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Underpass levy passes

By Mark A. York, Enterprise Staff Writer

Livingston voters approved a mill levy increase Tuesday to help fund an underpass beneath the Montana Rail Link tracks to connect Star Road and U.S. Highway 10.

The unofficial results are 624 votes for and 302 votes against, according to Denise Nelson, Park County's election administrator.

Nelson said 926 out of 4,892 registered voters took part in the election.

The 11.25 mill levy will increase taxes and assessments on a \$100,000 home by \$22.50 per year and \$45 per year on a \$200,000 home.

The levy will raise \$657,651 over five years for Livingston's share of the underpass cost. That will be combined with \$1.2 million from the state and \$6.9 million in federal money for the proposed \$8.7 million dollar project. The project is designed to alleviate traffic congestion to Livingston's growing north side.

"This is really good news," said Livingston City Manager Ed Meece on Wednesday. "It passed two to one and carried every precinct. We've already started going forward today. We have the state funding, and now it's time to get our federal folks going on this. We've called Washington today.

"Senators Tester, Baucus, and Congressman Rehberg have been very supportive all through the process. Now it's time to move forward to get the \$6.9 million in federal funding."

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Park County jail escapee sentenced

By Mark A. York, Enterprise Staff Writer

Gabriel Norlin, 18, appeared for sentencing, pleading guilty in Park County District Court Monday morning to four felony offenses and two misdemeanors, including a short-lived escape from the Park County Detention Center on June 25.

Norlin was charged with the escape, three counts of burglary, aggravated burglary, attempted criminal endangerment and the misdemeanors — drug possession and eluding a peace officer.

The escape charge, a felony, was plea bargained down to a misdemeanor, court records show.

The escape occurred from the Park County Detention Center Complex during a transfer from the sun room back to the jail, said Park County Sheriff Allan Lutes.

"Norlin had smuggled in a handcuff key in a body cavity," Lutes said. "He'd seen how the garage door worked, hit the button on the way by, rolled under the door and ran.

"We found the handcuffs in the parking lot. We never found the key. He got rid of it before he was apprehended," Lutes said, Tuesday. "We'd never had a problem before. It was just a freak thing. We fixed it by installing a coded lock on the door, so it can't happen again."

District Court Judge Nels Swandal sentenced Norlin for car theft to the Department of Corrections for five years, suspended with a recommendation for boot camp. On the theft of a pickup truck and the misdemeanor charge of possession of dangerous drugs, he was sentenced to 10 years, with five suspended, and five years to the Department of Corrections with a recommendation for boot camp to run concurrently, according to District Court records.

On charges of burglary and criminal endangerment and a misdemeanor assault charge, Norlin was sentenced to 20 years, with 15 suspended and five years with the Department of Corrections, with a recommendation for boot camp to run concurrently.

Norlin was also ordered to pay \$12,680 in restitution plus \$245 in court fees and \$50 to Department of Corrections.

Lutes said Norlin was transferred out of Park County Monday to answer charges in Gallatin County.

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Meeting on oil and gas lease sales generates heat

By Mark A. York, Enterprise Staff Writer

Concerned residents, conservation groups and landowners in Park and Sweet Grass counties converged on Livingston's Best Western Yellowstone Inn Thursday to confront federal and state officials over recent oil and gas lease sales in the bed of the Yellowstone and Boulder rivers.

The sale, held Tuesday in Helena, brought \$11 million into the state coffers. Seven and a half million dollars of that figure came from leases in Sweet Grass County, according to The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, which manages state lands.

At the meeting were DNRC Director Mary Sexton, Hal Harper of Gov. Brian Schweitzer's office, representatives from the federal Bureau of Land Management in Butte and Billings, Bruce Farling of Montana Trout Unlimited, and Scott Bosse of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

The meeting was sponsored by the Livingston-based Joe Brooks Chapter of Trout Unlimited, which has actively campaigned to postpone the oil and gas leases until better environmental safeguards can be formulated, according to chapter president Kerry Fee.

The conservation groups attended the Aug. 22 Land Board meeting in Helena and made a presentation to the governor asking for a temporary deferral from the sale for riverbed leases in Park and Sweet Grass counties.

The meeting attracted about 100 residents, including current and former state legislators from the area, in what became a heated and impassioned question and answer session that included an upset Livingston state Representative Bob Ebinger.

