

## THE CITY OF MAPLE LAKE

# A great place to live and work

By Brenda Erdahl

The City of Maple Lake has seen a lot of changes recently and it's helped to set them on a path that City officials and the Community can be excited about.

From a new housing development on 5th street that will bring 35 much-needed single-family homes to town, to new staff at City Hall who focus on positive and friendly service, it is all coming together to make Maple Lake an even better place to live and work.

### City Hall

Some would say City Hall has experienced the biggest change. Since May of 2024, there is an entirely new set of faces in the office, and they've all been working hard to build positive relationships. City Administrator Scott Hildebrand came on board last summer. During his tenure, the Strategic Plan has been revived so the council and staff have a better idea of united goals for the community. Staff has also wholeheartedly tackled the City's financial transparency and yearly audit which should be completed on time this year.

As you enter City Hall, Administrative Assistant Melissa Dixon



There are new faces at Maple Lake City Hall and their focus is on positive and friendly service. Pictured, front, from left is City Administrator Scott Hildebrand and Melissa Dixon. Back row, from left, Jill Norlander, Rose Mambwe and Cassie Johnson.

is there to greet you with a smile. Jill Norlander is working on planning, zoning and permitting. The City's newest hire, Margaret Webb will be jumping right in with many years of municipal experience under her belt as the new finance

officer, to replace Rose Mambwe who stepped in on a temporary basis and has done an outstanding job with process improvement and tackling unfinished tasks. Cassie Johnson has been a major help in bringing efficiencies to process-

es as our clerk. The City wishes her well as she moves on to a new role. A new clerk will be joining the Team soon.

"What staff has accomplished this past year has been

pretty phenomenal," Hildebrand said.

### 5th St. Development Project

Recently the City Council approved a new development on 5th Street that will bring 35 single family home lots, six twin town home lots and a multi-family apartment building to Maple Lake. Not only will the development have a positive impact on the City's budget by expanding its tax base it could spur other industrial and housing growth. The school district will benefit as more housing attracts families with school-aged children, which will strengthen enrollment.

### EDA revival

The Maple Lake Economic Development Authority (MLEDA) is a necessary component of a successful city. It works to attract new business opportunities and grow existing ones. The last time Maple Lake had an EDA was in 2018.

Earlier this year, The City Council hired an EDA consultant with the knowledge, vision and experience to help direct the local EDA in seeking out opportunities to help expand the industrial park

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and other business opportunities.

The EDA is also working to revive the City's Revolving Loan Fund. This fund provides low interest loans such as GAP financing for start-up businesses or specific needs for existing businesses in the community. The City hopes to advertise the Mission and Vision of the EDA, as well as loan information soon.

### Public works

Maple Lake has a valuable public works department that oversees the city streets, water and parks. In August, public works will see a change in leadership when Al Hudek retires and passes on the reins to Andrew Johnson.

Johnson has been with the department for 13 years and is "very capable and knows the city well. He's ready to step in," Hudek said.

Hudek has been with the department for 25 years. Four years ago, he took over as director when Jerry Sawatzke retired. He leaves large shoes to fill. In his time, he led an effort to get the city on a GIS mapping program that essentially uses GPS to map out where all the city's sewer lines and watermain are located, making identifying and maintaining them easier and less time consuming for staff. He also upheld Sawatzki's efforts to get city equipment on a budget rotation. As a result of that foresight, Maple Lake has top notch equipment for such a small town, he said. Most recently, Hudek and his department are responsible for getting the city's first permanent generator at a lift station. It will be arriving next month. Having a generator on site that automatically kicks in when the power goes out will be an immense help to staff, he said. Currently, when the power goes out staff receive a phone call and must run to the public works building to get a generator and bring it out to the site. Eventually, Hudek hopes the city will have generators at all the city's lift stations.

"It's been a pleasure working for the community I grew up in and its being left in good hands," he said.

### Comprehensive Plan

The City has committed to updating the 2014 Comprehensive Plan in 2025. This will include revising planning and zoning ordinances as necessary to adapt to the changes in the community. Doing so will clarify regulations for both residents and when it comes to industrial growth. The ultimate goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to better define the long-term vision for growth and development in the city.

