

# Meet Clay County Commissioner: Leo Powell

By Sarah Wetzel  
For the Plain Talk

Vermillion native and Vietnam Vet Leo Powell is no stranger to community involvement.

Powell has been a Clay County Commissioner for 10 years.

As far as being commissioner is concerned, Powell said it's certainly interesting.

"I work with the departments and build a budget based on what the public wants and balance that budget," he said.

Along with lots of financial issues, Powell said they watch over the county bridges, roads and ditches.

"There's Clay Creek ditch which is a joint ditch with Clay County and Yankton County," he said. "Then there are some registered lateral ditches that are between Gayville and

Vermillion that we meet as joint boards to make sure that those are clean and drained to the taxpayers' expectations."

"Along with that we advertise for bids for different contractors and look things over to make sure everything meets expectations," Powell continued. "Most of them are pretty reasonable and easy to get along with."

Powell grew up on a farm just south of the Vermillion airport.

"When I got out of high school I went into the service as a telephone lineman," he said. "When I came out of the service, farming wasn't very good and I went to work with Clay Union Electric in January of 1971 and went to a vocational program through the GI Bill. I did a lot of electricity. It was exciting."

Powell finished his career with Union Electric in 2012 and is currently retired.

But being retired does not mean Powell is not active in the community.

"I suppose it's been somewhere about the mid-90's I started to get involved in community service," he said. "I was appointed to the City Planning Commission then I was appointed to the County Planning Zoning Board. After that I was city councilman for the central ward for three years and then I ran for commissioner ten years ago and won. My intent is to run one more time."

Even during his career, Powell said he made time for the city of Vermillion.

"It takes a lot of time and it was difficult when I was still working but my

employer felt it was good to be active in the community so I was allowed to use my vacation time for those projects," he said. "It worked out good."

Powell has collected quite a resume of community experiences.

"I actually made a list one time and it really surprised me," he said. "I'm a member of the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars), the Disabled American Veterans, a member of the American Legion, a member of the Honor Guard for the VFW that serves for funerals for veterans in the community. There's actually quite a few other things."

The only time Powell said he has left South Dakota was when he served in the Vietnam war, first in Germany and then spent 14 months in Vietnam itself. "It was a tough way to

grow up," he said. "I got an education and it wasn't exactly what I wanted. I don't like to elaborate on these things. It's just not a fun thing to have gone through."

Powell is not the only one in his family involved in the community.

"My wife is the county treasurer," he said. "We've both been as active in things as we can."

Powell and his wife raised two sons in Vermillion. One still lives in Vermillion and one is currently in Sioux Falls.

In Powell's more active years, he said he would go fishing and do archery.

"I'm a little old to be climbing trees now," he said.

If there's one thing Powell is passionate about, it is people participating in their community.



"People will start to complain about something and I'll start explaining it to them and they understand it and they're fine. When I ask them, 'Did you read about it in the paper? Did you hear what the governor said in his address?' And they'll always say 'No I'm too busy for that.' For somebody like me I find that extremely hard to accept."

## CHEEP From Page 1A

of food animals, an increasing number of people are opting to grow or raise their own food.

Cities like Omaha, Minneapolis, Chicago, Seattle and Ft. Collins, CO to name a few have adopted ordinances allowing up to four hens (as long as they are contained) within city limits. ....And Vermillion could be joining their ranks.

The City of Vermillion is investigating the concept of adding chickens to the list of animals allowed in town. On Feb. 2nd Christine Ahmed, the Coordinator of the Vermillion Community Garden, approached the city with a proposal for allowing chickens in town.

Ahmed, who has a PhD in Health and has been teaching for 27 years drafted the proposal asking the city to allow citizens "to have up to four hens (not roosters) contained in their yards as pets." Her proposal goes on to state that "Health Department and city laws

that apply to dogs and cats would also be applied to chickens. If no dogs are allowed in places, then no chickens would be allowed as well."

"Coops would need to be well maintained and located no closer than 10 feet from a neighbor's building, property line or road. Runs would need to be protected with a net or roof overhead to prevent escape" the proposal goes on to say.

The idea of chickens in town is not a new or even foreign one to South Dakota. Sioux Falls allows its citizens, with proper licensing, to have up to six hens on private property. "People have wanted this (in Vermillion) for a long time" says Ahmed "but never got to the paperwork point of the proposal stage. So I just decided to do it." City Council Member Katherine Price says the chicken movement "was clearly percolating for a long time" before she was elected.

Ahmed says "I think chickens would be a great thing for Vermillion. I think Seattle and Portland are great places to live because of the quality of life,

so the more quality of life we have to offer here (in Vermillion) the better."

