



Photo by Nancy McGuire
BOATLOAD OF BLOOMS—Participants in the 2008 Nome Garden Tour enjoy the bounty of flowers in Peggy and Chuck Fagerstrom's front yard Sunday. For more, see page 24.

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Photo by Diana Haecker
YUMMY—First-grader Kenneth Hafner thoroughly enjoyed the first bite of his pilot bread with ketchup and sausage for lunch on the first day of school Monday. Students from first to 12th grades hit the books again this week, while kindergarteners and preschoolers are scheduled to return to class next week.

Explosives, hazardous materials moving thru Nome spurs concern

By Diana Haecker

At the tail end of the monthly Local Emergency Planning Commission meeting, members touched on an explosive topic, complaining about the lack of reporting when hazardous materials and explosives are trucked through town.

The complaint centered on loads of explosive components coming off the barge and being trucked to the Rock Creek mine while LEPC members were not aware of the transports.

"Emergency services should know and be informed when hazardous materials are mobile in town," said Nome Volunteer Ambulance Department

Chief Charlie Lean.

Coast Guard regulations require the presence of five firefighters and firefighting equipment when explosives are offloaded from barges at Nome's docks, and that's the only time local emergency services are notified, according to LEPC members. Matt Johnson, Nome Volunteer Fire Department Chief, said that he wasn't notified until five hours before the offloading took place and had to sit at the dock until midnight. Once the blasting agents, detonators and ammonium nitrate are loaded and trucked off the dock, they're on

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Just as temps drop, electric rates to rise

By Sandra L. Medearis

Electric power rates are going up a nickel in tandem with more expensive fuel being poured into utility generators. That takes the cost of a kilowatt from 34 cents to about 39 cents from a higher fuel surcharge.

"The fuel surcharge should be right at 18 cents. The current surcharge is 13 cents, established in August of 2006," Nome's utility manager, John Handeland, said.

But there is good news, he said. The state would offset part of the increase. Rural utilities with higher operation costs receive help for customers from the state's Power Cost Equalization program. This year, the Legislature raised the PCE subsidy from 15.63

cents to 18.2 cents per kWh based on higher utility operation costs.

That means that beginning with the next utility bill for residential customers, folks will be paying only 2 cents more, or around 21 cents per kWh. That's \$10 on a monthly use of 500 kWh. NJUS board members voted unanimously to raise the charge.

I think it is unfortunate we are in this quandary, but everyone else is, too," NJUS board member Fred Moody said.

Board member Berda Willson, reluctant as others to raise the price, asked if the increase could maybe wait for another look at the financial

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Council approves master plan proposal for Nome Rec Center

By Laurie McNicholas

The Nome Common Council unanimously approved a proposal from North-Wind Architects to develop a master plan for the Nome Recreation Center for \$71,828 at a meeting Monday.

Last year the City received a \$1.5 million grant from the state for repairs to the facility. On Aug. 1 the Council reappropriated a 2007 Community Benefit Share distribution of \$100,000 from Norton Sound Economic Development Corp. to fund the master plan.

A condition assessment and energy analysis of the facility will be included in the master

plan, as will concept designs for roof and wall improvements, and electrical and mechanical system upgrades based on the energy analysis. The architects will provide concept designs for converting the bowling alley into usable spaces and for a new covered skating rink on the Rec Center premises. A phasing plan for implementing these projects will be included.

The City has completed site preparation for paving a skateboard park on the Rec Center grounds, and paving is scheduled near the end of the season, reported Interim City Manager Pete Hallgren.

Residences due for abatement

Nome Police Chief Paul Burke updated the Council on the condition of two residences under consideration for formal abatement because informal efforts by the City to resolve safety problems and health hazards at the residences have failed. Burke reported no change at the Kakik residence at 610 W. Fourth Ave., which has been sealed. The structure was sealed after City Building Inspector Pat Hahn received letters in May from Burke, Ambulance Chief Charlie Lean and Fire Chief Matt Johnson describing health and safety hazards at the residence.

