials also seem to be in-

creasingly concerned that the so-called open-concept school, which does not have traditional classrooms, although dividers have been used as makeshift walls over the years, is contributing to the challenges there. Saukville Elementary School's state report card scores are considerably lower than those of its counterparts in the district and significantly more students open enroll out of the school than they do from either Dunwiddie or Lincoln elementary schools.

"I've heard from so many parents that they would never send their kids there because of the open concept," Stephanie Trigsted, who represents the Village of Saukville on the board, said.

The district initially proposed a \$66.7 million referendum but pared the cost to \$59.4 million in an effort to shore up support for the new school and the most critical maintenance work in light of an October survey of district residents that projected a narrow approval margin that was within the margin of error as well as concerns about significant City of Port Washington tax increases.

"We wanted to listen to community members who spoke to some of the challenges of tax increases outside the School District," McMahon said.

In addition to the new school, the district had planned to spend \$20.9 million on major maintenance projects at its other schools to address heating and cooling systems, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and security as well as window and roof replacement, new playgrounds and emergency generators.

But the referendum question approved by the board last month reflects a \$7.3 million cut to maintenance spending at Thomas Jefferson Middle School, a move that officials said makes sense because the school is slated for major renovations or replacement in the relatively near future. The only work that would be done at the middle school under the new plan is the replacement of its roof, which has been blamed for recent flooding.

Approval of the referendum will allow the district to catch up on deferred maintenance, and school officials have pledged to create a fully funded, 10-year maintenance plan to wean the district from its reliance on referendums to care for its facilities.

"We would be starting with a clean slate so we don't have to come back (to voters) for maintenance," School Board President Sara McCutcheon said last month.

Borrowing \$59.4 million is estimated to increase the school property tax rate by 26 cents per \$1,000 of equalized value, an amount that would cost the owner of a \$300,000 home an additional \$78 in taxes annually.

## City: Mayor says plan for data center complex is attractive

FROM PAGE 2B

going to incur any costs as we explore (the data center concept)."

It was an agreement, he said, Cloverleaf approved before the closed session.

Mayor Ted Neitzke said, "We will not explore this at a cost to the taxpayers. This will not cost the City of Port Washington a dime."

The closed session, which lasted about 1-1/2 hours, was held so aldermen could discuss negotiation strategies as the city works to annex land for a proposed data center and strategies regarding the predevelopment agreement.

Neitzke said Tuesday's "work session" of the Common Council, which preceded the closed session, was the first time officials had a public discussion of the data center concept, adding there will be more to come.

"We're at step one of maybe 1,000," he said.

The concept, he said, is attractive for the city because it will help reduce the tax burden on homeowners, who currently shoulder a disproportionate share of the tax burden.

Residential properties make up about 70% of the city's valuation, Neitzke said, while commercial properties constitute 18.25% of the valuation and manufacturing 2.3%.

"We have to be strategic in finding ways to spread that tax burden," Neitzke said.

A data center campus, he said, not only fills a need for computing power, it is also relatively low impact.

"We don't want invasive traffic. We don't want to have to redo our interstates. We don't want pollution. We don't want smokestacks and semis running all of the time," he said.

Cloverleaf Chief Development Officer Aaron Bilyeu presented rough plans for the data center complex, answering aldermen's questions and common concerns.

The presentation was given before a standing-room-only crowd, with only two residents commenting on the plan.

Pat Morrissey, 120 Dodge St., told aldermen that while she appreciated the session, rumors that have been spreading for weeks about the proposed development have eroded public trust.

"The secrets up until tonight that you hold keep the public in the dark about the economic and environmental risks of these projects," she said.

"How do you know if this is in our best interest? Why is the City of Port Washington so urgently pressing this matter?"

Neitzke said the city will take residents' questions about the data center and post the answers on a website it is developing, along with Tuesday's presentation. Questions can be posted at economicdev@portwashingtonwi.gov.



## Kicking off the new year with a chilly polar plunge

A crowd of New Year's revelers kicked off 2025 last week with a celebration on Port Washington's south beach — some finding the courage to take a polar bear plunge into Lake Michigan and others partaking in an al fresco Champagne toast. Despite the fact the water temperature was 38 degrees, the plunge was cold with air temperatures in the 20s and a wicked wind making it feel even colder.

Photos by Sam Arendt

# Sigwart opts not to run for re-election

By KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM  
Ozaukee Press staff

The slate of candidates seeking election to the Port Washington Common Council won't be set until Friday since Ald. John Sigwart did not submit nomination papers by Tuesday's deadline, nor did he submit noncandidacy papers.

That automatically extends the deadline for candidates to file nomination papers for the city's 7th District seat until 5 p.m. Jan. 10.

Incumbents Deb Postl, Mike Gasper and

Jonathan Pleitner are seeking re-election to their seats representing the city's 1st, 3rd and 5th districts, respectively, and retired Ozaukee County Clerk of Courts Mary Lou Miller submitted nomination papers for the 7th District seat now held by Sigwart.

Sigwart said he decided not to submit his nomination papers around noon Tuesday, citing his health, family issues and stress given his relationship with Mayor Ted Neitzke.

"I did struggle with the decision," he

said. "But I really don't think I'd have the energy to do justice to my constituents."

Town of Port Washington Chairman Mike Didier is unopposed in the spring election but there will be a race for town supervisor.

Incumbent supervisors Gary Schlenvogt and Greg Welton are seeking re-election and Melissa Schlenvogt Alexander, a member of the Plan Commission, is also seeking a seat on the board.

The general election will be held on Tuesday, April 1.

# Town: Data center complex worries residents

FROM PAGE 2B

to say about annexations and little power to fight them.

"We lose land to annexation every year," he said, adding the state requires cities to compensate for annexations by reimbursing towns for the taxes they lose for five years.

Didier said he, like many residents, had questions but few answers about the proposed project.

Residents raised questions about the amount of power and water that the proposed complex would use and the impact on their properties and the area in general.

"All these things need to be discussed as a community prior to the Town Board giving an answer to the city," one woman said.

As the board prepared to go into closed session, one woman told the members, "It

seems like you're going into closed session prematurely. You don't know what the public wants the conditions (to amend the border agreement) to be."

But when Didier asked those attending what they would seek, no one responded.

Didier said after the closed session that it's "very possible" the board will schedule a meeting on the data center proposal before its next regular meeting on Feb. 3.