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for the  
future  
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## Rethinking I-94 discards fill-in-the- trench options

Four options likely to remain  
after winnowing in January

By JANE MCCLURE

Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) recommendations headed to the Rethinking I-94 project policy advisory committee on Jan. 17 are provoking debate. Recommendations to set aside at-grade parkway or boulevard options have drawn a mixed reaction in area neighborhoods.

The policy advisory committee, which is made up of elected officials and appointed representatives, has looked at 10 alternatives since 2023. The proposal, if adopted, would narrow that list to four.

The MnDOT recommendations were published in the Star Tribune just before the Christmas holiday. That surprised advocates for filling in the freeway trench.

Ricardo Lopez, MnDOT spokesperson, released a statement:

"The information shared recently by the Star Tribune contains draft recommendations that are not yet final. MnDOT is continuing to work with agency partners and established working groups to finalize recommendations and will share information about both the alternatives evaluation and the final recommendations once they are complete. As we have been throughout the entirety of this project, MnDOT is committed to robust community engagement and allowing ample opportunities to provide feedback on this important project. In addition to a public comment period that is currently planned for late 2025/early 2026, members of the public can provide feedback on the project at any point by contacting the Rethinking I-94 Project Team at [rethinkingI94project.dot@state.mn.us](mailto:rethinkingI94project.dot@state.mn.us)."

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## LEARNING CENTER NOT A SECRET ANYMORE



ESL tutor Myra Arnold works with a student at East African Magnet Elementary School in Frogtown. Tutoring complements what the teachers are doing in the classroom. (Photo by Terry Faust)

### ESLC envisions a community where all children read with pride and joy

By JAN WILLMS

There is not an interest in the East Side Learning Center (ESLC) being the best-kept secret anymore.

This belief was recently shared by Karmit Bulman, the new director of the center, located at 290 Arundel St. in St. Paul.

Since 2001, ESLC volunteers have been tutoring children K-3rd grade in reading. In 1998, as part of a long-range effort to revitalize the East Side of Saint Paul, the East Side Neighborhood Development

Company approached the School Sister of Notre Dame (SSND) to supplement the educational needs of East side resident children. "They were concerned about poverty on the East Side," Bulman said. "The first director was a Sister, who eventually moved on. There have been a few directors before me."

She said the neighborhood organizations wanted a very intentional program to address the literacy rate of the children living in poverty in East St. Paul. In 2001, the SSND partnered with St. Paul civic and educational leaders to develop the one-



Once a child learns how to read, that child can do anything."

KARMIT BULMAN

on-one literacy tutoring for first through third grade children who were reading below grade level. Later, they expanded to include kindergarten. Their service area includes the Frogtown, Midway and Como neighborhoods.

According to Bulman, volunteers tutor the children four hours a week in three schools: St. Paul Music Academy, Frost Lake Elementary and East African Elementary Magnet School.

"We have after school tutoring virtu-

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## What's the future look like for independent pharmacies?

As more pharmacies close, pharmacists point to low reimbursements and issues with PBMs that affect how people are getting their medications

By TESSA M. CHRISTENSEN

The policies of health insurance companies today are making it harder for pharmacies to stay in business, according to Jim Stage, and that affects the people who need prescriptions.

Stage owns and operates two of the shrinking number of independent phar-

macies in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Lloyd's Pharmacy (720 Snelling Ave., St. Paul) and Setzer's Pharmacy (1685 Rice St.). He also operated Schneider Drug Store at 3400 University Ave. but closed it in 2019 and consolidated operations.

Stage points to the middlemen - the pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) - as the reason pharmacies are closing.

A big problem is that pharmacies never know how much they are going to get paid for a drug. "We are a downstream business," Stage pointed out. "It's hard for a small pharmacy to stay in business because the reimbursements are low."

It's a complicated system. The amount the pharmacy is reimbursed for varies depending on which insurance company is involved and which specific plan a customer has.

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St. Paul Optimist Club celebrates 100th anniversary

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Be a nature BFF: Start wildflower seeds indoor this winter

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There are some drugs that are consistently being reimbursed for less than it costs the pharmacy.

Stage said he has made the tough decision to stop selling some medications because he can't afford to take the loss.

For a popular weight-loss drug, Lloyd's spends \$1,200 and loses \$30 on a claim. "People don't see that. All they see is what they pay," Stage observed.