Burke said police officers had checked the

Davis residence at 205 W. Fifth Ave. twice in June, once in July and had received a call for service in early August. At that time an officer reported conditions inside were much worse with eight buckets containing fecal material in rooms, Burke said. Minimal cleanup had been done outside the house, he added.

On May 27 a letter from the city demanding that health hazards be removed from the premises of the Davis residence within five days and disposed of at the Sewage Treatment Plant was hand-delivered to occupants of the resi-

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• Explosives

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their own, said Johnson.

"Nome wants to know when [hazardous materials] or explosives are mobile through town," said LEPC chair Pat Hahn. "It's not just a matter of courtesy but a matter of public safety." Hahn said that while the explosives being off-loaded and trucked to Rock Creek might not cause a direct threat to town, "...an act of sabotage could be very harmful. If detonated, one of these containers would be enough to level the town."

Nome Police Chief Paul Burke agreed that the likelihood of the ammonium nitrate exploding by itself is slim, but also added that the city has no regulations on the books to enforce or require reporting of mobile hazardous materials or explosives.

On a state level, there are no reporting requirements, as mining operations are specifically exempt from the so-called Tier 2 reporting by the Alaska State Emergency Response Commission (SERC). Other entities are required to submit forms to provide state and local officials, and the public, with specific information on hazardous materials and explosives present at facilities. The Rock Creek gold mine is exempt from these requirements, despite being the largest importer of chemicals and explosives to the area.

The mine is under the jurisdiction of the federal Mining Safety and Health Administration. When asked whether MSHA has regulations in place to disclose to the public which chemicals or explosives are transported via public roadways and what's stored onsite, Matthew Faraci, MSHA spokesperson wrote in an email from Washington, D.C., "The Mine Safety and Health Administration has no regulations requiring notification to civilians of shipments or storage of hazardous chemicals or explosives through or in a town or over a public roadway. Storage and/or shipment of explosives or hazardous chemicals on mine sites are covered by MSHA's explosives or HazCom regulations."

Former emergency coordinator for the city Charlene Saclamana pointed out the flaw last year at a SERC meeting, but according to Ambulance Chief Lean, nothing has happened to address the gap. Public information officer Jeremy Zidek with the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, SERC's umbrella agency, acknowledged the ambiguity and suggested that the LEPC could make a request to the Alaska Department of Law to see if there are state laws that require reporting for some chemicals in unincorporated areas.

With no reporting requirements from local, state or federal agencies, for now, the transports fall through the cracks of oversight and rely on

goodwill and voluntary reporting. All regulations from MSHA and U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms are followed for storage and transport, said NovaGold's Nome Operations general manager Jim Mallory in an email to *The Nome Nugget*.

Asked about the Tier II reporting, Mallory said, "I understand a summary was reported for last year, and we are looking into the information required to update a new summary." Mallory described the process of the transport and storage of hazardous materials and explosives, saying that the containers stay at the port until the Coast Guard releases them to NovaGold. "At that time we will request permits to have it moved. Only after the responsible person has signed and checked all sealed containers will they be moved."

According to Mallory, when the explosives are unloaded, the fire department is notified, permits are in place and all Department of Transportation hazardous materials standards are met.

"There is someone posted at port and at our storage yard to check seals and begin locking containers as they arrive. Once it is in the storage yards, our blasting department and blasting supervisor will take control of any and all explosive containers. Any locks or seals are removed by the blasters or designate of the blasting department," Mallory said.

Regarding the chemicals needed for the gold mine, Mallory said that the mine's warehousing team and the operations crew are responsible for chemicals' transport to the mine site. "Our warehouse and the operations conduct inventories. All records are kept on file. The Safety and Security department has an Emergency Spill Response Plan for all chemicals and will notify city officials if any emergency or spills occurs at any time," Mallory said.

However, as of last week, the emergency services officials were left in the dark. Rather than blaming people, the culpability rests with the system, Hahn said. A shift in personnel in the city's emergency services administrator's office as well as changes in NovaGold's Nome Operations managers and safety manager led to discontinuity in reporting practices.

