

Potential development on horizon for S. Beloit

By Clint Wolf cwolf@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Thursday, October 23, 2014 4:00 pm

Three and a half years ago the newly elected South Beloit City Council faced numerous challenges.

They faced a \$146,000 budget deficit. They had to continue work on a sanitary sewer line repair project that so far has cost \$888,000. There was about \$500,000 owed in delinquent sewer bills. And, City Park was in bad need of repair and renewal after floods damaged the park.

But, hard decisions were made and the city is looking at some potential for development in the future.

Hendricks Commercial Properties is spearheading a \$50 million business development on Willowbrook Road called Ironworks At Willowbrook with a Meijer store as the main anchor and other retail businesses interested in the development.

The Garden Hotel, formerly the South Beloit Inn, is scheduled to open by the end of the year and it already is booking wedding receptions and other events.

These and other factors were outlined during the South Beloit State of the City Address held Wednesday. The address was hosted by the South Beloit Lions Club at the South Beloit American Legion Hall.

Alice Schoonover, who has served as mayor for the past four months after the unexpected passing of Mayor Michael Duffy, said the challenges were many when she and the other council members first took office.

She acknowledged some of the decisions the council made were not popular with some people, but the choices before the council all were hard choices. They had to lay off people. They had to raise sewer fees and garbage collection fees. And they had to aggressively pursue those who owed the city money.

“Because of these decisions, we put the city on the right track,” Schoonover said.

And she said more has to be done to continue moving the city in a positive direction.

“We have to reduce the tax burden on residents and increase job opportunities,” she said.

The city now is looking to establish a TIF District in the city’s main corridor of Gardner Street and Blackhawk Boulevard to promote development in the city’s core.

She said she encourages input from residents on issues facing the city and she has been happy to serve the people.

“I’m so proud to have served as your mayor over the last few months,” Schoonover said.

Council member Linda Chambers said the first job she faced as public safety commissioner was to begin the search for a new police chief. After contracting a search firm, a successful candidate was found and Police Chief Dean Stiegemeier has served as chief since 2011. She now serves as finance commissioner with her job being to make sure the city is financially sound.

Sonya Baden, who joined the council three months ago as parks and public property commissioner, said the city is in the process of repairing and improving several structures in City Park. Roof replacement and painting projects are underway in the park and other improvements are expected to be complete by the end of the year.

She said the late Mayor Duffy would be proud of the accomplishments of the city in the past few months. She recalled thinking when she heard the mayor had passed away, “what are we going to do now?”

“I guess what he left behind was his inspiration,” Baden said.

Council member John LaMendola, who started as parks and public property commissioner and now is public safety commissioner, reminded the audience that he and the other council members had to step into their positions not really knowing what to expect.

“We came into this job brand spanking new,” LaMendola said. “We had a new city clerk, a new city attorney and a new Public Works Superintendent. There was no transitional period for any of us. But, we accomplished a lot coming in on a lot of negatives.”