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NEWSHOPPER

Baxter's buttonhook overpass approved if conditions are met



MnDOT renderings of the buttonhook at the highway 210 and 371 intersection in Baxter.

A \$58 million reconstruction of the highways 210 and 371 intersection in Baxter is bumpy moving forward.

The Baxter City Council recently passed approval of the design, in a backhanded way, to require conditions from MnDOT (See sidebar

for conditions). The extensive redesign includes two bridges and numerous roundabout exits to go to local access roads to businesses. City council meetings have been packed by citizens opposing the project.

"If MnDOT meets the sev-

en conditions, the project goes forward," said Trevor Walter, city of Baxter director of public works. "MnDOT has until Feb. 19 to respond to Baxter's proposed conditions. The city of Baxter expects a written answer from MnDOT by February 19, 2026," Wal-

ter said in an interview.

Eric Schiller of MnDOT, project manager, stressed (in a video recorded by MnDOT) that something must be done for that intersection, which suffers from a tremendously high number of accidents and has frequent traffic congestion and backups. "Traffic spikes to 60,000 vehicles per day in the summer months," said Schiller.

The design is expected to be finalized by 2027 with construction in 2028. Design Engineer Derek Schmidt of WSB, explained that the intersection rebuild is designed to provide both local access and keep traffic moving along the two major highways. Two bridges would be installed, at Excelsior Road and at Hwy. 371, with numerous ramps to access the local frontage roads.

Schmidt talked about how a shopper could travel from

Costco to Fleet Farm on local roads without having to access Hwys. 210 or 371. "Local traffic doesn't need to use 371 ever when going to local businesses. There are ways to get where you are going instead of interacting with the 40,000 vehicles on 371."

Another piece of this complicated project is they have to pass over a railroad track, which requires a high clearance for the 371 bridge.

In response to public feedback, MnDOT says it changed the design details before holding its November 3, 2025, public hearing.

"Thank you to everyone who provided feedback to us. We appreciate everything that you have told us," said MnDOT on its website.

"The project team considered community feedback and has made changes to

Continued on Page 4

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COMMUNITY EVENTS

January

31st - Justin Morneau Ice Fishing Classic 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. Nitti's Hunters Point Resort on Mille Lacs Lake
 31st - Brainerd Jaycees Ice Fishing Extravaganza at Hole in the Day Bay on Gull Lake. Over \$4.5 million donated to charity. A \$3 million annual economic impact on the Brainerd Lakes Area. Thousands of anglers. Endless excitement. Cash, trucks, top-tier gear, and unforgettable memories await.

February

2nd & 9th - Cribbage players wanted, 1 - 2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
 5th - 7th - Crosslake Winterfest Family Fun Zone - Three days of indoor and outdoor activities throughout Crosslake for all ages to enjoy!
 7th - Palisade Super Sledders Snowmobile Club Open House, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., at the clubhouse.
 7th - Palisade Mid-Winter Festival. Vendor Market, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., at the Palisade Community Center. For more info call or text Debbie Weimer at 218-821-9985. Parade begins at noon.
 9th - Lakes Area Unlimited Learning speakers Gary Griffin and Sandra Brueland, 1:30 p.m. at Heartwood Senior Living in Crosby. It's free for members and \$10.00 for non-members.
 10th - Whitetails Cuyuna Range Whitetails Meeting, 6:30 p.m., at the Deerwood American Legion. For more info call Anne at 612-916-2459.
 12th - The Brainerd Lakes Area Parkinson's Disease Support Group meeting, 1 p.m. at Lord of Life Church, 6190 Fairview Drive, Baxter. Call (218) 829-4017 if you have questions.
 12th - Bridges of Hope Hope on the Slopes at Mount Ski Gull. Admission for spectators is free. Team check-in begins at 3:30pm, with races starting at 6:00 p.m. Proceeds from the event will support Bridges of Hope's programs.
 16th - Cribbage players wanted, 1 - 2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.
 18th - Cascade Church Cascade United Methodist Church Free Come and Eat Supper, 5:30 p.m. Call 218-534-3507 for a reservation. Cascade is located between Deerwood and Crosby at 22781 Black Lake Road, Deerwood on Highway 6 and 210.
 20th & 21st - Triple Fest Snow & Ice Drag Racing at Breezy Point Resort