"I asked for a deferral on this," Ebinger said to Sexton of the river bed leases in Park and Sweet Grass counties. "I left a phone message, and never got an answer back."

"I never got it," Sexton said. "I do apologize for that."

"I see you gave a deferral to the Bridger Canyon people," Ebinger said. "Why was Gallatin County listened to and not us?"

The crowd applauded.

"It's only temporary," Sexton said to a grumbling crowd. "Deferral is not a tool normally used by the Land Board. It was not appropriate at this time."

"Leases away from the rivers are not a concern for us," said Farling, who moderated the Thursday meeting.

A main concern at the session was notification. The oil and gas sales have to be advertised in the legals of local papers, according to Montana law, but several in attendance said not all papers were contacted.

"Why didn't I read about this in our local paper, The Big Timber Pioneer?" said Sweet Grass resident Shirley Lane.

"The paper of general circulation for the area is the Billings Gazette," Sexton said.

"We live in Sweet Grass," Lane said. "We don't get the Billings Gazette."

Even adjacent landowners weren't aware of the sale and locations of the potential drilling sites, two of which are located less than one mile from Livingston city limits abutting the Sleeping Giant subdivision, according to local landowner Chuck Donovan, who attended the meeting.

His land is 100 yards away, Donovan said Friday.

"I never saw it in the legals," Donovan said Friday.

He was concerned about hydrogen sulfide gas near residential areas and that potential energy development prevented Livingston from expanding eastward.

Sexton said at the Wednesday session concerns over river bed drilling are premature, since so few sites are ever drilled, and environmental standards are reviewed and applied if development does go ahead.

Only 2,000 acres of 27,000 leased acres in the Yellowstone area produce oil and gas, Sexton said. "There is no surface disturbance allowed."

"We want to strike a balance here, " Harper said. "We can have both if development is done right. You will see results from this meeting."

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Jardine home a total loss in fire

By Mark A. York, Enterprise Staff Writer

A home in Jardine was a total loss after it burned Sunday, according to dispatch records of the Park County Sheriff's Office.

"The incident is under investigation," said Park County Sheriff Allan Lutes Monday morning. "Nothing yet — we're looking into it."

The fire was reported to the Sheriff's Office dispatch at 7:50 a.m., with firefighting units arriving shortly after from Gardiner, Yellowstone Park and Paradise Valley.

Yellowstone National Park sent two engines to the fire, park spokeswoman Linda Miller confirmed.

Miller said she could offer no details, which is the park's policy on commenting when it gives assistance to fire departments outside Yellowstone.

Paradise Valley Rural Fire District sent a water tender and two firefighters — Ken Bossett and Chris Bray — spokeswoman Shari Graham reported Monday. Neither firefighter was available for comment.

Gardiner Fire District didn't respond to inquiries Monday.

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Author details Livingston's literary legacy

By Mark A. York, *Enterprise Staff Writer*

"This area of Montana became known as the 'Bloomsbury of the Rockies' in those days," local author and longtime Livingston resident William "Gatz" Hjortsberg said, Wednesday at a presentation before the Park County Historical Society. "We were making history, but of course we weren't aware of it at the time.

"We were just guys without jobs."

Hjortsberg, a novelist and biographer, was invited by the Historical Society to speak on the history of Livingston writers. The event was held at the Senior Citizens Center of Park County.



Enterprise photo by Angela Schneider

Author William "Gatz" Hjortsberg, of Livingston, speaks to members of the Park County Historical Society about Livingston writers in the 1960s and '70s at the Park County Senior Center, Wednesday, Sept. 10. Hjortsberg, a biographer of author Richard Brautigan, is also a novelist.

The term "Bloomsbury," Hjortsberg said, referred to a section of London where famous writers Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, David Garnett, Vita Sackville West and E.M. Forster lived during the period between the world wars.

Hjortsberg recalled how Paradise Valley and Livingston became an enclave of writers in the late 1960s and early '70s. The group included Hjortsberg, Tom McGuane, Jim Harrison, Dan Gerber, Russell Chatham and Richard Brautigan, about whom Hjortsberg just completed a 1,600-page biography that took him 20 years to complete.

"The story centers around Tom McGuane," he said. "We met in 1962 at a Yale Drama School play writing seminar. We both loved fly-fishing and wanted to write fiction."

