



# CITY HALL NEWS

February 2016

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## MAYOR'S MESSAGE

by *Connie Edwards*

Greetings! With so much activity and the many projects that are in the works within the City of Houston, City staff challenged themselves to find a way to disseminate that information to you, the citizens of Houston, in an effective manner.

The Houston City Council and City staff take their responsibilities of governing and managing the City very seriously. As you will see by the information presented in this newsletter, Houston has some serious problems to address and with limited resources, no less. It will take ingenuity and forward thinking to align and complete these projects for you, the citizens of this community.

City government is much like any other business. Extensive planning and business models are required for projects to be successful and effective. Along with the essential projects that will be required to upgrade our aging infrastructure, we must diligently continue to promote our economy and local industry. It is all of our responsibility, together as a community, to promote our local businesses as well as to promote our community within the region.

I hope you find this City Council and City staff newsletter informational. We also encourage you to routinely check for City news on the City website ([www.houston.govoffice.com](http://www.houston.govoffice.com)), the City Facebook page, and in the Houston Banner.

Another great way to learn about the current city topics is to come to a City Council Meeting, held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month at 6:00 p.m. in City Hall. You are also welcome to mail, call or visit Council members or City Hall regarding any concerns or questions. We appreciate your input as we strive to balance all needs and viewpoints of the community.

*Mayor Connie*

## NEW WATER/SEWER RATES WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR FEBRUARY BILLS

### SAMPLE BILLS USING NEW RATES:

<b><i>If you use 2,500 gal/month or less:</i></b>		
Base Rate Water (includes up to 2,500 gal)		\$ 16.88
Base Rate Sewer (includes up to 2,500 gal)		22.88
Recycling—Houston County Drop Site		6.29
Refuse—Waste Management		8.65
	(\$7.85, \$8.65, or \$9.44, depending on container size)	
State Fee		<u>.53</u>
<b>Example for 2,500 gallons/month user:</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 54.72</b>

<b><i>If you use OVER 2,500 gal/month, you must multiply the rate</i></b>		
<b><i>X gallons exceeding 2,500, and add to the base rate.</i></b>		
<b>Example: For 5,000 gallon user:</b>		
Base Rate Water (includes 2,500 gal)		\$ 16.88
Additional Water (rate* x gallons over base of 2,500)		16.00
Base Rate Sewer (includes 2,500 gal)		22.88
Additional Sewer (rate* x gallons over base of 2,500)		20.25
Recycling—Houston County Drop Site		6.29
Refuse—Waste Management		8.65
	(\$7.85, \$8.65, or \$9.44, depending on container size)	
State Fee		<u>.53</u>
<b>Example for 5,000 gallons/month user:</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 91.48</b>

**\* 2016 RATES:**

2016 Water: 0.64/100 gallons

2016 Sewer: 0.81/100 gallons

**Note:** To find the number of gallons you use, take the number from the usage column on your bill and add two zeros. Example: 34 = 3,400 gallons.

**COMPARISON:** The total cost of water and sewer (not recycling or refuse) in the City of Houston for a typical 5,000 gallon user in 2016 is **\$76.01/mo.** For comparison, a sampling of 2015 rates for a 5,000 gallon user are listed below:

Caledonia	\$ 59.50
Harmony	87.50
Hokah	66.47
La Crescent	53.42
Lanesboro	95.15
Mabel	81.00
Rushford	108.37
Spring Grove	61.95

# DEPARTMENT NEWS

## ADMINISTRATION

**CHRIS PETERSON**  
City Administrator  
**LARRY JERVISS**  
Financial Director  
**AUDREY HEGLAND**  
Deputy Clerk  
**TAYLOR LASCHENSKI**  
Marketing Intern

## PUBLIC WORKS

**RANDY THESING**  
Maintenance  
Superintendent  
**ED JACOBS**  
Maintenance  
**JEN EVENSON**  
Custodian

## POLICE

**DAVID BREault**  
Police Chief  
**DARIN DAVEAU**  
Police Officer  
**BRETT HURLEY**  
Part-time Officer

**Community Center Rental:** The City Council has clarified the rental policy and rates for the Community Center. The current rates are:

- \$ 75 for downstairs
- \$125 for upstairs
- \$175 for entire building
- \$ 50 for a set-up day prior to event

Beginning June 1, 2016, all users, including Non-Profits will need to pay for renting the building on weekends (Friday-Sunday). Houston Area Non-Profits are allowed to use the building free of charge during the week (Monday-Thursday) but must still sign a contract and have a \$100 security deposit on file.