Send your community events information to hopper@crosbyironton.net

or send us a message via www.NewsHopper.net/contact/

Area Births, Open Houses, Engagements, Weddings & Community Events are published **FREE!**

Send your community events information to hopper@crosbyironton.net

AARP Taxaide free tax assistance

The AARP Taxaide program for low to moderate income taxpayers will open by appointment only at the Aitkin Public Library beginning Thursday, Feb. 12 and be open every Thursday until April 9 from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

You must bring SS cards for taxpayers and dependents, picture ID, all tax return documents in printed form and last year's tax return. For married filing joint returns, both taxpayers must be present to sign

the return. AARP Tax-Aide volunteers are not trained in all areas of income taxes. You may be advised to see a paid preparer if your return is out of scope or is too time consuming.

Facilitated self assistance (FSA), with a counselor to assist the taxpayer using our software and computers, is available on Thursdays beginning Feb. 12 at 1:00 p.m. by appointment only. (limited to adjusted gross income of \$84,000).

We will also be available at the following locations and times:

Waukenabo Community Center: Wednesday, March 25 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

McGregor Library: Tuesday, March 31, Saturday, Mar. 28 and Saturday, April 4.

Beginning the last week of January, taxpayers may call (218)670-5588 for an appointment for all locations. Leave your name and phone number and you will be called for an appointment.

Competitive spirit meets great rewards, as Ruttger's has announced an impressive prize list:

- 1st Place - \$500
- 2nd Place - \$250
- 3rd Place - \$100
- PLUS additional prizes

Adding to the excitement, the top three teams will also get to choose from exclusive Ruttger's experiences:

- Oktoberfest 2-night stay
- 4-person round of golf
- \$50 resort gift card

First place gets first pick, second place chooses next, and third place still walks away a winner.

Beyond the competition, Rockin' Ice Bocce promises

Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort, located at 25039 Tame Fish Lake Road in Deerwood, is turning up the winter fun with its popular Rockin' Ice Bocce tournament on Saturday, February 14, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Games begin promptly at 9 a.m.

This high-energy event blends the strategy of bocce with the icy excitement of curling, creating a one-of-a-kind competition that's as fun to watch as it is to play. The tournament is open to co-ed teams of four, with no more than two males per team, and will be run as an elimination-style tournament.

After a day on the ice, couples can cap off Valentine's Day with Ruttger's Sweetheart Supper, served from 5 to 8 p.m. at Ruby's on the Lake. Diners will be welcomed with a complimentary glass of champagne and treated to a gourmet, five-course experience.



a full day of winter celebration, including ice games, bonfires, food and drinks, music, and plenty of laughs — making it a perfect outing for participants and spectators alike.

The team registration fee is \$100 per team. Teams can sign up online, and those with questions can call 218-678-4666 or email rob.rathsack@ruttgers.com.

You'll love our five course Sweetheart Supper

After a day on the ice, couples can cap off Valentine's Day with Ruttger's Sweetheart Supper, served from 5 to 8 p.m. at Ruby's on the Lake. Diners will be welcomed with a complimentary glass of champagne and treated to a gourmet, five-course experience.

The menu includes:
 First Course (shared): Grilled lamb and shrimp with garlic-herb marinade and blueberry habanero reduction.

Second Course (select one): Winter berry & burrata salad or short rib French onion soup.

Third Course (shared): Dark honey molasses bread with honey cinnamon butter

Fourth Course: (select one)

Firecracker shrimp, or coffee-chili rubbed ribeye, or a shared surf n' turf featuring ribeye and lobster tails.

Fifth Course (shared): Pistachio honey baklava cake with vanilla bean ice cream.

Reservations for the Sweetheart Supper are recommended and can be made by calling 218-678-4644.

Whether you're aiming for the top prize, enjoying the winter atmosphere, or finishing the day with a romantic dinner, Rockin' Ice Bocce at Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort promises a Valentine's Day to remember.

