



August 2020

3033 St. Croix Trail South
P.O. Box 219
Afton, MN 55001

Primary Election August 11, 2020

VOTE Absentee Citizens are encouraged to vote ahead for both the Primary and the General elections via absentee ballot if they so choose. Absentee voting will reduce the number of voters at the polling place and limit health risks during the pandemic.

Ballots are available now for the Aug. 11 primary election. To have a ballot mailed to you, contact Washington County Elections, 651-430-6175 or online at the Minnesota Secretary of State website www.mnvotes.org.

In-person absentee voting is available to Washington County eligible voters at the Government Center in Stillwater 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday through Aug. 10.

The below locations will be open only for direct absentee voting Aug. 4 through Aug. 10:

- Cottage Grove Service Center, 13000 Ravine Parkway in Cottage Grove;
- Headwaters Service Center, 19955 Forest Road N., Forest Lake;
- Oakdale City Hall, 1584 Hadley Ave. N., Oakdale;
- R.H. Stafford Library, Lower Level, 8595 Central Park Place, Woodbury.

VOTE In Person The City of Afton is committed to ensuring that citizens have an opportunity to vote in person if they so choose during this important election year while at the same time keeping the public safe during the pandemic.

Afton's polling place will be set up to comply with COVID-19 safety guidelines. Social distancing will be in force which may limit the number of voters indoors at a given time. Election judges will wear masks. Voters must wear a mask, and a supply will be available at the door, as well as hand sanitizer. Each voter will be provided a pen to use for marking their ballot and to then take with them. Polling pads will expedite the registration and sign-in process, and plexiglass barriers will be in place.

The polling location for Afton residents is Shepherd of the Valley, 14107 Hudson Rd S. The primary will be held in the North side of the building, enter through the main doors. Polling hours are 7 am to 8 pm.

VOTER Registration To check your voter registration status or register to vote, visit the MN Secretary of State's Voter Information Portal at: www.sos.state.mn.us or contact Washington County Elections at 651-430-6175. Voters also may register on election day at the polling location.

COVID-19 City Meeting Process Changes

The City Council and Planning Commission meetings are being held virtually. This means that rather than Council members, staff and the public meeting in the Council Chambers, each of these groups participate via phone and/or on-line via the internet. Our priority remains to make the City Council meetings and the Council's actions as transparent as possible and provide residents the means to provide comments and input regarding all items on the meeting agendas, while protecting public health. Information on how to join the meeting will be posted on the City website along with the agenda and meeting packet.

CITY MEETINGS

The regular meetings of Volunteer Commissions and Committees are canceled for August unless otherwise noted below. Remote meetings of these committees may be held if timely action is needed and if properly noticed.

August 3, 2020

Planning Commission Meeting
7:00 P.M.

(To be held remotely)

August 18, 2020

City Council Meeting
7:00 P.M.

(To be held remotely)

Please see the adjacent article regarding COVID-19 City Meeting Process Changes, and watch for more information on the City website and the City Facebook.

August 31, 2020

September Planning Commission Meeting (held in Aug. due to Labor Day Holiday)
7:00 P.M.

(To be held remotely)

CITY COUNCIL

- Mayor: Bill Palmquist 651-308-0569
- Ward 1: Annie Perkins 651-592-3007
- Ward 2: Lucia Wroblewski 651-436-3982
- Ward 3: Stan Ross 612-720-6478
- Ward 4: Randy Nelson 651-436-2479

CITY HALL

651-436-5090

CITY WEBSITE

www.ci.afton.mn.us

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

- Animal Control 715-220-1332
- Building Inspector 651-436-6469
- Burning Permits 651-248-5103
- Environmental Center 651-275-7475
- Highland Sanitation 651-458-0043
- Otter Lake Animal Care 651-426-8871
- Fire Dept 651-436-7033
- Sheriff's Dept 651-439-9381

EMERGENCY 911

Notes from the Mayor

The city council has been wrestling with several issues related to safety and noise for the last few years. Our discussions have focused on what is excessive, when does it rise to the level of impacting the rights of other property owners, and what, if anything, should the city do about it. Last month, I wrote about our efforts to deal with speed and excessive noise from motor vehicles. It is one of the biggest complaints we get every year.

