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The I-70 Scout

# The I-70 Scout

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Searching for news in Watkins, Bennett, Strasburg, Byers, Deer Trail and Agate

Wednesday, June 25, 2025

## 'Burg Schools shuffle principals for '25-26

by **Steven Vetter**  
Managing Editor

STRASBURG — About 2½ months after being part of five staff suspended because of an investigation surrounding a boys locker room incident, the two lead administrators at Hemphill Middle School were formally fired and their replacements for the next school year named.

During a 7 a.m. special board meeting June 20,

the Strasburg School Board unanimously approved Superintendent Kelle Bongard's recommendation of "rescission of prior offer" to both Hemphill Middle School Principal Johnnie Echer and Assistant Principal Avis Devlin.

"All administration contracts were recommended and approved by the board of education at the March meeting," Bongard said. "Since the board approved the renewal of the two administrative contracts, the appropriate process was to rescind

those renewals accordingly."

The board also approved JaLee Kitzman as new Hemphill principal and Jeromie Bongard as middle school dean of students. Kitzman was in her first year at Strasburg Elementary principal, and Bongard was high school dean when they were transferred to the middle school to replace Echer and Devlin. No middle school assistant principal

**SEE STRASBURG BOE  
PAGE 6**



ISAAC MANAUGH/The I-70 Scout

Shari Mathias, left, kicks through a board held by her daughter, Jocelyn, during the June 14 grand opening of the new Colorado Martial Arts Academy in Strasburg. **SEE PAGE 9.**

## Deer Trail board OKs new gas station; new mechanical sewer plant delayed

by **Steven Vetter**  
Managing Editor

DEER TRAIL — A new large-scale gas station and convenience store in Deer Trail is another step closer to fruition after town trustees recently approved preliminary plans from the developer.

In addition, plans for a new, more expensive mechanical wastewater treatment plant has apparently been put on hold.

During their June 10 meeting, trustees unanimously approved the minor subdivision plat proposal for the new Maverik station and auxiliary lot at 512 and 555 Seventh Ave. The location is immediately off the westbound interchange with I-70 and between Cedar and Date streets along Seventh Avenue.

The east side of the roadway is where the fuel pumps and convenience store will be located while the west side will house highway-visible signage and a detention pond for runoff collection purposes. The west lot is where the current Phillips 66 gas station is located, but it will be demolished.

Conditions of approval include:

- A development agreement quantifying and securing all public improvements — street repaving, right-of-way landscaping, detention pond and sewer line relocation/installation — including financial security to ensure the town can complete improvements if Maverik defaults.
- Installation of a guardrail along the south and west sides of the

**SEE DEER TRAIL BOT  
PAGE 6**

## Bennett board softens on water valve expense to residents

by **Shylo Bockenfeld**  
Staff Writer

BENNETT — Bennett's Board of Trustees indicated recently that it hopes to take some pressure off homeowners with changes to the town's mandatory Pressure Reducing Valve Program.

During its June 10 regular meeting, the board laid groundwork for increasing the rebate to \$552 per homeowner and delaying the pressure change to September of 2026.

Homeowners will still have the option of self repair but town code must be adhered to. A preliminary rebate of \$322 was mentioned during the board's May meeting, where it was also announced that the number of impacted residents had doubled from preliminary estimates and that the total cost jumped from approximately \$800 to \$1,000 per home.

The board is considering three options to assist impacted residents after learning

earlier this year of additional costs for twice as many homes as expected, particularly in the older parts of town. Town staff was directed to prepare a resolution for the board to vote on during its June 24 meeting, which occurred after press time.

Option one was instruction for homeowner self repair for which the town would post instructional videos on its website. Self repair was already approved by the board and this option would not increase the rebate or affect the budget. Multiple trustees indicated self-repair was the most unlikely option to be taken by most residents.

"The homeowner, if they did the work, they would be liable if something happened, right? So hopefully their homeowner's insurance would take effect, right?" Asked trustee Denice Smith, who also wondered if option one could make the town liable for unsuccessful repairs. The town attorney, Scotty Krob, advised that the town



CARL STEITZ/For The Scout

A couple of young ladies listen to Eric Golden and his band during Party in the Park at Trupp Park in Bennett June 13.

would not be liable.

"Option one looks nice in print but in a practical application it's not going to work," said Trustee Larry Vittum, who estimated that 1 in 10 Bennett homeowners might

be able to complete the installation on their own. "If you offer that to them, you're going to get a pretty high rate of failure and that is not the result the town is looking for."

Mayor Pro Tem Kevin

Barden, himself a longtime contractor, confirmed homeowners could struggle with a self repair.

"This does disproportion-

**SEE BENNETT BOT**

**PAGE 4**