LEGAL NOTICES

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Jan. 31, Feb. 7 & 14, 2026)

LIBBY TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETING

The Libby Township Board will meet at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 17, 2026 at the Palisade Community Center. Township supervisor Tom Anderson may attend remotely via phone or Zoom. The purpose of this meeting shall be to discuss and decide matters that may come before the board.

Dated this 22nd day of January, 2026

Jane Grimsbo Jewett, clerk
Libby Township

2.91

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Jan. 24 & 31, 2026)

SPENCER TOWNSHIP MEETING SCHEDULE FOR 2026

The Board of Spencer Township will hold its Regular March monthly meetings on the second Tuesday of each month, Jan 13th, Feb 10th, March 8th (at 1 p.m. Sunday due to Annual Meeting on the second Tuesday, the 10th), April 14th, May 12th, June 9th, July 14th, Aug 11th, Sept 8th, Oct 13th, Nov 10th, and Dec 8th at Spencer Town Hall at 5:30 p.m.

The Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 10th at 6 p.m.

Any special meetings such as the Board of Appeal and Equalization will be posted a month ahead of the meeting and published at least two weeks before the meeting.

Dated January 13, 2026
Bonnie Ganz, Clerk
Spencer Township

4.3

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Baxter's buttonhook overpass | Continued from Page 1



A rendering visualizing the view from the Fleet Farm parking lot looking west.

the design. We have revised two existing access points near Golf Course Dr. and Fairview Rd. The revised design includes updates to trail locations and a trail facility on the Hwy. 371 bridge crossing Hwy. 210 and the railroad. The project layout has been submitted to the City of Baxter for municipal consent with a public hearing scheduled for November 3 [since been held]."

Business opposed

Baxter area businesses are opposed to the design that they say splits Baxter in two and is over-engineered. They are pushing for a simpler design with a slower speed limit to encourage travelers to access local business.

Matt Killan, president of Brainerd Lakes Chamber of Commerce, published this in a guest editorial:

"Local businesses are not afraid of change. They're afraid of vanishing. Owners tell us they worry about customers speeding by or never finding them at all. Some fear they will be forced to close or relocate. Others wonder

whether they can survive two years of construction followed by a design that feels like a permanent detour.

"Yes, this intersection is busy and complex. Summer weekends can be frustrating. Population and tourism growth are real. In many ways, the buttonhook is ingenious but it's over-engineered and causes too much collateral damage. It splits Baxter in two.

"Safer does not have to mean more complicated. Faster should not mean people just pass us by. A simpler, community-friendly design with slower speed limits can reduce crashes, clear up confusion, and keep everyday trips intuitive," summed up Killan.

It will be an interesting couple of years when this mega project is constructed and it will impact everyone in the area. MnDOT and the city of Baxter will proceed to try and reach a design agreement for the Hwys. 210/371 intersection in Baxter.

Conditions before Baxter City Council will approve

the project:

• MnDOT shall monitor traffic operations at the Highway 210 east ramp intersection as traffic volumes increase toward the 2050 design year. If queuing, spillback or other operational deficiencies are identified that adversely affect safety or mainline operations, MnDOT shall implement corrective operational or geometric improvements. MnDOT shall ensure adequate right of way, grading limits and geometric flexibility are preserved within the current project design to accommodate future reconfiguration alternatives.

This came up as a potential early issue in the interchange design by the third-party review the city commissioned with the results presented Jan. 6 by Joe DeVore, project manager and traffic engineer with KLJ Engineering.

• Following completion of construction, MnDOT shall conduct a speed study and shall establish the posted speed limit in strict accordance with Minnesota Statute 169.14. The posted speed

limit shall be based on observed operating speeds and post-construction roadway conditions and shall not automatically default to posted speed limits assumed during the project's design phase without supporting data and formal documentation.

However, it does not limit the speed to 55 mph through the city as was previously suggested. It also didn't say anything on speed calming design options like narrower lane widths.

• MnDOT will coordinate with affected businesses to implement wayfinding signage through the Minnesota Logo Sign Franchise Program. MnDOT shall ensure that signage is provided in locations, quantities and timeframes sufficient to minimize driver confusion and backtracking associated with the interchange, consistent with applicable MnDOT policies and state statutes.

However, businesses previously expressed concern that policy usually limits the signs to food, gas and lodging businesses and that MnDOT limits where the signs go in the corridor.