### Master Parks and Trail Plan

As part of the Comprehensive Plan proposal is a plan to update

the Master Parks and Trails Plan from 2004. This will be helpful with the potential for new trails and walking spaces and will better coordinate visioning for park improvements. For example, the Maple Lake Lions recently donated funding for pavilion renovations or community gathering space at the Community Park. There are also additional park improvements being discussed for Bolduan Park and for a park in the new 5th Street development.

Hildebrand added that if anyone has an interest in the city parks, they should consider joining the park board. The board meets once a month and is responsible for generating new ideas for the community's parks systems.

### Safe Streets for All Planning Grant

Supporting the work for the Comprehensive Plan and the Master Parks & Trails Plan is another new initiative happening within the City of Maple Lake - Safe Streets for All. In 2023, the city was given a federal grant to create an action plan to enhance roadway safety for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists and other users within Maple Lake. The output of the work will be recommendations for safety improvements on the roadways as well as identifying areas in need of sidewalks and trails for pedestrians. Residents are encouraged to offer their input on the City's web site (ci.maplelake.mn.us) under the resident's tab, scroll down to "news" and then "get involved." The City is also planning more pop-up events where residents will have the opportunity to talk with planners in person.

### Maple Lake Fire Department

The Maple Lake Fire Department (MLFD) is led by Chief Steve Peterson. It has 24 members, including EMTs and serves the City of Maple Lake and the townships of Albion, Corinna, Chatham, Maple Lake, Marysville and Silver Creek. In addition, the MLFD provides mutual aid to other nearby departments. It is also the home of one of three fire department-based ambulances in Wright County.

MLFD is creative with its budget and has successfully sought and received grants to combat the increasing costs of safety equipment and trucks. Recently the department was approved for a grant that will benefit ambulance services. The generosity of local charitable organizations has also helped to keep the MLFD viable and current. A special thanks goes out to North Star Search and Rescue, the Maple Lake Lions, Ramsey Lake Association, Sugar Lake Association, the Maple Lake, Lake Property Owners Association and the Maple Lake American Legion

for their contributions.

Looking to the future, the MLFD has started setting aside funds for a building expansion or remodel. According to Chief Peterson, the MLFD building is one of the oldest in the County with a section still in use that dates back to the 1930s. Another section was added in the 1950s and the newest section was built in 1997. Peterson said they have close to \$200,000 set aside for a construction project and they've started talking with contractors, but he predicted it's still five to 10 years away before any work is started. The goal, when the time comes, is to be able to keep costs as low as possible for taxpayers, he said.

### Airport

The Maple Lake Municipal Airport is a source of historical pride and educational and business support for residents of Maple Lake.

The airport is home to a thriving EAA (Experimental Aviation Association) chapter who manages the Young Eagles program, giving youth the opportunity to take their first airplane ride and learn more about the aviation industry. The EAA is also finishing construction on a classroom providing space for education in building and maintaining aircraft. Not only is the airport home to education for the youth in our community, it is also home to several businesses from a flight school to an innovative air-based pipeline leak detection system and more. The airport also serves as a vital transportation hub for many of the nation-wide industries based in Maple Lake. The City is dedicated to working with the state to update its Airport Layout Plan in hopes of constructing new hangars and attracting increased activity. The airport is primarily funded by MNDot and has most recently benefitted from

three recent grants for the repaving of a taxiway and the purchase of a mower and tractor-mounted snow-thruster.

### Maple Lake Wine and Spirits

Ang Berthiaume manages the local municipal liquor store from which profits are reinvested in the community to help reduce the City's tax levy. Ang and her team have made many improvements to the store over the years including the addition of a rewards discount program and of course the addition of the popular wine and spirits tasting events. The tastings are held multiple times throughout the year and are always a great community gathering.

Through all that's changed and all that's stayed the same, the City of Maple Lake continues to look toward the future while keeping the present wellbeing of its residents firmly in mind.



Maple Lake's Public Works Department oversees the city's streets, water and parks. Pictured above is the public works crew, from left Andrew Johnson, Mike Wicks, Al Hudek and Bill Eccless.



The Maple Lake Fire Department serves the City of Maple Lake and the townships of Albion, Corinna, Chatham, Maple Lake, Marysville and Silver Creek. Above, the fire department takes part in Maple Lake's St. Patrick's Day Parade.