He appreciates the loyalty people have and how they are trying to keep independent pharmacies in business by sending their prescriptions to them. His customers are flabbergasted to learn that even if he's busy and fills prescriptions all day that he can still be losing money.

"People think that because you come into the store that we're making money but that's not true anymore."

**WHO IS MAKING MONEY IN HEALTHCARE?**

Today's health insurance system using pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) emerged in the 1990s to manage the prescription side of things for health insurance plans. Prior to that, this area of healthcare was directly managed by the insurance companies. PBMs negotiate drug



On a level playing field, if I get to compete with the big boxes on service and taking care of my patients, I will beat them every time. And that's all we're asking for, is the opportunity."

**Deborah Keaveny**

prices with manufacturers and structure medication benefits within health plans. PBMs provide these services for insurance companies and employers alike. United Healthcare's PBM is OptumRx, based in Eden Prairie, where pharmacists staged protests the past two years. Prime Therapeutics, headquartered in Eagan, is one of six largest PBMs in the country and is affiliated with Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

These middlemen manage what is paid or not paid, and how things are paid, pointed out Stage.

"Now they have become big conglomerates," Stage observed. "They have become so big and powerful that they control the market."



People think that because you come into the store that we're making money but that's not true anymore."

**Jim Stage**

Simply put, they are significantly deflating reimbursements for pharmacies, he observed.

They are also operating their own online pharmacies.

PBMs argue that they lower prices. However, it isn't the local pharmacists that are seeing the results of the savings. Instead, they're closing locations.

The number of independently owned pharmacies in Minnesota has dropped from 478 to 156 in the past two decades, according to the Minnesota Board of Pharmacy. Large chain stores have decreased from 552 to 451. Twenty years ago in the Twin Cities, there were 142 small pharmacies and 307 chain locations. Today, there are 48 independent pharmacies and 252 chain locations.

"It's staggering," said Stage.

The CVS at Snelling and University in St. Paul was shuttered in 2022, part of 600 stores that were shut down nationally, many of them in low-income neighborhoods and those with theft problems. Another 300 were closed in 2024, and the location at Franklin and Nicollet in Minneapolis will be closed on Feb. 11.

In 2024, Walgreens, another large pharmacy company, announced plans to close 1,200 stores over the next three years. Of those, 500 stores will be shuttered in 2025.

"When I hear that, I know I'm not the only one in a tight space," said Stage. When it's not only the independents struggling, but also the larger chains, it's a larger issue, he said.

"Something has to change. It's not sustainable."

While pharmacies are closing down and citizens are traveling longer distances to get prescriptions filled (or waiting for them to come in the mail), healthcare insurance companies are making money.

"They're doing it on the backs of the consumer and the pharmacies," Stage said.

UnitedHealth Group reported \$22 billion in profits for 2023, and its chief executive officer Andrew Witty made \$23,534,936 in total compensation. Its CEO, Maple Grove resident Brian Thompson, was shot and killed in New York City in December 2024 while attending a company event. Under his leadership UnitedHealth Group made \$16 billion in profits last year. The man charged with his killing, Luigi Mangione, criticized health care companies.

PBMs have been embroiled in lawsuits alleging that they are limiting access to some drugs and promoting others.

In 2017, Mylan, the manufacturer of

EpiPen, was accused of illegal schemes to favor the drug over competitors. The lawsuits alleged that Mylan offered PBMs large rebates in exchange for giving EpiPen preferential placement on their formularies. This allowed Mylan to raise the price of EpiPens.

"They demand we fill a certain brand of Epi and they inflate the price," said Stage. The insurance company reimburses very little, and the cost to consumer and pharmacy is high. "There is no accountability for them," stated Stage. "They need more accountability. They need more transparency with the consumer." The problem is found in many aspects of healthcare, he observed, as people don't know what services cost before they start receiving multiple bills.

**PHARMACIES SHIFTING**

Pharmacy is a proximity business, Stage pointed out. People want to get their prescriptions from a pharmacy near where they are, and that is the prime driver of business. But more than that, independent pharmacies believe they are fulfilling a critical role for their communities, said Stage.

During his time in the industry, he's watched pharmacies need to increase their volume and employ fewer people to stay in business.