Gatz, as he is known, said he left a master's program in screenwriting to travel and pursue writing novels, while McGuane remained to complete a master of fine arts. They later met up at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif., where they both held Stegner Fellowships.

"We couldn't afford the housing on a small stipend, so Tom began to look up north for cheaper arrangements," he said. "We wound up in Bolinas in Marin County. Since the seminar was only one night a week, commuting was no problem."

It was during this time McGuane sold his first novel, "The Sporting Club," while Gatz struggled. He couldn't sell his novel.

"I was sick with envy. I was doomed. Stephen Crane was dead by this age," he said to audience laughter. "So at 28, I gave up being a published writer and took a job as a stock boy at the Bolinas grocery store."

Hjortsberg still dabbled at writing fiction for fun.

"Some people discover being a writer is who they are," he said.

McGuane asked to see his project, which was in a rough draft editing stage, around 40 pages, Gatz said, and his only copy.

McGuane submitted the pages to his editor at Simon & Schuster. They offered Gatz a contract, and his first novel, "Alp," based on a dead climber hanging from a rope on the Swiss mountain the Eiger — an idea they'd traded back and forth — sold.

"I didn't even have an ending, or know where it was going," Gatz said.

He delivered the finished manuscript, and the job as a stock boy was history.

It was the last real job he had.

Coming to 'a new place'

"Tom picked Livingston off a map in 1968, as a good place for a headquarters," Gatz said. "He and his wife, Becky, drove out and rented a house at Lewis and H Street. Friends followed from Michigan — Jim Harrison and Dan Gerber, heir to the baby food company, who drove race cars."

Hjortsberg and his wife followed from Colorado, where they'd been living in a Volkswagen micro bus after McGuane, Harrison and Gerber had moved to a ranch in Pray the following summer.

"We all worked in the barn that summer in 1969," Gatz said. "We wanted to make literature. Each line had to justify itself. We were just trying to get it right."

When the owner, rancher Duane Neal, returned in the fall, the group had to find a different place to live. Gatz wound up in Chico Hot Springs. There, he worked on a novel that became "Gray Matters." He and his wife wintered in Mexico that year.

"It was serialized in Playboy," Gatz said.

The novel did well and allowed him to buy a house in Pine Creek.

"Tom McGuane had a knack for real estate," Gatz continued, "and bought a small ranch house and 15 acres in Deep Creek area of the valley, with proceeds from the movie rights to 'The Sporting Club,' and wintered in Key West."

"'Ninety-two in the Shade' is Tom McGuane's best known novel," he said. "They even allowed him to direct the movie."

Subsequent projects, such as the 1975 McGuane-penned film "Rancho Deluxe," drew other writers, directors and actors to the area, including Peter Fonda, who starred in the movie "92 in the Shade."

The artist Russell Chatham arrived in 1972, Gatz said.

"Russell knew of us from the Bolinas days," he said. "He's quite a good writer in his own right, too."

The Murray Hotel played host to all sorts of artistic types, Gatz said, including director Sam Peckinpau and Warren Oates.

"The rooms were \$11 a night," Gatz said. "And you could fall into the bed from the shower, which was handy some nights."

"The '70s were a golden age."

Tom McGuane

"It was a real happy time," McGuane said Thursday in a phone interview from his McLeod ranch. "Montana was a gentle, open society. It was an Edenic kind of world. There was a wonderful freedom to sit and think and make things up."

"Nobody really wanted to get ahead financially, and we were comfortable living like bums. I never intended to stay, but the people were so nice, I wound up staying 40 years."

"The discovery of this place was electrifying, and showed up in our writing, landing in a place that was new."

He said Hollywood was more open in 1975, too.

"I wrote 'Rancho' in 15 days, made the deal in my son's bedroom at the house in Deep Creek, and the project was a go."

He added, "Gatz was great. We all helped each other in those days. Harrison helped me get started."

"Gatz is a fabulist in everything he does," a writer like Italo Calvino, McGuane said.

At the Senior Center Wednesday, original copies of the group's books were arranged on the table. After his presentation, Gatz pondered the collection for a moment and said, "It's hard to say if anyone of these authors will be known 100 years from now. Maybe one."

"Livingston is still a highly literary town."