**Building Permits:** The City of Houston adopted the MN Building Code and designated Construction Management Services (CMS) as the Building Official. City Hall also plays a key role in the administration of the Building Code by processing applications and keeping track of who has or needs a permit. It is easy to obtain a permit and fees are reasonable. Please see the City website or MN Rules 1300 to learn more about work requiring a permit.

**NOTE:** If work for which a permit is required by the Code has begun without first obtaining a permit, an extra fee equal to the permit fee may apply. If equipment replacements and repairs must be performed in an emergency situation, the permit application shall be submitted within the next working business day.

### Water Quality

The City of Houston publishes a consumer confidence report each spring showing the results of monitoring done on its drinking water for the prior year. A copy is available on the city website under the Public Works tab or by calling City Hall at 507-896-4033.

### Water Conservation

With the increase in water/sewer rates, it may be a good time to review ways to conserve water. Updating to new toilets, water-saving showerheads and replacing faucets and old appliances can help conserve water.

To check if you have leaks, take a reading from the water meter. After no water use for a couple hours, take a second reading. The numbers should be the same. If the reading has changed, something on the property is pulling water through the meter. Check faucets and shower heads for leaks/drips and make sure the water level float is not stuck open on your water softeners or water heaters. Check your toilet for leaks even if you cannot hear water running. Do this by dropping one dye tablet or 10 drops of food coloring into the tank. Wait at least 10-15 minutes, and then look in the bowl. If you see colored water, you have a leak.

For assistance in locating or repairing a leak, call a licensed plumber.

### Contact Information:

For non-emergencies, call City Hall. For emergencies or any matter that needs immediate response, Houston Police are dispatched through Houston County, dial **911** or **Non-Emergency 507-725-3379**.

### Reminder on Parking Regulations:

City of Houston Ordinance 206 states: *"It is unlawful for any person to stop, park, or leave any vehicle upon any street for a continuous period in excess of forty eight (48) hours."*

**Winter parking provisions:** All motor vehicles, trailers, or other vehicles shall be removed from all City streets and alleys within two hours after a snow fall of two or more inches or after an ice storm until the street or alley is plowed/sanded. Should a snow/ice event occur between the hours of 10PM and 6AM, move no later than 8AM.

**Note to Pet Owners:** By obtaining the required license for your animal, should the animal become lost or missing, having the required license allows Police to identify the owner and return the pet to their proper homes. Licenses available at City Hall for \$5.33 with proof of vaccinations.

City Code Section 91.02 states: *"Running at large prohibited. It shall be unlawful for the dog or cat of any person who owns, harbors, or keeps a dog or cat, to run at large."*



**NATURE CENTER**

**CONNIE VERSE, Manager**

**DIANA WEINHARDT-TREANGEN, Assistant**

*PLEASE NOTE: Programs begin at 7:00 PM at the Houston Nature Center unless indicated otherwise. They are free and open to the public.*

**WINTER CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS**

*with*

*Diana Weinhardt-Treangen*

**February 13 - "Oh Deer!"**  
1:00—2:30 PM  
RSVP 507-896-4668

**March 5 - Bluebirds & PVC houses**  
*with Matt Kubley*  
*(Time to be determined)*

**March - Bison**  
*(Day & time to be determined)*

**April - Woodcock Sky Dance**  
*with Ken Fordahl*  
*(Day & time to be determined)*

**MAY — THE WETLANDS**

**May 7: Wetland Vegetation**  
*with Kerrie Hauser*  
*(11-12 pm RSVP 507-896-4668)*

**May 14: Water Water Everywhere**  
*with Kerrie Hauser*  
*(11-12 pm RSVP 507-896-4668)*

**May 21: Wetland Animals**  
*with Kerrie Hauser*  
*(11-12 pm RSVP 507-896-4668)*

**LIBRARY**

**LIZ GIBSON-GASSET, Librarian**

**BETH PETERSON-LEE, Assistant**

**From Liz...** We hope that you and your family are currently taking advantage of the free services offered by the Houston Library, ranging from our own collection of books, movies, and music to interlibrary loan from other SELCO libraries, public internet access, and special programs for both kids and adults throughout the year.