They've added more merchandise in the stores, selling over-the-counter medications, gifts and cards. Pharmacies are also doing vaccinations.

**MNINDYS WORKING ON REFORM**

Minnesota Independent Pharmacies, known as the MNIndys, seeks to bring awareness to the problems local pharmacies and their patients face due to PBM abuse and through educating Minnesotan patients, employers, unions, and legislators on PBM-related issues, according to the website www.mnindys.org/. In addition to education, MNIndys is dedicated to seeing both meaningful legislation and actionable enforcement regarding PBMs take place in Minnesota.

They seek regularly reforms to address potential loopholes and ensure that PBMs operate in a way that benefits pharmacies, patients and healthcare. They are also working to encourage competition among PBMs to ensure fair negotiations with pharmacies and medication manufacturers. MNIndys support regulations that enhance transparency about PBM practices, including pricing arrangements and rebates.

"Let us compete on our merits. Let us compete on our service. We'll never be able to buy drugs as cheap as the Walmarts, the Walgreens, things like that, and that's fine. That's the market. That's how a free market's supposed to work. But on a level playing field, if I get to compete with the big boxes on service and taking care of my patients, I will beat them every day. And that's all we're asking for, is the opportunity," said Deborah Keaveny, founder of MNIndys and owner of Keaveny Drug in Winsted, Minn.

Nationally, H.R.9096, the Pharmacists Fight Back Act, is winding its way through committees.

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**RETHINKING I-94** >> from 1

The transportation advocacy group Our Streets, which has promoted the notion of a Twin Cities Boulevard to replace the freeway, is strongly objecting. The group accused MnDOT of taking action in bad faith. The group is urging members to sign up to speak at the virtual meeting Jan. 17.

"This move, rushed before the holidays, effectively denies the public a chance to explore a transformative alternative that re-connects neighborhoods and addresses decades of harm," Our Streets said in a statement released before Christmas.

Yet another point made against at-grade options is the need for federal approval for such a change. Our Streets has countered that changes to I-94 require municipal consent from Minneapolis and St. Paul.

On its website, Our Streets pointed out that the announcement to drop the at-grade options comes just weeks before the U.S. Department of Transportation is to announce federal Reconnecting Communities grant recipients. "The Twin Cities Boulevard campaign has a strong chance of receiving those federal funds, especially with a funding match from Hennepin County and the city of Minneapolis," the web posted stated.

Our Streets has long touted the idea of highway property being returned to surrounding communities for new affordable housing, small businesses, community centers, parks and other uses. The at-grade proposals ranked highly in a recent MnDOT survey.

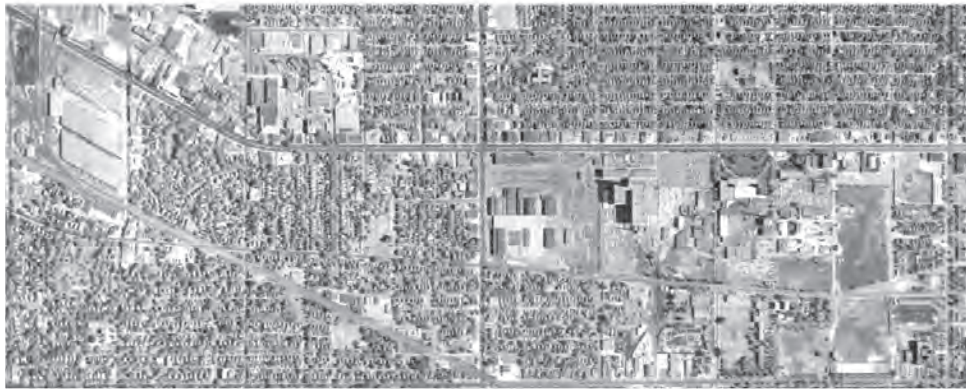
Area district councils and business groups are also looking at the recommendations and preparing to weigh in.

Lopez said in an interview that MnDOT staff working on Rethinking I-94 looked at many factors when deciding which alternative should move forward.

A MnDOT summary states that the at-grade options are being dismissed due to concerns related to safety, mobility, impacts to environmental justice communities, and short- and long-term costs.

"The at-grade alternatives do not address the number and severity of crashes for people in motorized vehicles. At-grade alternatives push additional traffic to surrounding roadways, which have higher crash rates than the existing freeway," the MnDOT summary stated. Another red flag is that the at-grade options would require expanding Interstates 494 and 694.