Ahmed has had chickens for years and felt she "would be a really good spokesperson after watching other cities go through the ordinance process." In her proposal, she outlines her hopes to have "up to four hens in a small coop and run in the Vermillion Community Garden this summer."

The City of Vermillion responded to her proposal on Feb. 25th by posting a poll on the city website (<http://www.vermillion.us>). The poll reads "Should City Council explore permitting residents to own up to four egg laying hens on their property within the city limits of Vermillion? If you would like to share thoughts or comments on this topic, please contact any City Council member or email the city at [info@cityofvermillion.com](mailto:info@cityofvermillion.com)." As of Mar. 17th, the results have been 261 votes for Yes, 302 for No and 6 Unsure.

City Council members such as Katherine Price urge citizens to "please encourage others to write

directly. Logical, cogent arguments speak louder than numbers on the poll... The poll on the website seems not as scientific as it could be, so getting direct correspondence from people is probably the best gauge of the situation."

When contacted for comment about the proposal, City Manager John Prescott, who worked with Ahmed in the proposal process, stated "at this point, the City Council Policies & Procedures Committee met and reviewed information on what other communities have reviewed and how this discussion went in those towns. They asked staff to put the poll up as part of public information gathering process. Staff was also asked to gather ideas on a prospective ordinance to review at next meeting. A time table nor next meeting date were established."

In an email, City Council Member Price echoed Prescott saying "everything is in the beginning stages, and I'm guessing what will happen next is that the staff will present the council with sample ordinances that other cities have so we

can review what will work best for the needs of our community."

City Council member Price states "I would support chickens in town, and hopefully the procedures committee is doing some research to find out how other communities are doing it (to deal with such inevitable things as noise/nuisance, etc.). I'm sure there will be people who are irresponsible about it, but for the most part, this is a rural town and farming is a normalcy. I think it would be easily adopted by the community and many people already possess the skills to raise chickens thoughtfully and responsibly."

"I do worry about the potential conflict with the feral cat population. Obviously the Verm cat (feral cat) situation is a problem, and I could see it becoming a major issue with people's chicken coops. That is another issue, though and perhaps this can start the ball rolling on how to better manage that problem. ..."

Ahmed and Price are not the only hopeful supporters of a pro-chicken

ordinance. Amy Schweinle, president of the board of the Vermillion Area Farmer's Market (who lives within city limits) may be one of the strongest supporters of backyard chickens. Schweinle states "I want my daughter to raise chickens. She will learn responsibility, learn where her food comes from and respect for what it takes to grow or raise food. I want to provide the healthiest, freshest food for my family. And quite honestly, chickens are a hoot. They are fun and funny creatures, each with their own personality."

Both Schweinle and Ahmed wish to educate people about backyard chickens and correct common misconceptions about raising the animals. Both point out that hens produce eggs regardless of the presence of a rooster and that only roosters crow.

When interviewed Ahmed stated "hens are mostly silent. They may cluck a little to announce when they have laid an egg but are otherwise quiet."

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## DAYCARE From Page 1A

to take the time to look into the daycare providers and questioned the council's move potentially taking on the role parents currently have when it comes to making sure their kids are taking care of properly.

"I don't see the purpose of us taking the time to inspect them," Erickson said regarding the required inspections on daycares that would come following a provider registering with the city. "It's not our job to tell parents where to take their kids."

Meins believed that registration in terms of a connection with emergency services and maybe some of the ordinance could be slowly brought in.

Yet, she said, it boils down to respect.

"There are a number of daycare providers that are OK with it and there are some providers that are not OK with it," Meins said. "Those are the ones who have been doing it for years... I would take my kids to those - I heard from word of mouth - (that were good), not someone (just because) they were registered."

"I care more about word of mouth and I think there are a lot of parents that do."

The ordinance requires a daycare provider to register with the city and in order to do so they will need to demonstrate safety items such as having a fire extinguisher, smoke detector, two ways out of a base-

ment if the space is used for a daycare, safe electrical wiring, closets that prevent a child from being locked inside, and other basic safety requirements.

Councilman Rich Holland said it that it was important to know where the daycare centers are especially in the case of emergency and believes the ordinance is one to be "proud of."

Councilwoman Kelsey Collier-Wise believes this is an act of pragmatism and not one that should be about enabling peoples' feelings.

"I'm sorry if people are insulted or that their feelings are hurt, but we are policy makers and we don't make policy peoples' feelings necessarily," she said. "We have to think about how these policies affect people across the board. Not just people we know, but just people we like, but people that are coming five, 10 years from now. It needs to be applied not only to those we know and like, but those down the road."

