

# FAIRFIELD Ledger

SOUTHEAST IOWA UNION

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## Fairfield Women's Club to host Lasagna Luncheon on March 3

By Andy Hallman, Southeast Iowa Union

FAIRFIELD – The Fairfield Women's Club will hold its annual Lasagna Luncheon from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Tuesday, March 3, the first of five fundraisers the group has planned for 2026.

As always, the event will be at the historic McElhinny House at 300 N. Court St., which the women's club is responsible for maintaining. This year is also a milestone year for the house, which turns 175 years old. The women's club purchased the building in 1931, and have been holding meetings there ever since 1933.

The luncheon will feature dine-in, carry-out and delivery options, with a choice of meat or vegetable lasagna plus a green salad, breadsticks and a dessert of either white cake, chocolate cake, lemon bar or brownie. Orders can be placed by calling 641-472-3241.

The club will prepare about 300 meals, anticipating 175 of those to be delivered, and 90-100 of them to be dine-in and the rest carry-out. Club member Julie Johnston said the club's fundraisers took a hit when the pandemic struck, but sales have been climbing higher each year to the point where the group's fundraisers are generating pre-pandemic revenues of about \$5,000.

Feeding 300 people is a



Fairfield Women's Club members, from left, Julie Johnston, Jean Keller, Jeanie Belgarde and Janet Roberts assemble supplies for the club's lasagna luncheon on Tuesday, March 3 at the McElhinny House. (Andy Hallman/The Union)

massive undertaking, and requires an army of 8-10 women who will work all day Monday, March 2 chopping vegetables before a full morning of baking on March 3. The day of the meal itself will feature 20 club members participating, many of whom will use ovens in their own home to bake the lasagnas, speeding up the process. A team of six delivery drivers will transport the meals throughout town.

The club has purchased 60 pounds of meat, 36 pounds of noodles and

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Julie Johnston (left) and Jeanie Belgarde load 60 pounds of meat into the refrigerator, which they will use to prepare 300 meals for the Fairfield Women's Club lasagna luncheon on March 3, 2026. (Andy Hallman/The Union)

## Fairfield school district plans to add new wing to middle school

By Andy Hallman, Southeast Iowa Union

FAIRFIELD – The Fairfield school board is united in a plan to build a new wing onto the existing middle school, and then demolish a portion of the building that has been expensive to maintain due to water infiltration.

At its regular meeting on Feb. 16, the board voted unanimously to pursue a "hybrid" plan to address the maintenance problems at the middle school that would combine construction of new classrooms, as well as maintaining a good chunk of the building such as the cafeteria, gymnasium, kitchen, band room and fine arts rooms on the west side. Once the new wing is built, the two floors on the east side of the building will be demolished, since that side has the most water problems and is the most expensive to maintain.

At the board's next regular meeting on March 23, it will hold a public hearing on a proposed issuance of up to \$23.5 million in school infrastructure bonds, which would be paid for from the 1 cent sales tax the district already receives. Fairfield Superintendent Zach Wigle said this would not affect the district's tax levy, nor would it require a referendum.

The specifics of the middle school's new wing are still being ironed out, but Wigle said the most likely scenario is to add onto the existing structure's north side, where the front entrance is now. That would mean moving the bus lane that currently occupies that space. Wigle said, if everything goes as planned, the district hopes to go out for bids on the project before Christmas, to begin construction in spring 2027, and for students to move in to the new wing by fall 2028.

"Kids will never be displaced, and we won't need mobile classrooms," he said. "It will be inconvenient and we'll have to reroute buses, but we won't have kids in modulars."

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## Fairfield residents may have to pay for previously free mulch

By Andy Hallman, Southeast Iowa Union

FAIRFIELD – The Fairfield City Council discussed a proposal to establish fees for both dropping off yard waste and picking up wood chips during its meeting Monday, Feb. 23.

The city had previously provided wood chips for free at its compost site on South 20th Street. After that site was closed in 2024, the city maintained a free mulch pile at a lot it owned just south of Hy-Vee.

Under a proposed ordinance before the council, Fairfield residents would have to pay for this mulch that was previously free. A full pick-up load of wood chips (defined as 4 feet by 4 feet by 8 feet) would cost \$25 plus tax, and half a load would cost \$12.50 plus tax. That would be roughly the same cost that the city has charged residents to drop off yard waste at its maintenance garage at 1002 W. Jefferson Ave. Waste Management stickers, which residents can place on yard waste bags to be picked up by Waste Management on



Under a proposed ordinance, Fairfield residents would have to pay a fee for wood chips that were previously free to pick-up. (Andy Hallman/The Union)

their trash pick-up day, would remain \$2.50.

Though the council ultimately voted 6-0 to advance this ordinance from the first to the second reading, council member Elizabeth Estey was initially skeptical about the plan to charge residents for mulch.

"It still seems like a bait and switch, since we just established all of those fees for people disposing of their yard waste, which

was supposed to offset the cost of the mulching," Estey said.

Council member Tom Twohill chimed in to say he felt the fee for mulch pick-up was reasonable.

"We're not creating a profit center out of this," he said. "We're not making money at all. It's not a money-grab or anything."

Estey remained skeptical.

"We just addressed this

issue, and maybe we didn't fully address it, but at the time, it was like 'we have so much mulch we don't know what to do with it, we'll be giving it away for the rest of our lives,'" Estey said.

Council member Paul Gandy said he understood Estey's concern, but felt that the matter was not fully addressed the last time the council took it up.

Fairfield City Engineer and Public Works Director Melanie Carlson said the mulch pick-up fee was intended to offset the cost of grinding the yard waste into wood chips. She reminded the council that the city still offers free yard waste pick-up days throughout the year.

The council members who voted to advance the ordinance from the first reading to the second were Gandy, Twohill, Estey, Bob Ferguson, Matthew Rowe and Victoria Thompson. Terri Kness was absent.

The city's website indicates that the maintenance shed on Jefferson Avenue will reopen for yard waste drop-off on April 6.

## Illinois man arrested for driving wrong way on Highway 34

Courtesy of Henry County Sheriff's Office

On February 22nd, 2026, at approximately 2:10 a.m., the Henry County Sheriff's Office received a report of an SUV traveling westbound in the eastbound lanes of Highway 34.

Henry County Dispatch fielded several 911 calls giving updated location information about the vehicle. The vehicle was located, still traveling in the incorrect lanes, and safely stopped near mile marker 239 of Highway 34.

An investigation into the incident determined Chad Hohenthaner, 54 of Niota, IL, was driving on the wrong side of a two-way highway. Hohenthaner was placed under arrest and transported to the Henry County Jail. Hohenthaner was charged with Operating While Intoxicated, 1st Offense, a serious misdemeanor, Open Container, and Driving on Wrong Side of Two-Way Highway, both scheduled violations.



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