**Aerial photo from 1954 (before I-94)**



**Aerial Photo from 1969 (shows I-94)**



"MnDOT heard both strong support and strong opposition to the at-grade options from community members and stakeholders via community events, open houses, the public survey in 2023, and in written communications to the project team. For example, while local advocacy groups expressed the most interest in and support for at-grade alternatives, other community members, such as corridor commuters, expressed opposition against at-grade alternatives more frequently than support," the summary stated.

**10 CURRENT OPTIONS**

Options for the Rethinking I-94 project have been winnowed down in recent years, with another round of cutbacks proposed for the Jan. 17 Policy Advisory Committee meeting.

Options set aside in 2023 included that of having transit down the middle of the freeway. Interesting enough, that was an idea studied in the 1980s and early 1990s leading to what became Green Line light rail. Proposed was a series of park and ride lots near key University Avenue intersections, as well as so-called "kiss and ride" drop-offs by the freeway where

motorists would drop off passengers who wanted to ride transit.

The committee Jan. 17 is to focus on 10 options, with discussion of winnowing down the list. While a Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) proposal to eliminate two at-grade options has drawn the most attention, four other options are also on the chopping block. Those include two freeway expansion options.

MnDOT's summary of options cites pros and cons for each one.

Four options would remain on the table if staff recommendations are approved. Those include:

1) No Build - I-94 would remain as is. Existing transit service would continue without improvements. No-build moves forward as a baseline for the study.

2) General Maintenance B - Updates the existing infrastructure to current standards with consistent shoulders. This would allow transit to run on bus shoulders between downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul. The MnDOT overview stated that this option provides notable improvements compared to no build as pavement and bridges are reconstructed,

creating an opportunity for bicycle and pedestrian crossing improvements. Bus shoulders are extended through the whole corridor, to improve mobility for transit users.

However, there are concerns about the ability of this alternative to fully address project goals outside of infrastructure condition due to the limited changes to the corridor.

3) Reduced Freeway A - Rebuild the existing freeway, reducing to three lanes throughout in total. Of the three lanes made available in both directions, two lanes would be general purpose lanes with one lane being converted to a managed lane in each direction for bus rapid transit (BRT) and E-ZPass.

4) Reconfigure Freeway - Rebuilds the existing freeway to provide four consistent lanes in each direction, with one lane being converted to a managed lane in each direction for BRT and E-ZPass.

A MnDOT overview stated that "because these alternatives demonstrate significant opportunities to achieve a more sustainable and safer future for I-94 and the community, while meeting the critical transportation needs of our region, it is our recommendation that they move forward for further evaluation."

Both could increase traffic congestion, and have negative air quality impacts.

Besides the at-grade proposals, MnDOT staff recommend that other options be shelved including both freeway expansion options. "While the expanded freeway option would improve mobility in the corridor, this option would have negative impacts on public health and the environment - particularly to those most vulnerable such as environmental justice populations along the corridor," the MnDOT overview stated.

A fifth option to be set aside is called General Maintenance A. It would simply maintain the existing infrastructure and transit services.

The sixth option slated for dismissal is described as "local/regional." It would separate the freeway into two roadway systems, providing a separate local traffic roadway and freeway space for through trips with limited access for regional traffic. It would accommodate transit on the shoulder. It would also mean expanded use of the frontage roads. This option would increase travel times and shift traffic closer to homes and through residential neighborhoods, increasing noise and air pollution.

**TIDBITS**

**NEW HAMLINE UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT**

Dr. Mayme Hostetter, a founding leader and current president of the Relay Graduate School of Education in New York City, was introduced as the 22nd president of Hamline University at a campus gathering on Wednesday, Jan. 8,

2024. Dr. Hostetter attended Kenwood School in Minneapolis and St. Paul Academy. She then attended Harvard University. In 2011, she helped found the Relay Graduate School of Education, an independent graduate school of education that serves thousands of teachers nationwide.