• MnDOT shall coordinate with the city to conduct post-construction monitoring of traffic operations and safety at the Clearwater Road and Woida Road intersections. If monitoring identifies safety, operational or capacity deficiencies that are reasonably attributable to traffic redistribution resulting from the interchange project, MnDOT shall evaluate and advance appropriate improvements in coordination with the city.

• Glory Road (west leg).

MnDOT shall collaborate with the city to advance a signal replacement project at the Highway 371/Glory Road intersection with specific attention to the western leg, recognizing anticipated interchange-related traffic growth. MnDOT shall complete an intersection analysis to define required improvements for the entire intersection, including appropriate lane configurations and storage lengths to accommodate observed and projected traffic pattern shifts. The replacement signal shall be designed and implemented within three years of the interchange being open to traffic.

However, the condition does not specifically state dual turn lanes previously identified by the city and the third-party review.

• Right-in only on southbound Highway 371 at Design Road.

This was noted specifically tied in to access to the new clinic going in the former Gander Mountain site.

• Maintain the three-quarter intersection on Highway 210 at Golf Course Drive.

Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office assist federal agents in arrests

The Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office assisted federal agents with a warrant operation Monday morning at El Potro Mexican Restaurant, an action that drew swift attention and questions from community members.

According to a sheriff's office press release, deputies were asked to assist a Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) team at about 11 a.m. on Jan. 26 as federal agents executed two arrest warrants in downtown Brainerd. Four individuals were taken into custody without incident.

"The Sheriff's Office has received several calls from community members regarding Immigration and Customs Enforcement activity in the

area," the release stated. "At this time, the Sheriff would like to provide clarification regarding the Sheriff's Office's involvement."

Sheriff's officials emphasized that their role was limited to providing assistance during the arrests at the request of federal authorities. The release also noted that the sheriff's office does not have information about where or when Homeland Security may conduct additional operations elsewhere in the county or the state.

"Those activities are managed independently by Homeland Security," the statement said. "The Sheriff's Office remains committed to transparency and to serving the safety

needs of the community."

The Crow Wing County Jail has been housing federal detainees for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, a practice that has drawn public interest amid heightened national attention on immigration enforcement. Last year, the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office signed a 287(g) enforcement agreement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, a federal program that allows local law enforcement agencies to collaborate more closely with ICE on certain immigration-related functions.

No injuries were reported during Monday's operation, and officials said the arrests were carried out peacefully.

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Chef's Choice Dinner Special

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Crepe Bar
Crepe's filled with your choice of
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Saturday, February 14
8 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Games will begin at 9 a.m. sharp

A fun combination of bocce & curling.

The day includes
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by Monday, February 9

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Sweetheart Supper

Saturday, February 14
5 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Treat your sweetheart to a gourmet meal at Ruby's on the Lake.

Menu includes: Reservations recommended 218-678-4644

One complimentary glass of champagne per person.

1st Course (Shared) Grilled Lamb & Shrimp
Garlic-herb marinade and house-made blueberry habanero reduction.

2nd Course (select Two) Winter Berry & Burrata Salad
Mixed greens, arugula, seasonal berries, toasted almonds, burrata cheese, mint vinaigrette and balsamic glaze.

-OR- Short Rib French Onion Soup

3rd Course (Shared) Dark honey molasses bread
served with honey cinnamon butter.

4th Course (select Two or One Surf n' Turf) Firecracker Shrimp

Roasted red pepper risotto, wilted spinach, aged Parmesan and micro greens.

-OR- Coffee-Chili Rubbed Ribeye

16 oz. Braveheart Black Angus coffee-chili rubbed ribeye grilled to your liking, topped with garlic herb compound butter, grilled asparagus and au gratin potatoes

-OR- Surf n' Turf (Shared)

20 oz. Braveheart Black Angus coffee-chili rubbed ribeye grilled to your liking, topped with garlic herb compound butter. Two 4oz broiled lobster tails with citrus herb butter, au gratin potatoes and asparagus for two.

5th Course (Shared) Pistachio Honey Baklava Cake

Served with vanilla bean ice cream.

25039 Tame Fish Lake Rd., Deerwood

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