If you or your child would like to acquire a library card, please stop by and see us at 202 East Cedar with your current Minnesota Driver's License or state photo I.D. card. Hours of operation are:

- Mondays: 2-8 pm
- Tuesdays: 2-8 pm
- Wednesdays: 9 am to 1 pm
- Thursdays: 10 am to 8 pm
- Saturdays: 10 am to 4 pm

Please feel free to contact us at 507-896-7323 or [hpublib@gmail.com](mailto:hpublib@gmail.com).

**PARK AND REC**

**SUMMER REC:** Director for this year will be Jason Carrier, HHS Head Basketball Coach and Varsity Coach, and MNVA teacher. Registration will be held in April; more information will be available later, both sent home with students and also on the City's web site—<http://www.houston.govoffice.com>.

**BLUFFVIEW COMMUNITY PARK:** Field II joins Field I in being ready for the 2016 Softball Season! Look forward to additional games and tournaments being played.

**ARCHERY RANGE:** Make sure to check out the new range in South Park. This project was made possible by a MN DNR grant, an Acentek grant, and donated services by Wild Exhibit and Van Gundy Excavating.

**PARK SIGNAGE:** This spring, look for a new kiosk sign/map at Trailhead Park and a new entrance sign for South Park, paid for by State Health Improvement Program Grant.

**AMBULANCE**

**CHRIS COX, Director**

**AMBULANCE/ EMS CREW**

- Christine Cox, Director
- Brad White
- Darin Wendel
- Tom Hill
- Becci Rediske
- Dave Runningen
- Tim Jergenson
- Lisa Schultz
- Chris Kildahl
- Mary Burt
- Nathan Nelson
- Dana Kildahl
- Anna Frauenkron
- Aaron Heyman
- Tony Schultz
- Renee Kinstler
- Rachel Boldt

**FIRE**

**JOE KRAGE, Fire Chief**  
**ASSISTANT CHIEFS:**  
Chad Rosendahl  
Steve Skifton  
Jay Wheaton

**FIREFIIGHTERS**

- Joe Krage, Chief
- Richard Carr
- Brent Carrier
- Craig Conley
- Allen Frauenkron
- Byron Frauenkron
- Rick Geiwitz
- Ryan Geiwitz
- Thomas Hill
- Tim Jergenson
- Kathy Jumbeck
- Kevin Jumbeck
- Kevin Knutson
- Brandon Olson
- Mark Olson
- Chad Rosendahl
- Matt Schutte
- Steve Skifton
- Brent Stampka
- Randy Thesing
- Chris Tuvenson
- Matt VanGundy
- Darin Wendel
- Ken Witt

# PROJECT UPDATES

## WATER TREATMENT PLANT

Preliminary planning has begun for the construction of a drinking water treatment plant. In 2014, the City received a Notice of Violation from the MN Department of Health reporting radium levels in the city water supply exceeded the maximum contaminant level (MCL). Radium occurs naturally underground in soil and rock and can enter ground water. The water supply is also high in iron, and the treatment plant will also filter for iron.

The City has a compliance agreement with the MN Department of Health which outlines construction of the plant will begin in 2017 and be in operation by 2019. The location of the plant is proposed to be on south side of Grant Street near Wellhouse #1 and will require a building approximately 2000 SF in size. The cost of the project is estimated at 2.5 million which will be paid with a combination of user fees, grants and a low interest loan. The application for and administration of these funds is of the highest priority for the City. For more information on radium in drinking water, see: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/water/factsheet/com/radium.pdf>.

## WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

The wastewater treatment facility was built 40 years ago and has far exceeded its useful life. Proper maintenance, improvements, and equipment replacement has kept the facility operating sufficiently, but some components are now due for an overhaul. A 2014 report by Davy Engineering itemized the needs as follows:

- **Main Lift Station** - Replace valves
- **Preliminary Treatment** - Minor concrete repairs
- **Aeration Basins** – replace aeration diffusers
- **Final Clarifier** – replacing drive mechanism, torque tube, scarpers, sludge manifold and bearing assembly
- **Bridge deck and railing** – replace with safer working surfaces
- **Aerobic Digesters** – replace the aeration diffusers
- **Standby Generator** - Purchase generator sufficient to run entire plant

The items could be completed as one project at an estimated \$450,000, or be completed individually based on priority. Upgrades are scheduled in the City's financial plan to be completed in the next couple of years. You may view the complete report on the City website.

