

"Hands-free" bill clears Senate floor

On Monday, legislation that prohibits drivers from placing phone calls outside of hands-free mode was approved by the full Senate. House File 50, known as the 'hands-free bill' and authored by Senator Scott Newman (R-Hutchinson), passed the Senate with bipartisan support and awaits action by a conference committee.

"Cell phone abuse on the roadways is a growing problem. This isn't about restricting liberties; it's a matter of public safety. The purpose of this bill is to encourage drivers to use their phones in a hands-free manner - or put it down," said Senator Newman. "Drivers have a responsibility to themselves, their passengers, and the others on the road. We need to reinforce just how dangerous cell phone use while driving can be, and that's what this bill is intended to do."

The bill requires drivers to use cell phones in

hands-free mode for voice-activated calls. Functions such as navigation and music would still be allowed, along with podcasts and other audio-based content. The law would not apply to drivers in vehicles legally parked outside of traffic or for emergency calls. State law already bans texting, using email, and web browsing while driving.

"More and more Minnesotans are being seriously injured or killed because of irresponsible, cell phone use while driving. This legislation is attempting to encourage people to use phones in a hands-free manner - or put the phone down altogether. This is a matter of public safety," Senator Newman continued.

The legislation awaits action by a conference committee, which will meet to work out differences between the bills passed by the House and the Senate.

Senator Scott Newman, of Hutchinson, is in his third

term representing District 18, which includes communities in McLeod, Meeker, Sibley, and Wright counties.

Senator Newman serves as chairman of the Senate Transportation Finance and Policy Committee.

Solar garden

(continued from front)

property owners who live near solar gardens. He said those property owners had no significant concerns. "It's a sign of the times," Grack said.

Among the conditions put on the project by the commission include:

- A barrier of vegetation along the west line of the solar garden that is 12' to 15' tall

- Maintain vegetation
- 80' setback on west line of property

It was an unanimous vote by the commission to approve the CUP. Gaylord's City Council also approved the proposal Wednesday.

There are still steps to take before the solar garden becomes reality. Much of the project hinges on what answers Engineering Concepts, Inc. gets from the Department of Natural Resources.

According to Coughlan, the goal is to have the solar online before the end of this summer. Engineering Concepts, Inc. wants to get the project going in 2019 because the final year of a 30% tax credit for solar gardens.

Once established, the City of Gaylord will receive rental income from the property in the amount of \$800 per acre on the developed portion, and \$200 per acre on the remaining land.

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Mayor Boeder

(cont. from front)

County Sheriff's Investigator formerly served on the Gaylord City Council.

The case is being prosecuted by the McLeod County Attorney's Office. The Sibley County Attorney's Office referred the case to McLeod County due to conflict of interest. Sibley County Attorney David Schauer's former private law practice, Schauer Law Office, formerly served as Gaylord's City Attorney. Schauer sold his private law practice and began serving as full-time Sibley County Attorney in December 2018.

Boeder, a retired businessman, was elected mayor of Gaylord in November 2012 and began serving in the position in January 2013. He was re-elected to his second term in November of 2016. His current term expires in December 2020.