

2016 was a good year for Ward County, and 2017 promises to be just as good, according to the Ward County Commission Chairman – as long as the heavy snowfall doesn't cause flooding. Larry Louser said the county's highway budget is a balancing act between snow removal and construction; more of one means less of the other. He said the county highway crew was busy, the early part of this winter because within a couple hours of plowing out a road, it would drift back in. Since then, the road crew has pushed back problem areas in order to more easily handle any additional snow.

Flooding is always a concern along the Souris River, and Louser said it's hard to tell right now what kind of impact snow will have on flooding. He said the ground in Ward County was soft when the snow season started and in some places, under the snow, the grass is still green. If the ground stays soft, and barring any heavy spring rains or snow, flooding will be minimal. He said a lot depends on the operators of area reservoirs. Timely releases will minimize flooding.

Louser said 2016 was a good year for the county budget. Ward County got several road projects completed, "More than expected," he said. Depending on how much money is spent on snow clearing, more road projects next summer are anticipated.

The quality of life in the county in 2016 remained high. He said there was a slight decline in the population as oil works left the county. Services for the population remained consistent.

2017 promises to see the completion of the Ward County Jail. Louser said construction on the nearly \$40 million expansion of the Ward County Jail is ahead of schedule. The expanded portion of the jail is expected to open by the end of the year. It will increase the jail's capacity of 52 cells to nearly 150 cells, or in other terms, from 104 to 300 beds. The building also includes state-of-the-art security upgrades and technology in order to provide a safe and secure environment for inmates and staff. Precast concrete wall and structural systems, as well as prefabricated steel holding cells, will be utilized to allow for a fast tracked construction process.



JLG Architect design of the Ward County Jail building

County judicial services will also improve with completion of a new large courtroom. Only two were available for jury trials. A third larger courtroom with jury room and meeting room will improve the court schedule.

With an eye on the 2017 North Dakota Legislative Session, Louser said the state budget and its impact on property taxes is the primary concern for Ward County. He said a Saturday morning legislative forum will give people a better idea of where the budget is headed. The forum is at 9:00 a.m. at the All Seasons Arena at the State Fairground.