The other issue that has impacted residents over the last few years is excessive gunfire. This is not the occasional target shooting or shooting of clay pigeons that many of us are used to and expect. This involves many more rounds and multiple times a week. This issue is equally challenging: What is a reasonable amount of recreational gunfire? It is very hard to define. We have tried. There are many different opinions and ideas on the council and in the community.

You will find more information about this issue on page three, so I will not go into the details again here. I supported the Planning Commission's request to work on the ordinance. The more eyes we have on this issue the better.

I would like us to find a balance between the rights of people to shoot responsibly and the rights of residents living next to a property being used as a gun range. Afton has long prohibited gun ranges, before any of us were on the council, but the city never defined it in our ordinances. So that is part of the problem.

My goal is to preserve what has always been true in Afton - that people come here to enjoy the peace, the quiet, and the natural environment, but also to have the space to enjoy their property. For most residents who enjoy shooting, that meant occasionally doing some target practice, shooting sporting clays, sighting in rifles, or spending time ensuring they are practiced and safe with a handgun. That is much different than the type of shooting we have experienced lately.

In testimony before the planning commission, one resident went so far as to say they were buying their house "and their gun range." He stated that commercial gun ranges do not allow the type of shooting he wants to practice. I was struck by that statement. If it is not allowed at a licensed gun range, should it be allowed on a residential parcel? I don't think so, but here is our challenge:

How do we preserve our heritage of using our property for reasonable shooting, but also protect the property rights of neighbors who feel the 2-3 times a week, 50-100 rounds a time, is impacting their own enjoyment of their property?

There was a narrative floated at the hearing that the complaints are only due to new residents moving in who are intimidated by the sound of gunfire. This is not true. The issue is impacting long-time residents and newer residents alike. What is clear to those of us who field the calls of frustrated neighbors, and what was articulated by one commissioner at the hearing, is that "something has changed." How we deal with that as a community will require all of us to work together to find a solution.

Please provide your feedback to city staff and the council. If you like to shoot and have been doing so on your property for a long time, let us know what that looks like: how often, how many rounds, the type of shooting. Knowing what has gone on in the past that did not have these negative impacts to neighbors will help guide our efforts as much as anything. If you have not been impacted by this, I would ask that you think about it as if you were. Let us know what you think is a reasonable level of gunfire to be taking place on an adjoining property. Is 2-3 times a week, 50-100 rounds a time OK? If so, let us know. If not, what is reasonable to you?

-Bill

New Office Staff

We'd like to welcome our new Office Assistant, Jenny Moore. Jenny brings her skills and experience in customer service and organization to city hall. We're thrilled to have her here.

July Meeting Highlights

July 6, 2020 Planning Commission Meeting

The Commission:

- Held a public hearing for the John & Beth Sevenich Minor Subdivision application at 10 Coulee Ridge Road.
- Held a public hearing on an ordinance amendment regarding the discharge of firearms and public nuisance noises
- Held a public hearing on an ordinance amendment regarding barbed wire fencing.

June 16, 2020 City Council Meeting

The Council:

- Extended the declaration of local emergency.
- Approved the John & Beth Sevenich Minor Subdivision application at 10 Coulee Ridge Road.
- Approved the ordinance amendment regarding barbed wire fencing.
- Approved payment to Geislinger and Sons for the River Road Sanitary Sewer project and for the Downtown Village Improvement project.
- Received an update on Afton Creek Preserve construction.
- Approved speed limit reduction on 50th Street east of Co Rd 21.

MEETING PACKETS, VIDEOS AND APPROVED MEETING MINUTES ARE AVAILABLE AT:

www.ci.afton.mn.us

Belwin Conservancy Upcoming Events

Education Center Summer Saturdays: May 23 - September 5

Every Saturday this summer, Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend, the Education Center trails are free and open to everyone for walking!

Explore Belwin Education Center's miles of rolling woodlands, prairie and wetlands trails every Saturday through Labor Day weekend.

Rules:

No dogs or bicycles allowed.

Please respect our neighbors' lands by staying on Belwin Conservancy trails and staying within our boundaries. Thank you.