In the past, Rock Creek mine's safety manager, Rick Martin, had done the reporting and had tight ties with the LEPC. Martin even co-chaired the committee. However, with his resignation and move from town, the link between NovaGold's Nome Operations and the local emergency services has been broken. "We just need to get NovaGold back in contact with us," Hahn said.

Mallory told the *Nugget* that NovaGold is committed to participate with the LEPC and that the company's safety manager or his designee will participate.

Other business

In other business, airport manager Bob Madden said he would like to invite all parties involved in emergency exercises to participate in a drill mandated to be practiced every three years. The exercise would simulate an emergency landing and involve a table-top exercise prior to the actual live drill and a debriefing session sometime in the third week of October. Madden asked the volunteer departments for an active participation of their volunteers since it will be a comprehensive exercise.

Also, he said that the airport is planning to hold a drill involving an accident in the water, as the Federal Aviation Administration demands that airports within a mile of open water do so. Yet, Madden said, other airports in the state with airports close to open water also have much better resources than Nome to conduct such a drill. "If we drill an incident, where a plane slides off into the Snake River, we can

handle that, but simulating a crash in the ocean?" questioned Madden.

Regarding the airport paving project, Madden said that weather allowed for good progress at the airport with intermittent issues caused by the half-width closure of the landing strips, but that the project should be complete in the second week of September. Knik Construction's progress on permanent repairs to various sections of the Nome-Council Highway will not be finished this year.

With the fall storm season just around the corner, the committee felt that Nome is fairly well prepared. All agreed that in addition to the Rec Center, the Nome Elementary School should serve as a secondary shelter in the event of a mass evacuation. Ryan McLane, director Public Health, said that he would like to see that his office is contacted once the shelters are activated to make sure that Public Health has a chance to check the facilities and kitchens for sanitary issues and also to segregate

people with contagious illnesses.

LEPC chair Pat Hahn said that the city had prepared a seven-day preparedness guide a few years ago. The guide was intended to help Nomeites prepare for emergencies or natural disasters by providing a weekly shopping list to stock up for goods and provisions on which a household could live for a seven-day emergency. Fireman Jerry Steiger and McLane volunteered to update the guide.

During discussion of the LEPC bylaws, the question arose whether the entity should be a regional or local entity. Consensus was that the LEPC has as its top priority Nome, but certainly extends services when called upon by neighboring villages. Mayor Denise Michels added that Kawerak sends out grant information to all villages to encourage the villages to apply for grants to write their own emergency plans. "Not much in terms of responses so far," said Michels. "Golovin is the only community that responded."

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Photos by Diana Haecker

A NEW LOOK (above)—The city recently commenced earth work at the landfill to make a new cell for Nome's refuse. The city is also in the process of installing a tall fence to prevent trash from being blown with the wind onto the surrounding tundra.

WHICH WAY NOW? (right)—Construction detour signs sometimes offer too many choices. Some motorists may have been confused while the state Department of Transportation worked on road improvements on Seppala Drive.



• Council

continued from page 1

dence. On the same day Hahn had received a letter from Burke describing conditions that included buckets and bags of fecal matter outside the residence, similar conditions inside, no running water, and an unsound, unsafe structure.

The Council approved scheduling a public hearing on formal abatement of the two residences at a regular meeting Sept. 22 to allow for the required 14-day advance public notice.

Council member Mary Knodel and Hallgren reported receiving complaints about noxious odors from a house on Second Avenue that was destroyed by fire in November 2007.

"Children are getting in through the open back," Hallgren said. Burke said he would follow up on the complaints Tuesday morning.

Noting that Nome has a number of abandoned, open and hazardous structures, Knodel suggested that Hahn make a list of them when he returns, so the Council can move to abate them. Councilman Jon Larsen asked Hallgren to provide a status report on demolition of buildings the City has condemned.

Other meeting highlights

The Council approved a recommendation by Mayor Denise Michels to reappoint Councilman Jerald Brown and Charlie Weiss to the

Nome Planning Commission. Brown abstained from the vote.

