

CONTEST
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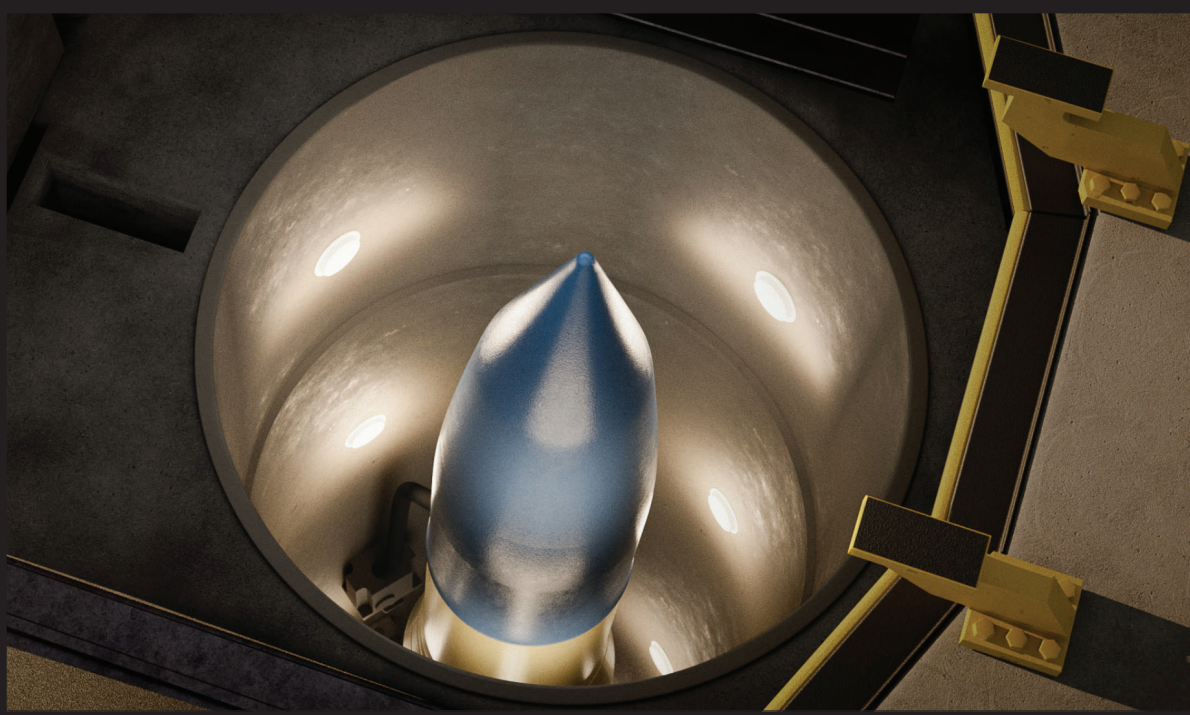
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COURSE CORRECTION



PRESLEY PRICE/NORTHROP GRUMMAN

Sentinel Missile program moving forward with some changes

DEB HILL
Reporter

There's no word yet on whether Lewistown will be a workforce hub for the Sentinel Missile project, according to Air Force officials at a town hall meeting Tuesday evening, and it is possible some missile silos in Central Montana may be decommissioned.

In the largest project ever undertaken by the Air Force, the military is planning to replace the 450 aging Minute Man III missiles located in silos across Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, Colorado and Nebraska with a new missile system called Sentinel. Sentinel is being designed and built by Northrop Grumman.

Tuesday evening Lieutenant John Mayer, Commander of the Sentinel Task Force, told the audience that 55 of the

150 Montana Intercontinental Ballistic Missile sites will be moved. Reasons include the need for all-weather access to missile sites, high water tables that impact silo locations and drive distance from Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls. Exactly which sites will be decommissioned is part of a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement that will get underway this summer. Decommissioned sites could be filled with dirt or gravel, or imploded.

Colonel James Rodrigues from Hill Air Force Base, who is responsible for Sentinel Launch Systems, said the Air Force is working with landowners to secure necessary easements for the Sentinel project, including new fiber optic lines and larger launch sites.

"We have folks out walking

throughout the missile field to confirm where communication lines are now and to see where we need to acquire construction easements," Rodrigues said.

