



'14 budget: Big, but...

Lack of funds for upgrades to power plant may cause long-term problems elsewhere, city warns

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

The good news is Longyearbyen is getting a 32 percent increase in next year's budget. The bad news is essentially all of the extra money is

to help upgrade the power plant, so concerns about a lack of funds for infrastructure maintenance and education will continue.

And even with the extra money the government-mandated power plant upgrades remain by far the largest funding shortfall, which could have long-term negative effects in local services, according to city officials.

A 2014 budget of 193.1 million kroner is scheduled to receive final approval from the

municipal council at its meeting Dec. 10. Although that's significantly higher than this year's 146.1-million-kroner budget, it's 37 percent less than the 303.8 million kroner the city sought for next year.

The upgrades to emissions, efficiency and other aspects of the city's coal-fired electricity plant – allowing it to continue operating for another 25 years – account for all but four million

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Youths react as the lights on Longyearbyen's Christmas tree are turned on Sunday in the central square. Their spirit – and that of the hundreds of locals performing the traditional circular dance around the tree – didn't seem too chilled by what some outsiders are calling Norway's worst tree ever.

'Most dismal tree?'

Scraggy Christmas fir ridiculed as maybe Norway's worst ever; 'lush' replacement being sent

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

It's a bit like watching a version of "A Charlie Brown Christmas" that skips the part about the tree "just needing a little love."

"Is this Norway's most dismal Christmas

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Phantom visions of Pyramiden

High-profile article about ghost town reveals a surreal world – of the living with creepy reactions

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Will Stewart sees a breathtaking, albeit bizarre, ghost town frozen in time. "Grim Grimbarian" of South Africa sees a place to send all their useless uppity inhabitants.

It's a strange world indeed that's revealed in a lengthy feature article about Pyramiden

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PHOTO BY VLADIMIR PROKOFIEV

A tourist tries out an "unusual item" during a visit to the Russian ghost town of Pyramiden.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

Bearly aware



MICHAEL LAWRENCE / UNIS

Fresh polar bear tracks passing by a cabin in Endalen near Longyearbyen are spotted Tuesday by two students from The University Centre in Svalbard. Michael Lawrence and Woody Rismyhr were analyzing rock samples stored in a second cabin, making numerous trips between the two, with the tracks appearing less than hour after one trip, according to *Svalbardposten*. The students called UNIS, requesting a car to light the area and verify the bear was gone. The Svalbard governor's office was notified and, after a search, determined the bear had wandered on to Adventdalen.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We seem to be running increasingly pornographic content as the dead of winter sets in, when readership is usually at its lowest. So that's our excuse for the picture to the right, but **our unworldly minds can't grasp what Jules Wright and Thomas Zanon-Larcher were thinking when they crafted what has to be the most pornographic Svalbard art exhibit ever.** Titled "The Lady from the Sea," an 82-picture online slideshow starts with the usual travelog photos of people at various popular sites. Then out of nowhere is a skinny-dipping shot of the woman in the three-person group and, after some more wholesome pictures, you start getting to know them v-e-e-e-ry well in the biblical sense. It seems the project is a modern retelling of a bleak 1888 play by Henrik Ibsen about a Nordic love triangle involving an "aging doctor; young, lonely wife; (and) handsome interloper against the tundra fjord." If the still images aren't naughty enough for you, the physical exhibit at The Wapping Wall in London (a defunct hydraulic power station turned art-event-dining space) features the action on film in a "damp, murky hall" designed to mimic Longyearbyen. "They've turned down the thermostat, spread actual permafrost across the floor and built replicas of the ramshackle wood huts they encountered up north," a de-



PHTOT BY THOMAS ZANON-LARCHER

Yes, they are actually having sex: Words can't express our embarrassment at having to scrutinize this art project's photos in order to find one not actually showing any naughty bits.

scription of the project notes. "It even smells remarkably of reindeer." Get your blink on at <http://tinyurl.com/pr8p9uo> ... Both Russia and Norway are planning to build big new boats suitable for use in Svalbard. Take a look at the designer illustrations below and guess which is which. Yeah, **that flat ugly thing on the right is the Russian's, but looks aren't all that important since they want to use it to transport nuclear waste through our backyard. Meanwhile, the Kronprins Haakon seen at left, will reportedly be the world's most advanced research ship when it goes into service in 2016.** We're guessing a PhD won't be necessary to figure out why our polar bears are glowing in the dark.



ILLUSTRATION BY ROLLS-ROYCE



ILLUSTRATION BY KRYLOV RESEARCH CENTRE

A boatload of brainiacs or nuclear waste? Both sound better than getting stuck on a 'poop cruise.'