## FLOOD LEVEL RECERTIFICATION

The MN Department of Natural Resources and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are working jointly to produce a county-wide update to the Flood Insurance Rate Maps. The map depicts the area receiving protection from the City of Houston Flood Levee. For FEMA to continue to accredit the flood levee, the City must certify that it meets the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations 44CFR 65.10. The City has hired Mead & Hunt Engineering to provide the necessary calculations and report, which is due January 5, 2017.

Most of the analysis is complete, including an elevation survey, flood calculations, pump calculations, field inspection, and soil borings. It was found that the elevation does not meet the freeboard requirement in a couple of locations. The amount is minor, less than 6 inches, but the levee must be raised in these areas to obtain compliance.

In the coming months, the report will be finalized and submitted to FEMA for approval.

## STREET REPAIR & RECONSTRUCTION

Many public streets and utilities are of an age that repairs will become more frequent and costly. Pavement in fair condition should be maintained by sealcoating in order to prolong its life, and streets in poor condition should be scheduled for reconstruction. The prioritization of street projects is also impacted by the age and condition of the water and sewer lines.

Keeping up with the ongoing deterioration of streets and utilities has become a top concern for many small communities. The cost to maintain infrastructure is an ongoing expense and cities should have a permanent fund for this purpose.

The City levied \$39,043 for the Construction Fund for 2015 and 2016. This Fund is planned to support sealcoating projects and preliminary engineering for upcoming street reconstruction projects. Larger projects will need to use bond financing and the payments on the bond will come from property taxes and assessments if appropriate.

## PROJECT SCHEDULE

This schedule is conceptual and used for financial planning purposes, subject to change. It does represent the infrastructure needs, but the City Council will need to balance the needs with affordability. City staff will make every effort to obtain grants, but most projects would require some increase in user rates and/or taxes. \*

<b>2015-2017</b>	<b>Flood Levee Recertification</b>
<b>2016</b>	<b>Ellsworth Street Reconstruction; Sealcoating-various streets</b>
<b>2017</b>	<b>Lincoln Street Reconstruction; Water Treatment Project; Wastewater Plant Updates; Stoddard Street (New); Westgate Drive Paving</b>
<b>2018</b>	<b>Sealcoating-various streets</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>Sealcoating various streets; Community Center</b>
<b>2022</b>	<b>Street Project</b>

\* Utility extensions to areas within the City without sewer or water are reviewed for feasibility as resources are available.

## COMMUNITY CENTER

Significant repairs and upgrades are needed at the Community Center, 109 W. Maple St. including exterior stucco and sewer upgrades.

The Planning Commission and Council have voted in favor of researching the options for a new building. Potential locations and building scope will be reviewed in the coming months to determine a cost estimate. Sketches of options will be made available for public comment and fundraising.

Although the deficiencies at the existing Community Center are immediate, the fundraising and planning for a new center has taken a backseat to several other City projects. Progress has been slow, and it has been suggested that a private group or community foundation would be able to move things along quicker. If anyone would like to assist in forming such a group, please contact City Hall.

## OHV (Off-Highway Vehicle) Trails

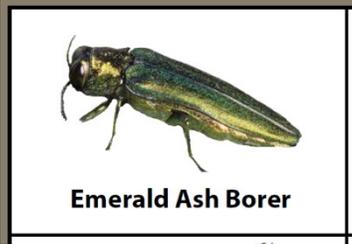
A partnership between the MN DNR, user clubs, and the City of Houston has obtained grants to purchase land for a proposed OHV Project. A first step in the project included applying to the National Park Service for a change in designation for the south 80 acres of South Park. Additional steps will follow the Seven Step Process for DNR Grant in Aid Trails.

In August, the City hosted a training put on by Trails Unlimited, an enterprise program through the US Department of Agriculture. This training covered many aspects of trail Planning and Design and was attended by City staff, DNR representatives, and user groups. The first visit by Trails Unlimited was only training, but most likely, Trails Unlimited would be involved in the design process for Houston Trails when that phase begins.