**BACH SOCIETY'S NEW LEADER**

Bach Society of Minnesota (BSM) has named Grant Johnson as the organization's new executive director. Dr. Yunyue Liu, who has held the position since 2017, will become the organization's Operations Director. Johnson, a Minnesota native, has been executive director of Denver-based St. Martin's Chamber Choir since 2022 and will continue in that role while also

working with BSM. He starts at BSM on Jan. 16. In his childhood, Johnson was a member of the Minnesota Boychoir, touring and recording with them extensively. While a student at the University of Minnesota, he was concertmaster for multiple orchestras.

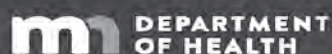


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## BUILDING A STRONGER MIDWAY

BY CHAD KULAS,  
Midway Chamber of  
Commerce Executive Director  
[chad@midwaychamber.com](mailto:chad@midwaychamber.com)



As someone who loves the Midway, I don't love seeing vacant lots. I cringe when I see the boarded-up windows of the CVS, and the trash floating around the old funeral home parking lot – or think about the large unoccupied space at the former At Home building. But with the threats and weaknesses of inactivity comes opportunities. How can we reshape the commercial properties in our neighborhood?

In conversations with people in the Midway, I like to ask them what they want to see in future developments. One recent

# LET'S DREAM FOR THE FUTURE

time I did this was at the Union Park District Council Annual Meeting on Dec. 4. The room was filled with residents of the neighborhood stretching across I-94 into Merriam Park, Desnoyer Park, Lex-Ham and more.

Some of their ideas included entertainment-related businesses. Along with other conversations I've had, people have suggested pickleball, roller skating, rock climbing, a movie theater, and bowling. A good bakery would be a wonderful addition, and the good news is that one is already in the works at the United Village development.

Bonus points also go to any business that is locally owned. While possible to successfully own a business operating elsewhere, we have seen the value of having someone local running daily operations.

More of the revenue also stays in our community, and there is a greater chance the organization supports neighborhood endeavors and charities.

Will we see more housing near Snelling/University? Eventually, yes. While some developers have been scared off by rent control, the city of Saint Paul may exempt buildings constructed since 2005. As we see an increase in unhoused neighbors and rising costs of rent, adding density could help control the monthly living costs and add vibrancy to our community.

Whether its housing or commercial space, we will continue to see transit-oriented development. Part of that guarantee is because of the station area plan, which focuses on land use less connected to cars and more toward pedestrians. Again, the United Village site is an example of many

amenities within walking distance.

Whether its me or people I talk to, inevitably we have to stop and ask if the items on the wish list are attainable. After all, unless we're the ones with site control and the financial backing we aren't going to dictate what happens. Is all this talk just for fun, only to get the dreams dashed? Not necessarily. If we can speak with unified voices on what we want and expect in future developments, it tells those who do have site control what people want. If the developers know there's a demand for it, and those speaking loudest are also nearby residents, it can help move ideas forward. It may even cause a neighbor to move forward with an idea – as we can see with the number of Midway residents who do own businesses nearby.

Together, if we bring our ideas to the table and talk with a cohesive plan perhaps these unused buildings will be filled with excitement shortly. Now is the time for us to dream about what we want next.

So, what do you want?

## Power of diverse children's books: building social and global understanding

### FIRST EDUCATOR

BY DR. ARTIKA TYNER,  
[dr.artikatyner@gmail.com](mailto:dr.artikatyner@gmail.com)



Diverse books aid in building a solid foundation for a bright educational future. These books nurture our children's social and emotional development. Each book provides them with the tools to create, innovate, and work together. In addition, these books foster their understanding and appreciation of the world around them.

One powerful way to promote literacy and support the academic success of children is to read diverse children's books with them. As the United States becomes increasingly more diverse, it is critical that children see themselves reflected in the stories they read. Too often, children of color do not see characters that look like them, and this lack of representation limits their connection to books. Diverse books provide mirrors for children of color to see their own experiences, identities, and dreams represented. In addition, these books also serve as windows for all children to better understand and embrace cultural differences. According to Professor Emerita of Education at The Ohio State University Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, "When there are enough books available that can act as both mirrors and windows for all our children, they will see we can celebrate both our differences and our similarities."

This month's column explores how diverse books can serve as invaluable learning tools. Thuba Nguyen, Early Childhood Education Specialist and founder of Children of the Collective Arts Academy, LLC, provides practical guidance on the importance of multicultural ed-

ucation and insights on how to build a diverse home library.