"I think the finished product is something we should be proud of, and I hope that it ends up helping both the children and ultimately the providers."

In the development of the proposal, there was a lot of discussion on the requirement to have a fence.

While the fence requirement is still part of the ordinance, an exception to having a fence can be obtained if the parents sign a consent form noting that there is not an enclosed playground at the registered location. The ordinance provides that a daycare can register prior

to July 1 without completing an inspection.

In this case the first inspection would not be until 2016. Registrations are for a two-year period and expire on the June 30 of even numbered years.

According to council paperwork, during the 2015 budget review sessions, the City Council posed a question about the location of daycare facilities in the community.

It was noted at the time that the city did not have regulations pertaining to daycare facilities. City staff was asked to look into the matter and report back to the council.

At the Nov. 3, noon meeting, city staff presented a list of what some other state communities have in their daycare regulations and a draft ordinance.

The council reviewed the information and directed staff to contact some daycare providers to gather feedback. The staff worked to compile a list of providers, sent the information previously provided to the council, and asked for comments to be returned in December.

Several comments were received and daycare providers were invited to a meeting on Jan 27, where the staff explained the proposal and received additional feedback. The same presentation was made at the noon council meeting the following week.

The City Council requested to have a special meeting with providers before placing the ordinance on a future agenda for consideration.

That meeting was held on

Feb. 23.

The council approved 8-1 a permit for consumption on a portion of Kidder Street from 3 - 6 p.m. to on March 28 for the Old Lumber Company Grill and Bar, LLC which will play host to the Polar Plunge event that day (see related story).

Councilman Howard Willson voted against the permit approval.

The permit was approved contingent on the Old Lumber Company DECISION

The county approved the issuance of a special daily malt beverage license for the Vermillion Area Chamber & Development Company's (VCDC) banquet that was held on Wednesday (see related story) at the Vermillion Technology Center at 1012 Princeton Street.

The council unanimously approved the Fireworks Public Display permit for Dakotathon to be held on April 18 in the field south of Polaris and west of Carr Street.

Tom and James Taylor will be conducting the show. James Taylor has indicated that he is providing the insurance as he has done for other displays.

The event has had a permit in previous years but the location of the fireworks display was the high school.

The council unanimously approved the Fireworks Public Display permit for the VCDC for July 4 in the field south of Polaris and west of Carr Street.

Tom and James Taylor will be

conducting the show. Tom Taylor has indicated that he is providing the insurance as he has done for his other displays. This permit request is similar to previous years.

The council unanimously approved the request of the VCDC to retain the sale proceeds from Lots 6 & 7, Block 7 and Lot 5, Block 8 to be reinvested in economic development opportunities.

In October 2011 the City Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which transferred the city owned Erickson Addition property to the Vermillion Chamber of Commerce and Development Company (VCDC) for marketing and development. The VCDC has been marketing the property as the Riverbend Business Park.

The MOU transferring the property to the VCDC included language that all land sale proceeds minus reasonable sale expenses such as title searches, filing fees, etc. would be remitted to the City.

Over the last twelve months, the VCDC has sold Lots 6 & 7, Block 7 and has a pending sale agreement on Lot 5, Block

8. The sale of Lots 6 & 7, Block 7 netted \$75,636.75 after closing costs and legal fees were paid. Lot 5, Block 8 has a listing price of \$180,000 according to city council documentation.

The final sale price for Lot 5, Block 8 may be reduced per stipulations in the sale agreement. There would also be closing costs which would reduce the net proceeds from this lot sale.

Polaris is planning a 224,000 square foot expansion to their facility. The State of South Dakota is providing a sales and use tax rebate on some eligible construction costs as well as other incentives to help facilitate the development of the expansion.

In 2014, the city entered into an agreement with the VCDC and Polaris to rebate up to \$208,000 of sales and use on the \$10.4 million dollar conveyor system that was installed.

The VCDC has submitted the attached request to keep the sale proceeds from Lots 6 & 7, Block 7 and Lot 5, Block 8. The first \$100,000 of funding would be used as a local incentive for the Polaris expansion.

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### MECKLING TOWNSHIP MEETINGS

Monday, March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

7:00 PM

Township Hall  
Tax Appeals

Tax appeals must be submitted to Clerk

Tuesday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2015

7:00 PM

Township Hall  
Road Maintenance  
Contracts Awarded

Jane Larson  
31377 45<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Meckling, SD 57069

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Responsible attorneys: Ferrer, Poirot & Wansbrough, Principal office: 2603 Oak Lawn, Suite 300, Dallas, TX 75219. Cases likely to be referred.

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