

Assembly OKs K-9 Veterans Day

MADISON — Working dogs were recognized Tuesday as the state Assembly passed legislation officially making March 13th K9 Veterans Day in Wisconsin.

"They say dogs are man's best friend, but military and police working dogs are so much more," said state Rep. Andy Jorgensen, D-Milton. "From World War I to present day, these dogs have laid down their own lives for our freedom and safety. They deserve recognition for that faithful service and sacrifice."

The Assembly Democratic Caucus chair, Jorgensen invited K9 police teams to stand with him on the Assembly floor, representing their military compatriots, as the body voted on AJR 4.

Guests included Oconto County Deputy Sheriff and Wisconsin Law Enforcement Canine Handlers Association President Todd Skarban and Dexter; Deputy Scott Guich and Mink; Deputy Greg Jansen and Falkos; and Deputy Jason Behm and Harlow, all of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office; Wabeno Police Chief Mick Ashbeck, Sgt. Cherise Caradine and Casey and Detective Sgt. Brent Plish and Odin of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department, and Officer Rose Mansavage and Falcon of the Madison Police Department.

All of the visitors received a standing ovation, and the dogs barked their applause in response.

"To the four-legged force that has saved so many human



K-9 VETERANS DAY — Working dogs were recognized Tuesday as the state Assembly passed legislation officially making March 13th K9 Veterans Day in Wisconsin. It was Mabel Schumacher, the Fort Atkinson Kennel Club treasurer who proposed the observance. On Friday, a program was held in Fort Atkinson that was

keynoted by retired Sgt. Jerry Witt, Brookfield, who served as a canine handler in Vietnam and lost his dog, Skip, in the line of duty. Shown Tuesday are, left to right, outside Assembly Chamber, Wabeno Police Chief Mick Ashbeck and Dutch, Oconto County Deputy Sheriff and Wisconsin Law Enforcement Canine Handlers Association President Todd Skarban and Dexter, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Deputy Scott Guich and Mink,

Mabel Schumacher, state Rep. Andy Jorgensen, Sgt. Jerry Witt (retired), Detective Sergeant Brent Plish and Odin and Sergeant Cherise Caradine and Casey of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Police Department, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Deputy Jason Behm and Harlow and Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Deputy Greg Jansen and Falkos. — Contributed photo.

lives, that has served with courage and loyalty, and that has supported our military's efforts to protect and preserve democracy here and abroad: thank you," said Jorgensen.

Last Friday, Jorgensen participated in the first-ever K9 Veterans Day celebration in Fort Atkinson at the American Legion Dugout in Fort Atkinson. The keynote speaker was Sgt. Jerry Witt, Brookfield, who

served as a canine handler in Vietnam and lost his dog, Skip, in the line of duty.

Until now, 13 states have established March 13 as K-9 Veterans Day. They include California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

March 13, 1942, marked the founding of the United States

K9 Corps. The initiative to honor or service dogs on that date started in 2009 with retired military dog handler Joseph J. White, whose efforts resulted in Jacksonville Beach and the entire State of Florida becoming the first to proclaim the recognition.

The more recent effort in Wisconsin was spearheaded by Mabel Schumacher, treasurer of the Kennel Club of Fort Atkin-

son. She and Witt also were recognized on the Assembly floor Tuesday after AJR 4 passed with unanimous bipartisan support.

It was in 2011 that Schumacher first brought the issue to the attention of the kennel club, which gave her permission to pursue the recognition further. The treasurer contacted then-state Rep. and current

Sen. Nass, R-Whitewater, and Jorgensen, who also voiced their support of the idea.

K-9 Veterans Day is intended to honor military dogs, as well as canines working with police, customs, the border patrol, service and therapy.

The Fort Atkinson Kennel Club also hopes to place a memorial in McCoy Park in the future to further recognize the

Whitewater council keeps George Street curb, gutter

By Chris Welch
Whitewater correspondent

WHITEWATER — After a 75-minute discussion Tuesday, the Whitewater Common Council decided to keep curb-and-gutter as part of the George Street reconstruction project.

This marks the second time the council addressed the George Street revitalization, which is planned for this summer.

George Street is a cul-de-sac that runs north/south near the Downtown Armory off of North Street. There is a small bridge on the south end of the street that crosses Whitewater Creek, which continues on the west side of the street, as well. The majority of the project is in the residential area north of the bridge.

Original plan designs included the addition of side-

walks, complete street replacement, curb-and-gutter, and upgrades of sanitary sewer and water lines.