Currently a utility corridor pilot project is underway north of Kimball, Nebraska to see whether the 16.5-foot-wide utility corridor is going to be wide enough for the work required. The new missiles will communicate using fiber optic cable, so the old copper cables will need to be replaced.

"We have a 20-mile-long test project north of Kimball where we have acquired all the easements," said Director of ICBM Infrastructure Peter Sturdivant. "Also, starting this year we will be testing silo construction methods."

More **MISSILE** | A12

Q&A with the candidates 7 running for 3 school board positions

COMPILED BY OLLIE TUCKER
Reporter

While three positions are open on the Lewistown Public Schools Board of Trustees for three-year terms, only one incumbent is running for re-election, Carson Sweeney. The other two trustees, Lisa Koch and Kris Birdwell, decided not to run. Mail-in ballots for the School Board election will go out Wednesday, April 15, with the election happening on Tuesday, May 5.

All candidates were asked to answer four questions about themselves and their thoughts on current issues that Lewistown Public Schools are facing, of which include the proposed \$98,000 elementary levy, which will appear on the May ballot, and the proposed bond for maintenance/improvements at the High School, which will not be on the May ballot but may appear on the ballot later this year.

Below are the candidates' responses, in alphabetical order. Since all answers provided from the candidates were within the guidelines, no edits were made and are formatted in the way that they were sent in.

KARLY DEMARS

1. What is your background and why are you running for Trustee?

"I am a graduate of Fergus High School and MSU-Bozeman, with a degree in natural resources. My husband is a local business owner, and we are raising two children in Lewistown schools, one in 6th grade and one in 2nd grade, so I am personally invested in the success of our school district. Professionally, I serve with the DOI — U.S. Wildland Fire Service as a Regional Fire Planner for Montana and the Dakotas. My work focuses on long-term planning, workforce development, budgeting, policy implementation, and organizational leadership to support safe and effective wildfire response.

I am running for Trustee because I am a public servant at heart and believe strongly in quality public education. I want to use my experience in planning, leadership, and problem-solving to support our teachers, staff, administrators, and community, and to help ensure every student can have a positive and successful school experience."

More **CANDIDATES** | A9



DeMars



Dubbs



Helmer



Saunders



Smith



Overcast



Sweeney

Objection SpringWater Apartment decision likely to be appealed

DEB HILL
Reporter

The City of Lewistown received 22 letters protesting the Board of Adjustment's Feb. 26 approval of waivers for the proposed SpringWater Apartment complex on Eighth Avenue South. The Board's approval cleared the way for developers to apply for a construction permit for the project.

Over 50 people attended the Board of Adjustment hearing at the end of February. The majority of those who spoke said they opposed the construction of the four-story apartment building, as it was not in

keeping with the character of their neighborhood.

However the Board of Adjustment's decisions were limited to whether or not to grant the three waivers. The Board approved two of the three: to reduce the setback (distance to the lot line) from 15 feet to 10 feet for the rear of the building, and to allow developers to provide only 24 parking sites on the lot, with the rest of the parking being on nearby streets.

A third request for a building taller than the code allows was not granted.

Members of the public who objected to the Board's decisions had 30 days from the hearing in which to

file their appeals. In general appeals must show that the Board's decision to approve the waivers did not adequately consider the four required findings.

Those include that unique physical conditions of the property require a waiver from typical development rules, that applying normal regulations would cause unnecessary hardship, that the waiver doesn't threaten public health, safety or general welfare, and that the granting of the waiver doesn't violate the intent of the City's growth plans or zoning ordinances.

More **APARTMENT** | A12



DEB HILL/REPORTER/

Spencer Woith, president of Woith Engineering, explains the design of the proposed SpringWater Apartment complex to the Board of Adjustment at the end of February. The Board's approval of two waivers has since been appealed.



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OBITUARIES: G. ROSS, G. FINKBEINER

Missile/from A1

Originally the existing Minute Man III missile silos were to be reused for Sentinel, but last year the Air Force announced that due to age, deterioration and other reasons, all new silos must be built. Except for the 55 Montana silos that will be relocated, new silos will be constructed on the same sites as the Minute Man III silos.