A young Longyearbyen resident, above left, deposits a letter in Santa's mailbox at the base of Mine 2 in Nybyen on Sunday. Dozens of children stopped to deliver letters during a torchlight procession by hundreds of residents from Huset to the center of town for the lighting of what is being mocked as Norway's "most dismal" Christmas tree, above right. At right, a pair of Santa stand-ins pass out candy to youths during the Advent celebration in the town center. Photos by Mark Sabbatini / Icepeople.

Scrawny tree still gets some local love

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tree?" asks *Nordlys*, of the scraggy wisp of green donated by its hometown city of Tromsø to Longyearbyen.

Similar ridicule from media throughout Norway is being heaped on Longyearbyen's official Christmas tree after its lighting as part of an afternoon-long celebration marking the first Sunday of Advent. While the consensus is the tree is this year's worst, *Nordlys* allows it *might* not be the worst ever since "it is possible that the tree that stood in Alta in 2010 was worse."

Plenty of locals noticed the tree's less-than-impressive bulk, a few tossing out words like "embarrassment" and "disaster," but most accepted and even professed love for it as part of the quirky spirit of Svalbard.

The tree is donated from Tromsø "so we should not criticize it," said Roger Ødegård, the city's cultural advisor. Still, he said the tree might be the skinniest he's seen during his 28

years in Longyearbyen.

Which didn't mean everyone was above a little ribbing of the tree's donors.

"Maybe it's a Conservative fir, as it is tall and slim" said Christin Kristoffersen, Longyearbyen's mayor and Labor Party leader told *Nordlys*, referring to the political affiliation of her counterpart in Tromsø. "A Labor spruce would, in any case, have been wider at the bottom to represent the grassroots."

Tromsø Mayor Jens Johan Hjort denied any political motives, telling *Svalbardposten* "I would think that the Christmas tree is supposed to be in line with the barren nature-related conditions in and around Longyearbyen."

But the publicity seems to have planted a seed of shame as Øyvind Hilmarsen, Tromsø's municipal council leader, said a new "big and lush" tree is being sent by boat Friday.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM **SVALBARDPOSTEN** VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Store Norske coal shipments up nearly 40 percent 2013

Store Norske shipped 2.09 million tons of coal from Svea in 2013, slightly more than the company predicted and nearly 800,000 tons more than in 2012. Last year's production was hurt by problems with the mine's processing plant which halted worked several times. Also boosting this year's total was extracting coal with 21 percent stone content, compared to 30 percent in 2012. The last shipment for this year departed from Svea on Nov. 22. The increase won't alleviate the company's financial struggles in recent years that have resulted in ongoing downsizing, however, as coal prices, remained low most of the year.

Inspection: Longyearbyen's playground equipment risky

Much of the playground equipment at Longyearbyen's schools and kindergartens is damaged and/or dangerous, according to an external investigation. Equipment at Kullungen Kindergarten, Longyearbyen Kindergarten and Longyearbyen School received a national-scale grade of two, meaning "major flaws/wear." Polarflokken Kindergarten received a grade of one, meaning moderate or intermediate failure/wear." Much of the equipment was set up or built by volunteers without the necessary technical expertise in playground equipment. Morten Langerud, property manager for Longyearbyen's municipal council, said the city is already addressing the most serious violations and that officials will not allow use of equipment they consider unsafe. Also, he said, the safety of the equipment has improved considerably since the annual inspections were first conducted in 2011.

Russia urged to seek funds to protect heritage sites

An effort to get Russians to apply for grants from the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund is being made by Siri Hoem, the governor's cultural advisor. She said heritage sites in Barentsburg and Pyramiden are now eligible for funds and "in the course of 10 to 20 years I think many of these cultural memories will be lost." Russians have never received a grant from the six-year-old fund.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Cloudy. E winds to 15 km/h. High -15C (-19C wind chill), low -18C (-23C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NE winds to 32 km/h. High -14C (-20C wind chill), low -18C (-24C wind chill).	Cloudy. N winds to 39 km/h. High -14C (-20C wind chill), low -16C (-22C wind chill).	Cloudy. NW winds to 29 km/h. High -16C (-21C wind chill), low -17C (-22C wind chill).
24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, -15C (-20C), -16C (-21C), light 0:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -12C (-17C), -16C (-21C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -9C (-16C), -12C (-16C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, snow, -5C (-14C), -9C (-18C), light 0:00h			
Data provided by storm.no			



PHOTO BY VLADIMIR PROKOFIEV

A long-abandoned piece of mining equipment marks the one place in Pyramiden where workers in the Russian ghost town might get a decent mobile phone signal from Svalbard's Norwegian settlements.