### THE POWER OF DIVERSE BOOKS

Diverse children's books, featuring protagonists from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences, offer a multitude of benefits for young readers. They help children to:

- Develop empathy and understanding: By encountering characters who are different from themselves, children can learn to appreciate and respect diverse perspectives. They can develop empathy for others and understand that everyone has unique experiences and challenges.

As the child's first teacher, you can foster safety in your child's curiosity by asking open-ended questions and joining them in finding answers.

By reading diverse children's books, young readers can appreciate real stories and validate the lived experiences of others. This helps foster empathy, understanding, and a sense of belonging.

- Challenge stereotypes: Diverse books can help to break down harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about different groups of people.

The growing collection of diverse and inclusive children's literature is in great part due to BIPOC writers and artists who chose to tell their stories and reimagine powerful moments in their lives. These authors often explore themes of comfort, love, and joy, as well as moments they felt they lacked support in their own experiences.

We must acknowledge that BIPOC people are not a monolith and do not have identical experiences. While nuances and themes may be similar, each group within the diaspora deserves its own cultural identity and celebration.

- Build cultural awareness: Exposure to diverse cultures through literature can help children to develop a broader understanding of the world. They can learn about different traditions, customs, and values.

- See themselves reflected in the world: For children from marginalized groups, seeing themselves represented in books can be incredibly empowering. It can help them to feel valued and included.

Parents and caregivers, as a child's primary source of learning, play a crucial role in their development. When selecting diverse children's books, it's essential to consider the quality of the writing and illustrations, ensuring they are engaging and informative. Additionally, the accuracy of the cultural portrayal is paramount, ensuring that the book authentically represents the culture it depicts. Finally, choosing books that align with your child's interests will make reading a more enjoyable and enriching experience.

### A CALL TO ACTION

Promoting literacy and diversity in books is a call to action. It is an opportunity for all caring adults to support our children as they learn, grow, and lead by serving as First Educators.

*See tips in sidebar at right.*

By incorporating diverse children's books into your child's reading routine, you can help them develop a broader social and global perspective, become more empathetic and understanding members of society, and empower their voices to stand for justice and speak their truth. Reading diverse books is not just about teaching your child about different cultures; it's about helping them see the world through a more compassionate and inclusive lens, allowing them to make informed choices, think critically about difficult situations, and engage in challenging conversations. This not only helps our young generation of leaders feel seen and represented but also paves the way for infinite thought and ultimately our collective liberation.

*First Educator: refers to the fundamental primary role that parents and caregivers play in a person's early development and education. They instill essential life skills, morals and behaviors. Through her organization,*

### TIPS FOR INCORPORATING DIVERSE CHILDRENS BOOKS INTO YOUR CHILD'S READING ROUTINE

**1. Visit your local library:** Libraries often have a wide selection of diverse children's books. If you don't see a book or title cataloged, speak to your local librarian and ask about how local residents can request book titles. Signing up for a FREE library card is a simple process. Enjoy instant access to diverse and language-expansive books, movies, and more. Many local libraries offer story time hours and other reading activities. Be sure to check their calendar for the next family literacy event.

**2. Support independent bookstores:** Minnesota is home to many inclusive independent bookstores that often have a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. Stop by your local independent bookstores to support a small business and contribute to your child's inclusive bookshelf.

**3. Look for book recommendations via MN BIPOC Kidlit Creators:** MN BIPOC Kidlit Creators fills a gap in the children's literature community in Minnesota by connecting writers and illustrators of color with one another and with readers and educators across the state.

**4. Build a literacy community:** Your child's teacher, fellow parents, community networks, and school librarians are all excellent resources who can recommend books that are appropriate for their age and interests.

**5. Read outdoors:** Take your reading adventure outdoors and explore scenes and other impactful moments in the book with your child. Outdoor settings provide a wealth of sensory experiences, enhancing children's understanding of the world. Relating book content to the natural world helps children make deeper connections and understand concepts better. It's important for children and their families to have text-to-self experiences with the book to understand and empathize with stories and cultural spaces new to them.

*Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute, Dr. Artika Tyner offers resources to foster literacy and education.*

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# LETTERS

## THANKS FOR PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

I just wanted to tell you that I thought Melvin Giles' article in the December 2024 Monitor was wonderful. It helped me again see that I do not want one event to determine my outlook. I loved the story Melvin told about the farmer and his son. "Maybe so, maybe not. We'll see." I will pray to accept President-elect Trump's rightful position and will pray for the good of our country.