“We will need a larger site because digging out the old silos and bringing in the materials for constructing the new silos just can’t be done on the existing 1-acre sites. We will be working with landowners to increase the launch sites to 5 acres,” Rodrigues said, adding that command sites will be 10 acres in size.

A prototype of the new launch silo is currently under development by Northrop Grumman in Promontory, Utah, according to an Air Force press release on March 27. In an effort to contain costs, Northrop Grumman will create a modular silo design that can be repeated at each of the 450 sites. Construction of the silo prototype will tell the Air Force what size of workforce is needed.



PHOTO BY DEB HILL

Air Force Colonel James Rodrigues addresses the crowd at Tuesday nights Sentinel missile town hall.

“We want to lower the number of workers we need, but we will still need to bring in outside labor,” Rodrigues said.

“A lot depends on the efficiencies we find as we go through the prototype development,” Sturdivant added. “We haven’t decided yet how to split the job up. We need to build the new silos quickly, so we probably need between 1,000 and 1,500 people.”

Originally estimated at \$77.7 billion, the Sentinel program cost estimates ballooned to \$141 billion by 2024. As required by the Nunn-McCurdy Act, because of the cost

overruns the program had to be re-approved by Congress, causing a review of the timeline and project implementation. Recently the Air Force determined it could not reuse existing silos, but must build new ones, another impact to the budget.

When asked about the current cost estimate on Tuesday evening, Sturdivant cited the current cost estimate at \$141 billion, but also said he did not know if there was an upper limit for the Sentinel project budget. Sturdivant said he expects the Sentinel missiles will be operational sometime in the early 2030s.

Air Force officials encouraged members of the public to voice their concerns during the supplemental EIS process, which begins this summer. According to officials, the “Sentinel SEIS will assess changes to the proposed action that have occurred since the Sentinel design has matured after the May 2023 publication of the Record of Decision for the original Sentinel EIS.”

Look for documents, schedules and comment periods for the SEIS on the website www.SentinelSEIS.com.

Apartment/from A1

“We don’t know how many of these 22 letters will end up meeting the legal criteria for an appeal,” City Manager Holly Phelps told the News-Argus on Thursday.

According to Phelps, the City has hired outside legal counsel to assist with the process of reviewing the letters and setting up an appeals hearing. City Attorney Tyler West is on paternity leave, so the City worked through the League of Cities and Towns to find an attorney to handle the apartment appeals process.

“We’re sending all the letters of appeal to the attorney, who will determine which ones have merit. There are things that people might comment on that don’t have anything to do with the three waivers the Board of Adjustment had to make their findings on. Those would not rise to the level of a formal appeal,” Phelps explained.

Another decision the attorney will make is who counts as an “aggrieved party,” something that is spelled out in Montana law.

If an appeal is determined to have merit and the party making it is an “aggrieved party” as

defined by law, then the Board of Adjustment will set a public meeting to hear those appeals.

The City has 30 days from the end of the appeal period, which was March 27, to schedule the appeal hearing. The meeting will be run by the City’s attorney and the Board of Adjustments.

“I don’t know if all the appeals will be heard at the same time, or if they would be heard sequentially. We will leave it to the attorney how best to do that. But each person who has an appeal will be allowed to present his or her case,” Phelps said.

Following those presentations, Board of Adjustment members will review their findings and determine whether to support the decisions they made in February or whether to make a change.

After that there is yet another level for disputing the results.

“If someone doesn’t feel the appeals process was handled correctly, they can take the case to the next level, which is court,” Phelps said.

Phelps said the date for the appeals hearing will be made public as soon as she hears back from the attorney.

Deb Hill can be reached at dhill@lewistownnews.com or by phone at (406) 535-3401.

Candidates/from A9

I am running for trustee because I want to see our children succeed. We live in an era of rapid digital change, and while our schools have access to incredible educational tools, we cannot simply place them in students’ hands without proper guidance. Just as I teach adults to navigate their devices intentionally, I want to ensure our students develop strong digital hygiene and critical thinking skills. I will bring my hands-on experience and ensure our kids get an education that is balanced and secure.”

2. *What do you think is the biggest issue facing Lewistown Public Schools and how would you address it?*

“The list of issues is a long one. As someone who works in technology, I take that perspective — and boy, are there changes happening fast. “Artificial Intelligence” models are being pushed into classrooms, but there must be restraint and balance between useful tools and dangerous fads.