Getting spooked by Pyramiden

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written by Stewart for *The Siberian Times* and widely republished in newspapers around the globe. But it's the living, not the ghosts, occupying a surreal universe based on their reactions to a story focusing on a tourist guide in the once-thriving Russian mining community.

The article (at tinyurl.com/n983vrf) follows the adventures this year of Vladimir Prokofiev, 33, a guide in the decaying town Russia is trying to restore and promote as a tourist destination. The narrative includes the oft-written details of Pyramiden's history and general eccentricities of Svalbard, but ventures beyond them to include interesting nuggets such as Prokofiev's pet Arctic fox and where the lone "spot of hope" for mobile phone connections is located.

"The battery runs down before the fingers get frozen," he told Stewart. "You can never know which one will give up first – your fingers or a battery of your mobile."

The article has attracted dozens of reader comments at some news sites where it has been republished and many – notably affection for the pet fox – are socially apt and predicable.

There's also tidbits Svalbard residents might learn from, such as a resident of Hudson Bay, Canada, noting children there are also escorted to school by adults carrying rifles due to polar bears.

But a rather high percentage – a vast majority in some instances – veer off on tangents that confirm the internet offers a voice to people who see the world in spooky ways.

"We can relocate all global warming advocates to the island where they can hope for global warming," wrote a reader of London's *Daily Mail*. In the U.S., an Iowa resident managed to work in an ubiquitous boogeyman with "It really would not be so bad to live in that place. At least you would not have to hear about how wonderful Obama is all of the time in the press."

And there's never-before-revealed details about the Norwegians and Russians in Svalbard back when it was "like the Wild West."

"Every so often they would get together, which usually resulted in a huge fist fight," asserts "Ron," a Carlisle, U.K., resident.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

City: More money, but not enough

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kroner of next year's allocated increase. The Norwegian government, which provided 14.6 million kroner for the project in 2012 and 29.6 million in 2013, approved 73.3 million for next year.

But the city requested 150.1 million kroner for next year, and the shortfall means the city is facing a long-term loan to pay for the upgrade and extra operating expenses, according to a letter to the Norwegian government from City Manager Lars Ole Saugne and City Budget Chief Elin Dolmseth. It may also mean fee increases and reduced spending elsewhere.

"Longyearbyen's government needs financial support in order to ensure that energy costs alone will not overturn a balanced economy and service offerings to the population," the

letter states. "This involves initially a need for 29 million kroner to finance necessary maintenance measures for the next four years and five million kroner annually to service the loan."

Longyearbyen's per-resident debt will increase from 67,140 kroner this year to 110,972 kroner in 2014, decreasing gradually to 87,498 kroner by 2017, the letter adds. That compares to a recent per-capita debt of 60,747 kroner for Tromsø and 44,301 kroner for Oslo.

Rejected entirely by the Norwegian government were 33.5 million kroner extra in requests for preventative work to Longyearbyen's school, kindergartens and other infrastructure, affected by the changing Arctic climate, and for emergency preparedness.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

Dec. 4

6 p.m.: Movie: "Malavita," U.S./French action/comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 5

6:30 p.m.: International social gathering. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 7

2:15 p.m.: Holiday swim performance by local youths. Svalbardhallen.

Dec. 8

11 a.m.: Second Sunday of Advent Mass. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "This is the End," U.S. comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Blue is the Warmest Color," French drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 9

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

Dec. 10

7 p.m.: Municipal Council meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

7 p.m.: Presentation and singalong with new hymnals. Svalbard Church.

Dec. 11

6 p.m.: Movie: "Gravity," British/U.S. sci-fi/drama, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

Dec. 12

10 a.m.: Bydrift Board meeting. Næringsbygget 3, Newtontoppen room.

Dec. 13-15

Dance Marathon, featuring instruction in various styles for youths in all grade levels. Contact birgitte@dahlknutsen.no for registration information.

Dec. 15

11 a.m.: Third Sunday of Advent Mass. Svalbard Church.

5 p.m.: Christmas concert featuring various local performers. Svalbard Church.

6 p.m.: Movie: "The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug" (3D), U.S. drama, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

What's online

icepeople.net provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- *Canada will attempt to annex North Pole*
- *Why is India thwarting climate pacts?*
- *Watch online: 'Gravity' folo, set in Arctic*
- *How climate change is helping al-Qaida*