Sincerely,  
Elizabeth N. Drumm

## GRATEFUL FOR FROGTOWN ELECTION WORKERS

My friend, Lois Drush and I decided to take advantage of early voting. We both started out at the Roseville Library - only to be told there was about a two hour wait to vote.

We each decided to try the Frogtown Community Center and headed there to see what the wait would be. To our surprise the line was moving very fast, with an estimate of about 20 minutes in total.

Our hats are off to the election workers at that location. What a delight. They were friendly, efficient beyond words and very on top of the situation. In short, they did a fabulous job.

Please pass along our thanks and appreciation for a job very well done.

Kathryn Miller  
Como Park

## ASIAN AMERICANS NEED TO BE AWARE

With the presidential term looming around the corner, I am fearful.

I am an Asian woman, and I remember what COVID-19 was like for Asian Americans. There was an awful increase in racism, violence, and crime perpetrated against Asian Americans. As the model minority, we are seen as "more white" than

other races. We must remember that we are immigrants, or our parents or grandparents. We must remember that during World War 2, Japanese Americans were imprisoned. We must remember that our freedoms are not free. We are at the beck and call of an administration that encouraged anti-Asian sentiments during COVID-19. We need to make sure our families are safe and that we all have documentation or knowledge of how to navigate the immigration system. We are the MODEL minority. We are safer than those with darker skin. We are the model MINORITY. We are not safe from the majority if the tide changes.

We need to be aware and use our privilege to lift others up, but not at our own expense. We will stand on our own, as Asian Americans. We will stand with our POC neighbors, as fellow people of color. And we will stand with our American neighbors, as fellow Americans fighting for the vision that we can see for our future.

Grace Duggan  
Merriam Park

## HISTORICAL ARTICLE INFORMATIVE

I just read the article about Holcomb-Henry Funeral Home written by Jane McClure. It was very interesting and informative. When I attended the U of M Mortuary Science program in the late 1970s there were still several mortuaries in the area and was familiar with several of the funeral homes. I lived at Willwerscheid-Peters Funeral Home on Grand Avenue and I understand that was sold to a conglomerate. We hate to see the family owned neighborhood funeral homes disappear. My wife and I owned a funeral home in Montana and upon retirement we were fortunate to sell to a young family.

Again, thanks for a great article.  
Respectfully,  
Jim Harris



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Lymphoma survivor Rob McHattie (left) and his wife Lynn (middle) and daughter Emily (right) are shown in the photo. Rob is shown in the photo. The St. Paul garden roses are there and always fresh roses of the Garden of Eden.

Stop and smell the roses Rob McHattie grows, Jan Williams @st

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# Kaleidoscope Learning offers third space for winter play

*Toy library, play hours, musical storytime, and more at local building*

By LULU JAECKEL

The first five years of a child's life can be a lost opportunity for learning because most community services, like kindergarten, don't start until age five, said Como resident Julia Kallmes, the director and co-founder of Kaleidoscope Learning.

Kallmes and Jennie Lynch of Richfield, the president and co-founder of Kaleidoscope Learning, want to fill this void.

"Every time a child plays with a toy here, it might look simple, but there's a lot of learning and brain development and connections being made," said Kallmes, who has a master's degree in elementary education and teaching.

Toys and gross-motor play materials fill the shelves of Kaleidoscope Learning, an early childhood education space located inside Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church in St. Paul (1669 Arcade St.).

Kaleidoscope Learning offers families with children, ages 0-6, the opportunity to play with Montessori-inspired toys during open play, according to Kaleidoscope's website. They also have a toy library with over 700 toys including gross motor items and Montessori materials.

Families who have monthly or yearly memberships can rent out up to eight toys from the toy library, Lynch said. Families can benefit from this because they don't have to purchase the toys and can exchange them for new ones as their children grow.

"Children go through developmental stages very quickly at this age," Lynch said. "What might satisfy a child three months



Julia Kallmes (left) and Jennie Lynch started Kaleidoscope Learning, an early childhood education space located inside Gustavus Adolphus Lutheran Church in St. Paul (1669 Arcade St.). (Photo by Lulu Jaeckel)

ago probably won't satisfy them now."