Our community faces pressure to change because of technology, but we cannot allow this change to be forced upon us. My summary of the Data Center meeting held on March 19th is this: Technology has always had the motto of “move fast and break things”, and now someone has decided it’s us they might break. AI in schools is in the same category, except it is our children in the hot seat.

Most adults have a difficult time

managing the technology we find prevalent in our homes and our hands. We must be intentional. Our teachers are irreplaceable.”

3. *What do you think about the bond that the School Board has been talking about for facility maintenance/improvements at the High School?*

“The high school building is an amazing community asset. We host tournaments that bring thousands of students — and their families — to town, concerts in the event center, and festivals in the gymnasium. Buildings require maintenance, and the high school is no different. I’ve helped Mr. Hamling with technical issues backstage and I know the struggle that operating aging infrastructure takes. If we defer maintenance for too long, this bond is a small price compared to the price tag attached to “emergency replacements”. Again, we should be intelligent and intentional with how we invest and grow, but the reality is that we cannot afford to let the community spaces at the high school decline.”

4. *What are your thoughts on the proposed \$98,000 elementary levy?*

“A reality of life: costs rise. I have been frustrated for years that we have failed to pass levy after levy. We talk about making Lewistown a better place for our children, and then refuse to invest in their environments? We have seen great growth in the Elementary school buildings in the past few years, but if we refuse to provide the budget to keep educators and staff in these spaces

then our investments into the real estate are useless.”

Carson Sweeney
1. *What is your background and why are you running for Trustee?*

“I have appreciated my time as a school board trustee and would ask voters for their continued support. I was born and raised in Lewistown and was fortunate to complete K-12 within the Lewistown School District. I then continued my education and graduated from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology with a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. I am grateful to lead an excellent group of employees as the General Manager of Fergus Electric Cooperative. My wife, Jamie (Colver) Sweeney, and I have three young children, two of which are students within the district. In my current role, I develop and implement long term operational initiatives and budgets to meet the strategic and financial goals of our electric cooperative. I have the desire and opportunity to use my strengths and experience to support our local school board, school administrators, educators, and students.”

2. *What do you think is the biggest issue facing Lewistown Public Schools and how would you address it?*

“As a school board trustee, I have seen firsthand how complicated our state funding and school finances are. School districts are regularly struggling with the gap between 80% of the base budget and the budget necessary to operate. Often, the voting public isn’t aware of our role locally to support the budget difference created within this complicated state mandated funding process. Our biggest challenge is to build voter confidence and trust while being responsible with taxpayer dollars to maximize student potential with highly qualified and competent educators. We have an impressive and caring staff within the

school district that strive each day to educate our amazing youth. I hope voters will show their support and appreciation by approving the elementary levy.”

3. *What do you think about the bond that the School Board has been talking about for facility maintenance/improvements at the High School?*

“Our high school building is now 40 years old and has served our community well throughout that time. The school is overdue for maintenance of the roof, electrical components, fire system, and security controls. Roof leaks are of primary concern and can be noticed throughout the building with water stains on many ceiling tiles. The school board has taken a thorough and comprehensive deep dive into the pressing issues that need to be addressed. I believe we need to be good stewards of our buildings and maintain them in good working order so that future generations of students and staff can utilize them to their full potential. Everyone understands that general maintenance is required of all buildings and our high school is no exception. Now is the time to invest in the building our community is truly proud of.”

4. *What are your thoughts on the proposed \$98,000 elementary levy?*

“The school board recently voted not pursue or renew several levy options so that we could give our citizens a tax break. Financially we need help in the elementary budget, but our high school budget is stable. With the approval of the elementary levy, taxes will still decrease \$9.16 per year on a \$200,000 home, compared to existing levies. As a reminder, a levy supports learning and a bond supports buildings. I hope that the public will support our elementary levy, appreciate the temporary tax relief, and support a future high school bond so that we can complete necessary and appropriate building maintenance.”

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| June 22nd | -----CMMC Suite 5----- | 8:30am to Noon |
| June 23rd | -----CMMC Suite 5----- | 1:00pm to 5:00pm |
| July 20th | -----CMMC Suite 5----- | 8:30am to Noon |
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