Councilman Randy Pomeranz encouraged other Council members and the public to attend an open house at the newly constructed NACTEC facility on the Nome-Beltz campus Sept. 4 at 11 a.m.

Hallgren said the City is advertising for a project superintendent for construction of the Public Safety Building. He will present a job description for a public works and port director for approval at a Council meeting Sept. 8, he added.

Burke has noted that Nome's tight rental housing market is hampering his efforts to recruit and retain police officers, Hallgren reported. Knodel

and Councilman Stan Andersen urged Hallgren to search for rentals for officers. Andersen asked Nome Public Schools Superintendent Rick Luthi if any housing is available on the Nome-Beltz campus. Luthi said one apartment is open in a three-unit

communal living facility recently developed in half of the old NACTEC dormitory. Occupants share a bathroom and kitchen. Two new NPS teachers occupy one of the apartments, and a couple from NACTEC lives in one unit, Luthi said.

• Fuel

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structure this fall after the final fuel shipment and with hope that the mine would go into operation.

"I feel a little uncomfortable with this increase in the fuel surcharge right at this moment," she said.

Increased costs are upon us now, Handeland responded.

"The fuel is being consumed and expensed through our books at this time," he said. "We can't tell the generators to take fewer gallons."

The utility kept the surcharge at the 2006 level last year, counting on

the opening of the Rock Creek Mine to pull large loads of power and share operation costs.

It was disappointing that the mine was not up and running, "and we could spread some of those fixed costs over a larger customer base," Willson lamented.

The board would take another look at the power charge if a late delivery next month brings cheaper diesel fuel.

Moody saw a silver lining in the delayed mine opening—an extra 1.5 million gallons of cheaper fuel ordered last year in anticipation of making more electricity for the mine was

available to cushion the rate hike.

"We can thank them because we have another tank of fuel to use we wouldn't have otherwise," he said.

Credit card auto pay is available to customers now with applications available at customer service in Nome City Hall. NJUS is also testing a budget bill option, which averages 12 months' usage and bills a flat monthly amount to even out bills over a year.

Residents who qualified for a Permanent Fund Dividend due to drop into bank accounts Sept. 12 will receive an extra \$1,200 from the state intended to go toward energy costs.

Nome Public Schools



Dear Nome Community,

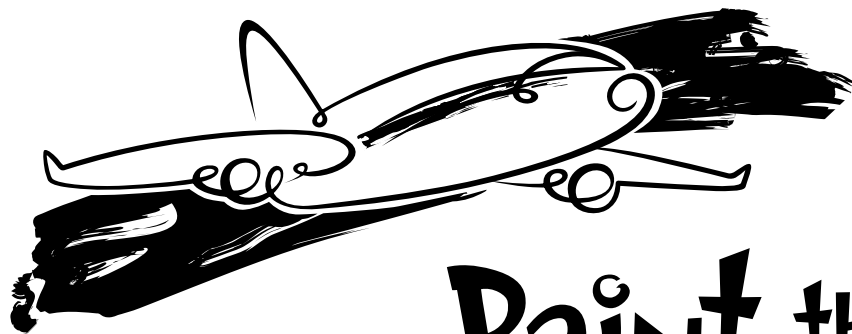
On behalf of the Board of Education and the Staff of Nome Public Schools we want to welcome the students and families back to school! We trust you had time this summer for the activities that make life special, with the people you hold dear. As summer winds down we hope you are looking forward to the excitement and memories this school year will bring.

As we begin this school year we want to extend a special invitation to you to be a part of all the happenings at your child's school. We want you to feel welcome to visit your child's class, maybe have lunch at the school, or just come by and have a cup of coffee.

Folks, we thank you for allowing us to be a part of your child's life, and we look forward to supporting you as you prepare your child to become a productive and successful citizen.

Gloria Ann Karmun,
President
NPS Board of Education

Rick Luthi
Superintendent
Nome Public Schools



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