One component discussed at the training was how to set up a community advisory committee. This is the next step for Houston's OHV Project. The committee would develop a list of goals and note concerns to be addressed. The successful utilization of existing lodging and local businesses by OHV users/visitors is one of the most important topics to discuss. The potential for new businesses and growth also warrants proper planning and guidance. The advisory committee will review other OHV facilities and advise the City on options for administration, inspection, maintenance, and oversight of the trail system. The OHV user groups would play a role in the upkeep of the trails, but the City can also utilize Grant funds.

If you are interested in serving on the Community Advisory Committee, please call City Hall at 896-4033 or email [houstonplanning@acegroup.cc](mailto:houstonplanning@acegroup.cc) to request an application.

# EMERALD ASH BORER (EAB) IS HERE!



EAB is an insect that attacks and kills ash trees. The adults are small, iridescent green beetles that live outside of trees during the summer months. The larvae are grub or worm-like and live underneath the bark of ash trees. Trees are killed by the tunneling of the larvae under the tree's bark (<http://www.mda.state.mn.us/eab>).

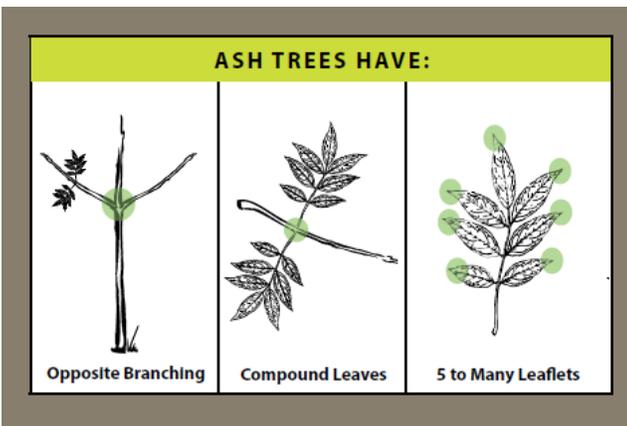
Fillmore, Houston, Olmsted, and Winona Counties are part of a multi-county quarantine in Minnesota. The movement of ash or hardwood firewood from any quarantined area to any non-quarantined area is prohibited, except under certain conditions.

Based on a 1995 survey of street and park trees in Houston, there are about 62 public ash trees in Houston, or 5.5% of the City's public trees. A 2010 DNR survey estimated about 300 ash trees in managed (mowed) areas, both public and private trees, or about 11% of the community forest.

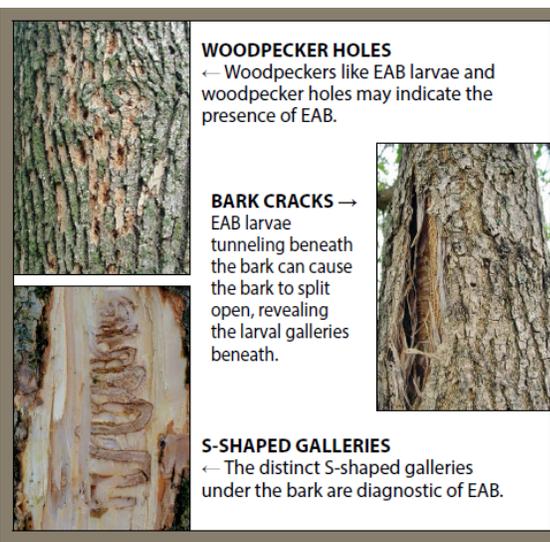
In the event that the City's Tree Inspector must condemn a public street tree because of unsafe conditions or that the tree or stump is diseased, the City will cover 50% of the cost of removal with the other 50% to be paid by the adjoining landowner. The City of Houston has increased the budget for tree removal in 2016 and expects a further increase will be necessary in coming years.

If you suspect your Ash Tree is infested, please call or email the City Tree Inspector Ed Jacobs: 896-2387 or [wwtp@acegroup.cc](mailto:wwtp@acegroup.cc)

## IS YOUR TREE AN ASH?



## SIGNS OF EMERALD ASH BORER



Please visit <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/eab> for more information on Emerald Ash Borer.