Initially, the project was estimated to cost about \$1.4 million; the cost was approved as part of the capital improvement plan for the 2015 budget. Using a road condition rating system called the Pavement Surface and Evaluation Rating, or PASER, of one to 10, with 10 being the best, George Street rated two.

During a public hearing on the project on Jan. 14, a majority of residents spoke out against the new sidewalks particularly, and other issues such as tree removal, flooding concerns and special assessments.

That neighborhood feedback led to the council discussing the residents' concerns at its Feb. 3 meeting. At the time, the council

agreed to remove the sidewalk installation from the overall project, primarily because the street is a cul-de-sac, and not a connecting street to other city streets. Between Assistant City Manager Chris McDonnell's presentation on the project, public comments and council considerations, there was over an hour's worth of discussion on the issue that night.

Once the council agreed to remove the sidewalks, several residents then spoke out against curb-and-gutter due to flooding concerns. Some of the driveways are lower than the street, and some residents feared the curbs would direct water to their driveways.

Additionally, there were concerns from residents about special assessments that were to be placed on residential property to help defray costs of the project, as has been done on other residential streets in the city that have been upgraded, such as Cain Street.

Special assessment is when an area of a city has an upgrade, such as sewer or sidewalk installation, part of that project's cost is charged back (or assessed) to the residents of that area. The chargeback is a way to reduce construction costs to municipal governments when a public project benefits

a private property owner; a new sidewalk, a resurfaced street, or new utility connection can increase the market value of private homes, for example.

The council deliberated on the special assessment issue, as it related to the city as a whole, at its March 3 meeting. The council ultimately decided to review the special assessment process, and that review is ongoing; it will likely be addressed at an April or May council meeting.

Prior to Tuesday night's meeting, city engineer Mark Fisher and Zach Simpson of Strand and Associates answered 17 specific questions about the project and how it will affect residents. Many dealt with construction issues such as traffic access and garbage collection during the construction period, along with the unique medical transportation needs of a specific resident.

Fisher was on hand Tuesday, along with McDonnell and Whitewater streets superintendent Chuck Nass, to discuss issues in more detail.

In short, Fisher said that there were two options for George Street: curb-and-gutter or ditches and culverts. The ditches and culvert option fell flat for everyone present, so curb-and-gutter became the fo-

cus.

Five individual George Street residents spoke against the curb-and-gutter option, saying that would increase floodwater. They advocated for no curb or gutter, such as the current street exists. They also spoke against the length of the three-to-four-month construction period needed for the project.

Fisher argued that for most normal rainstorms, there would not be any flooding; he said the curbs might keep a small amount of water in the road before fully draining into the Whitewater Creek, but that massive flooding would occur only during massive rainstorms, like any other street in the city.

Curbs and gutters would prevent large-scale reconstruction projects like this one for at least 20 years, Fisher added.

Nass told the council that if the street is replaced without curb-and-gutter, it still would receive a two on the PASER scale. Curb-and-gutter is a basic requirement for favorable ratings in urban areas, he said.

In short, the council would spend over \$1 million and see no long-term benefit from the project, as the street would need to be reconstructed sooner than later, Fisher, Nass, and McDonnell explained.

The council discussed the issue among itself, and raised several issues beyond just the immediacy of George Street residents. Those issues included long-term maintenance costs, the fact that all city taxpayers were paying for the reconstruction through the bonding process, and protecting the investment of the infrastructure.

Councilperson Stephanie Ab-

bott noted that the council already had compromised with residents on the sidewalk issue, and she feared that without curb and gutters, the council was "prejudging the street to an early failure."

She also said she felt most residents were afraid of the potential special assessment costs more than the upgrades themselves.

Councilperson Lynn Binnie said that the city should rely on the expert opinions of the professionals who supported curbs and gutters.

Councilperson Ken Kidd said the council had to look at the long term and make wise engineering choices now to prevent such big overhauls in the future.

The remaining councilpersons echoed those collective sentiments, as well.

Because the curbs and gutters already were part of the original design, a council member needed to make a motion to deliberately remove them from the George Street project. Since no one did so, the project moved forward with curb-and-gutter being installed during reconstruction of the street.

The council did want staff to investigate access issues and the timeframe to complete the project as soon as possible, and those should be addressed by the time the council approves the actual contract for the reconstruction.

In other matters, the council:

- Approved a \$12,000 contract with Strand and Associates for design and engineering services for upgrading the Cravath Lakefront boat launch. The project was planned for in the city's capital improvement plan.

(Continued on A7)

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