Please note: The Education Center building will not be open. There is no restroom access on the site.

Belwin Conservancy
1553 Stagecoach Trail South
Afton MN 55001
651-436-5189
www.belwin.org

Firearms Ordinance Amendment Update

Addressing Concerns Regarding the Repetitive Discharge of Firearms

The Council has been working since early 2019 to address serious safety and noise concerns regarding the loud, repetitive discharge of firearms that occurs as residents use their property in a manner similar to a shooting range, where they discharge a high number of rounds per day several days per week. The amount of this type of shooting by residents has increased significantly, as have the number of complaints.

The Council has developed a draft ordinance amendment to address noise and safety concerns related to the current ability to discharge firearms with no or limited restrictions on the number of rounds, the duration and frequency of shooting and the noise generated by the firearms discharge. A link to the draft ordinance can be found at the bottom of the City's Home Page under City of Afton Documents.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing regarding the draft ordinance amendment and had a number of concerns regarding the ordinance. The Council referred the ordinance to the Planning Commission to enable the Commission to develop proposed revisions through discussion at its August 3 and August 31 meetings, and to provide the ordinance with any revisions to the Council for its consideration at the regular Council meeting of September 15.

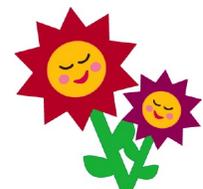
In the meantime, in order to protect residents from the noise of repetitive shooting, the City will be vigorously enforcing its nuisance ordinance in the case of loud, repetitive shooting. Residents who shoot on their property are encouraged to limit the frequency, length of time and number of rounds discharged. Residents who are subjected to a high frequency and high number of rounds discharged are encouraged to call the Sheriff's Department when the shooting is occurring and to record the shooting to enable action to be taken regarding the shooting.

Free Meals & Food Shelf Items

The Eastern Twin Cities Islamic Center (ETCIC) will be providing FREE curbside Meal and Food shelf items on Wednesday's from 5:30 - 6:30 PM. This will be in partnership with Loaves and Fishes.

Based on the demand, there may be an increase the number of days and/or timing. This service will be provided entirely outside of the facility in a safe manner based on social distancing guidelines.

Details on this program are at <https://www.facebook.com/etcic>. The FREE service is open to all - irrespective of faith and religious beliefs. <http://www.etcic.org>





CITY OF AFTON
3033 ST CROIX TRAIL SO
P.O. BOX 219
AFTON, MN 55001



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Valley Library August 2020

Valley Library is open with limited capacity and modified hours. Visitors can come to pick up holds, browse materials, and use computers without an appointment. Our meeting rooms will remain closed.

When visiting Valley Library, please help protect everyone in the library by:

- Wearing a mask in the building.
- Practicing social distancing from other visitors and staff.
- Keeping your library visit to one hour or less.

Valley Branch Library

384 St Croix Trail S
Lakeland, MN 55043
651-436-5882

www.washcolib.org

Open with limited capacity. Current hours:
Monday, Wednesday, Friday:
10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Tuesday, Thursday: 12 to 7 p.m.

**PATRON
AFTON, MN 55001**

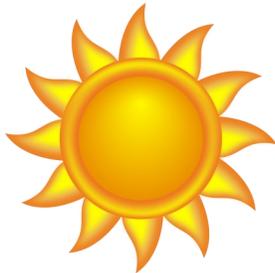
You may view this newsletter

IN COLOR
on the city website.



*Please recycle this
newsletter after use.*

City of Afton
Find us on Facebook!



2020 Afton Elections November 3

City Council seats up for November 3, 2020 General Election will be:

- Ward 1 — 4-year term (must reside in Ward 1)
- Ward 4 — 4-year term (must reside in Ward 4)
- Mayor — 2-year term (at-large; Afton resident)

Candidate filing period for open City Council seats:

July 28 through August 11 at 5:00 p.m.

The city website tab “Election and Voting Information” has the Ward Boundary map. City Council candidates must file for candidacy during the filing period. If you’d like to file by mail, contact the office and we will send you the forms. You also may schedule an appointment to come to City Hall and file in person. The filing fee is \$2.00. All City Council seats are non-partisan.