

Mayor's Column for the January 2, 2013 Review

Happy New Year everyone! I am anticipating another busy year at City Hall, with good community projects and positive benefits achieved from continuing organizational improvement efforts.

One of the early 2013 activities that will be accomplished is completion of the renewal application for our community's Bird City Wisconsin designation. Bird City Wisconsin is a two-year old program, designed to encourage Wisconsin communities to undertake practices to enhance bird environment and educate the public about the value of birds in a healthy ecosystem. The Milwaukee Audubon Society and seven other Wisconsin conservation groups launched the program. To date, 60 Wisconsin municipalities have received Bird City designations. Evansville was among the first 20 communities selected for the designation, with the award presentation occurring during our 2011 Energy Fair.

I was originally contacted about the program in January 2011 by local resident Ivy Otto. Ivy is an avid birder and a regular volunteer at Sand Bluff Bird Observatory in Shirland, Illinois. She had learned about the new Bird City Wisconsin program, looked into the requirements for designation, and believed that Evansville would be able to meet the necessary number of activities for selection. An applicant needed to accomplish a total of 7 of 22 criteria from five categories. The categories are habitat creation and protection, limiting hazards to birds, participation in programs promoting effective forest management, public education, and celebration of International Migratory Bird Day.

I studied the Bird City materials and knew right away that we would receive some credit. One criterion was that the municipality is in compliance with the Wisconsin "Smart Growth" law. Another item was that the community had been selected as a Tree City, USA.

Credit would certainly be given for documenting that the community planned to provide additional bird habitat. The Grove Community School Forest plan provides a detailed description of our valuable new environmental resource.

Community education regarding birds was a category identified in the application. Our annual Energy Fair has provided interesting bird information through the years. Hoo's Woods provided raptor education; National Geographic cinematographer Neil Rettig made a presentation on harpy eagles and rain forest habitat; Welty Environmental Center, Aldo Leopold Nature Center, Green Rock Audubon Society, Sand Bluff Bird Observatory, Wild Birds Unlimited, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources have been exhibitors at the Energy Fair.

A small group of citizens, including Nancy and Phil Kress, David Huset, Ivy Otto, and myself, met to work on the original application. We found that there were many other birding activities and projects occurring in Evansville that had never been "grouped" together. This lack of awareness is a phenomenon that I have found on a number of occasions in other Evansville areas of interest.

In working on the application with the committee, I learned about the Christmas Bird Count. Former Evansville resident and University of Wisconsin art professor John Wilde began local participation in the Christmas Bird Count in the mid-1960s, possibly making Evansville one of the oldest participating Wisconsin communities. Annual participation continues to the present day, with coordination by local resident David Huset. The Cooksville Bird Count, part of the Christmas Bird Count, occurs on January 1 and includes Evansville locations such as Lake Leota and Wind Prairie Park.

I also learned that Lake Leota is a birding “hot spot.” Members of SOLE have installed wood duck boxes in the lake environment and have restocked fish in the lake, enhancing the lake ecosystem.

The Bird City program uses a renewal process to encourage continual public education and habitat improvement in Wisconsin communities. Evansville will be applying for the High Flyer Award, which requires completion of an additional 5 of 17 criteria options, as well as continuing the basic criteria.

Additional information that will be included with the renewal app is the use of birds in the elementary school curriculum. All first graders learn about owls, including in math, where students learn measurement by looking at owl wing spans. Second grade students learn about bills and beaks. (Anyone else remember accurately coloring mimeographed sheets of birds in Mrs. Chapman’s class half a century ago?)

Other new information that will be provided:

- SOLE has erected an osprey platform near the lake.
- There is a bluebird trail at the golf course that is maintained by David Huset. 52 fledglings were observed at the golf course last spring.
- Bird siting list from early morning spring bird walk at Lake Leota in 2012. Some of the species sited were great blue heron, belted kingfisher, spotted sandpiper, eastern bluebird, and yellow warbler.
- A “high flyer” criterion is restoration of at least two acres of woodlands, wetlands or prairie. Wind Prairie Park is 5.4 acres.
- The school forest currently has two bluebird boxes. Additional bluebird boxes are being obtained and will be installed in the next few months.
- The Boy Scouts have participated in a number of efforts that enhanced habitat.
- Phil Kress, a member of the Woodchucks, will construct two chimney swift towers that will be installed near the school forest.
- A Bird City exhibit was part of the 2012 Energy Fair. It included displays and handouts on protecting birds from cats. Students were able to make window silhouettes to place on windows to prevent bird/window collisions.
- A prominent exhibit on birding, habitat, and bird protection from cats and window collisions was displayed at Eager Free Public Library last spring.

There is a wealth of information on the Bird City Wisconsin program on their website at www.birdcitywisconsin.org, including a page on Evansville birding efforts. I encourage you to take a look.

Evansville citizens have indicated their interest in quality of life issues and environmental stewardship. Birding is an intergenerational activity that enriches our community. Bird City Wisconsin designation is one recognition of our commitment.

Community Announcements

Curbside pick-up of Christmas trees will begin on Wednesday, January 2, weather and time permitting. Trees should be free of tinsel, wire, lights, and ornaments and should not be bagged.

Because of the holiday calendar, there are a number of changes to city meeting times and dates. The Public Safety Committee will meet on January 2 at 6:00 p.m. The Fire District meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on January 2 at the Fire Station. The Finance and Labor Relations Committee will meet at 5:00 p.m. on January 3. The Plan Commission meeting will be held on Thursday, January 3, at 6:00 p.m. The Park and Recreation Board will meet on Monday, January 7, at 6:00 p.m. at City Hall.

New staff member Nicole Sidoff, Evansville Community Development Director, will begin employment on Thursday, January 3. Welcome to Evansville, Nicole!

Community Thanks

Evansville thanks Accounting Technician Jan Krueger for her service to our community as she begins her retirement. Following more than twenty years of city employment, Jan's last day of work is January 11.