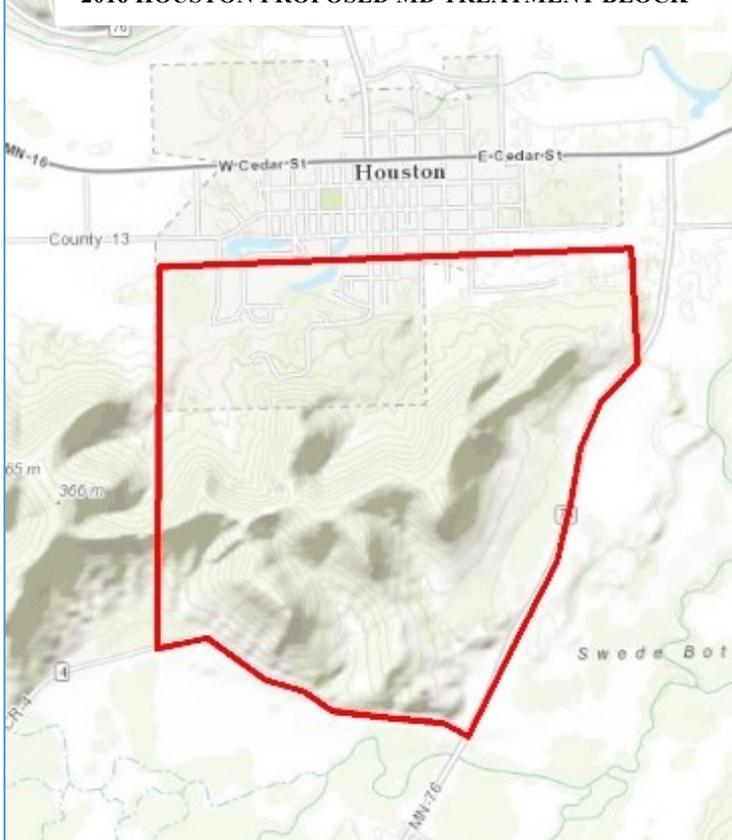
## Minnesota Department of Agriculture to fight gypsy moths near Houston

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and partner organizations are planning to tackle a gypsy moth infestation near the city of Houston this spring. This is one of three areas to be treated for gypsy moth in Houston County. In anticipation of the treatments, the department is inviting people to learn about the effort at an open house to be held Wednesday, February 24 at the Houston County Criminal Justice Center in Caledonia.

Gypsy moth is one of America's most destructive tree pests, and has caused millions of dollars in damage to forests as it has spread from New England to Wisconsin in recent decades. Gypsy moth caterpillars can defoliate large sections of forest. The pests are common in Wisconsin and are now establishing themselves in Minnesota.

The MDA has a monitoring program to watch for start-up infestations, and when an infestation is found, the department does aerial treatments to eradicate the infestation before it can spread. In 2015, the MDA found three infestations in Houston County. One of those infestations borders on the city of Houston.

2016 HOUSTON PROPOSED MD TREATMENT BLOCK



The department is now developing a treatment plan for an affected area totaling approximately 960 acres next to the city. The proposed treatment area stretches from the southern part of the city of Houston south into the bluffs. The northern boundary of the treatment block runs along East Mons Street and the southern runs along County Road 4. The western block boundary is parallel to and about 1/10 of a mile west of Westgate Drive (if it continued south of Co Rd 13). The block is bounded on the east by State Highway 76. See the map below. The outline is the proposed treatment block boundary.

Over the years, the MDA has successfully treated dozens of gypsy moth infestations across eastern Minnesota. More information on gypsy moth can be found at: <http://www.mda.state.mn.us/gypsymoth>.



**The MDA will host an open house  
to share information with citizens about the threat gypsy moths  
pose to the environment, and how officials plan to protect forested areas.**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2016, 5:00 – 7:00 p.m.**

**Houston County Criminal Justice Center, 306 Marshall St., Caledonia, MN 55921**

**HOUSTON CITY HALL**  
**105 W. MAPLE, PO BOX 667**  
**HOUSTON, MN 55943**

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**CITY HALL**

**PHONE**

**EMAIL**

Audrey Hegland

896-4033

hegland@acegroup.cc

Chris Peterson

896-4033

houstonplanning@acegroup.cc

**CITY COUNCIL**

**PHONE**

**EMAIL**

Mayor Connie Edwards

896-4453

cjedwards@acegroup.cc

Matt Schutte

896-4983

matt.schutte@acegroup.cc

Tony Schultz

896-5472

tjschultz@acegroup.cc

Cheryl Sanden

cheryla@acegroup.cc

Kevin Knutson

896-2582

severin@acegroup.cc