

Menasha credit rating improves

By Michael King
The News-Record

MENASHA — The January settlement of the lawsuit filed by investors in the failed Menasha Utilities steam plant project has prompted an improvement in the city's credit rating.

The city is still working its way back to its A1 credit rating that dropped nine steps to B1 in the aftermath of its Sept. 1, 2009, default on \$22.8 million worth of municipal bonds issued for the steam plant project.

Moody's Investors Services noted that the city strengthened and stabilized its general obligation debt position so it recently issued a Ba2 rating with a stable outlook, a two-step improvement.

"It's positive and it's showing that we're going in the right direction," said Mayor Don Merkes.

"They recognize that we're trying to set the ship straight but it's still too close to the event yet for us to be back to where we were," said Tom Stoffel, comptroller-treasurer.

Both officials said the city would likely need to continue relying on the state Trust Fund for any

necessary future borrowing needs until the city is able to restore its credit rating to investment grade status.

Merkes said the city's financial outlook has certainly improved but added that "it will be a number of years before we're completely out of the woods."

Merkes said the city will look to the state Trust Fund later this year for street projects in the Woodland Hills area that will be repaid with special assessments.

It may also look to refinance a Lake Park Villas balloon payment at a lower interest rate through the state fund.

The mayor, who won reelection this month without opposition, said he has a number of goals for the next four years.

"I think that we're moving in the right direction," Merkes said. "People are happy that we are resolving things. Now we need to start looking toward the future, working on our housing stock and reconnecting back to the riverfront again and improving our financial situation."

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The city is still working its way back to its A1 credit rating that dropped nine steps to B1 in the aftermath of its Sept. 1, 2009, default on \$22.8 million worth of municipal bonds issued for the steam plant, which closed a month later unable to cover its debt.

Last week, Moody's Investors Services noted that the city had strengthened and stabilized its general obligation debt position so it issued a Ba2 rating with a stable outlook, a two-step improvement.

Mayor Don Merkes and Tom Stoffel, the city's comptroller-treasurer, said the city likely would need to continue to rely on the state Trust Fund for any future borrowing needs until it is able to restore its credit rating to investment grade status.

Ald. Taylor

COMMENTARY

Civility is based on honesty, values

Civility is something we need to pay attention to if we want to correctly deal with the issues at hand. Civility isn't just using polite or politically correct words and phrases, but is an honest, mature sharing of facts and opinions.

I recently read an article entitled "The Meaning of Civility" written in 1997 by Guy and Heidi Burgess. This

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article identified ways to "increase the constructiveness of public debate." Due to our cur-

rent political and social media climate, the strategies suggested in this article seem timely.

The first recommendation made in this article was to "separate people from the problem." This will help defuse the destructive "us vs. them" attitude along with hopefully encouraging a "principles above personalities" type of dialogue. When a controversy or con-

flict arises, it doesn't matter who is right, but what is right.

"To obtain all the available facts" was another suggestion made in this article. This suggestion is just as and maybe even more important than the previous recommendation.

We now live in a society that's wired for instant overreactions to questionable information. The complete, real

facts are seldom readily available and I believe our best defense is to slow down and take the time to gather all available facts before responding or taking action.

Abraham Lincoln said, "I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national cri-

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GERNER: Civility comes first from honesty, values

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sis. The great point is to bring them the real facts."

"The Meaning of Civility" urges the community to "condemn the deliberate distortion of information." This means we all need to take the time to educate ourselves so that we don't naively believe the false, incomplete messages being marketed to us day in and day out.

I used to hear the phrase "knowledge is power," but in

this day and age, I think knowledge is "protection" more than power.

Another recommendation made by the authors of "The Meaning of Civility" was to "honor legitimate uses of legal, political and other types of power." The important word here is "legitimate." The definition of legitimate is "being in compliance with the law, being in accordance with established or accepted patterns and standards, based on logical reasoning, and being authentic/genuine."

We have witnessed our share of uncivilized behavior in this country and around the world due to the "illegitimate" use of power.

The final recommendation from the article that I want to focus on is to "separate win/win from win/lose issues." There are many issues we can compromise on and come up with win-win solutions. Then there are "core value" issues such as basic freedoms, justice issues, the protection of children, adolescents and vulnerable adults, along with the basic protection

of the natural environment where compromise may not be an option.

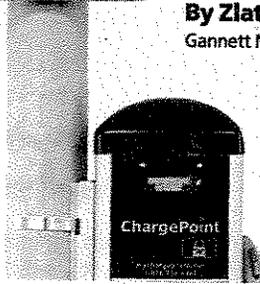
When it comes to core value issues, we need to be willing to "agree to disagree." We are our values and we cannot compromise who we are and expect to be at peace with ourselves and others.

Being civil is being willing to be honest, fair and compassionate while walking fearlessly in the values that define us.

— Terri Gerner

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ELECTRIC
VEHICLE
CHARGING
STATION



Study: Charging up electric cars could create more emissions than fueling up

By Zlati Meyer
Gannett News Service

For most motorists in Michigan, charging their electric vehicles could produce more greenhouse-gas emissions than fueling up and driving the most efficient gas-powered hy-

brids, according to a new study released Monday by the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The organization looked at how electricity is produced around the U.S. — regions more dependent on coal for their electricity received a lower score.

“Today, in Michigan, our analysis is an electric vehicle is as good as

some of the best gas vehicles and some hybrids, and if Michigan continues to invest in renewable energy, it can go from being a ‘good region’ to a ‘best region,’” said Don Anair, one of the researchers.

He said that in Michigan, where 70 percent of electricity comes from

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Electric

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coal-burning power plants, a plug-in electric vehicle affects the environment the same as a car that gets 38 mpg. That’s not as environmentally beneficial as a 2012 Toyota Prius, for example, which gets 50 mpg Michigan’s score is about equal to the all-gasoline 2012 Scion iQ. The Rocky Mountain region ranked last with a 33 mpg score.

The southwestern corner of Michigan and parts of the Upper Peninsula are lumped with the region that ranked cleaner at 41 mpg and includes mostly Indiana, Ohio and West Virginia.

“When people are considering electric vehicles, I think emissions is one question,” Anair said.

“This will certainly make it clear that even with no tailpipe emissions, there are emissions associated with charging it.”

Jesse Toprak, vice president of market intelligence for the new vehicle research and pricing site TrueCar.com, doesn’t anticipate the study will affect consumer behavior. Plus, despite the study findings, buying an electric vehicle now could help the environment in the long run by helping drive down the costs of the cleaner vehicles through higher demand, he said.

“The idea of introducing these cars, fuel cells, anything not going to use the traditional supply of oil, is that one day we’ll be able to reach an economies-of-scale number ... so the masses can afford electric cars,” he said. “The ultimate multiplier effect of that eventually will be much cleaner air, due (to) not using much gas.”

Environmental concerns aside, many car shoppers simply want to save on their gas expenses.

The study — which took into account the higher cost of the electric vehicles and the price of electricity and gas — found that electric vehicle owners could save as much as \$1,200 a year compared with the average compact gas-powered car, based on the national average electricity price of 11 cents per kilowatt hour and an average gas price of \$3.50 per gallon.