The inspiration behind Kaleidoscope Learning was to create a community of support for parents and caregivers raising young children who experience parental burnout, Kallmes said.

U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy said in an Aug. 28, 2024 advisory that families urgently need support to help the community thrive. Thirty-three percent of parents report high levels of stress com-

pared to 20% of other adults.

"The thing about having young children is that it is a joyful experience, but it's also a really demanding and stressful one and sometimes those joys can be delayed," Kallmes said. "The most important thing to me is that word 'community' as people coming together, having a third space that isn't their home or workplace and that is also welcoming to young children."

Kaleidoscope Learning opened its



Bags of toys available for checkout from the toy library at Kaleidoscope Learning. (Photo by Lulu Jaeckel)



The open play area at Kaleidoscope Learning in St. Paul. (Photo submitted)

doors in 2022 focusing on the toy library. To provide more support for caregivers of young children, who generally cannot take children to outside spaces like playgrounds in the winter months, they began offering free open play hours, Lynch said.

The weekly open play events include a musical storytime on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 10-10:20 a.m. and Fine Motor Fridays from 9:30 a.m. to noon, Lynch said. She noticed a growth in families that participated in these weekly events.

"Sometimes when you go to school for the first time, it's like landing on a different planet," Kallmes said. "I think that our open play hours are school adjacent but in a really gentle way because you're with your adult."

KALEIDOSCOPE LEARNING >> 7

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## LEARNING CENTER

>> from 7

ally four days a week, again one-on-one," Bulman said. "We also have a summer program that takes place here onsite."

ESLC added a new pre-school tutoring program for children ages 3-5 in November 2024.

"Our volunteers start in September with a lot of intensive training, both for new and returning volunteers," Bulman said. "Some work during the school year and some in the summer. We have volunteers who work year-round, also."

Bulman said ESLC has 10,000 tutoring sessions per year and serves just under 200 children. "Our outcomes are pretty remarkable in social-emotional learning and reading fluently, which are our goals," she said. Bulman noted that some children arrive just learning to do letter recognition.

"Our program focuses on fluency, comprehension, vocabulary and phonics," Bulman stated. "We focus on getting the child to read the way he or she speaks."

She said the tutoring complements what the teachers are doing in the classroom. "They just don't have the time to do the one-on-one tutoring," she explained.

Bulman said that although the program has volunteers of all ages, most of them are over 50. "We work with Experience Corps, that is a part of AARP," she said. "We look for that relationship between an older adult and a child. Many children really struggle with reading, and the one-on-one relationship makes all the difference."

Each child tutored has a half hour of instruction. Bulman said she is learning how to tutor and fit all the pieces into a structured half-hour session. "We know what to do, and there is data and evidence behind how we teach," Bulman said. "That half hour goes very quickly, and there are no minutes wasted at all."

"The beauty of our program is that there is not a requirement that our volunteers be teachers," said Bulman. "They need to be good with kids, reputable, honest, patient and follow the structure of the program. For anybody who cares about making a difference, it is an absolutely rewarding experience."

Bulman emphasized the importance of reading. "Once a child learns how to read, that child can do anything."



Ron Pearson is an ESL tutor at East African Magnet Elementary School (437 Edmund Ave. W). (Photo by Terry Faust)

## A VOLUNTEER'S VIEWPOINT

By JAN WILLMS

Saint Anthony Park resident Nancy Hauser lives a long way from her grandchildren, who are on the East Coast, and she does not often get to see them. So volunteering with the East Side Learning Center has helped.

Hauser began volunteering when her kids were in grade school, assisting in their classrooms. But she said she never volunteered with any program that had its own syllabus and way of doing things until she connected with ESLC. She is going on her third year with the program.

"This is more organized and structured than the things I have done before," she said. Hauser said she does not officially have a teaching background, but is a professional who has worked with grad students in her field, videotaping dance. "I love kids!" she exclaimed, and volunteering with ESLC has given her the chance to work with them.

She works with four children this year at Frost Lake Elementary, and she continues to work with them through the school year, proving half-hour tutoring sessions.

"These are third graders who started school during the pandemic, and so there is a lot of catch-up to do," Hauser said.

She sees kids learn to read, and then to comprehend what they read.

Hauser said each 30-minute session begins with three minutes of getting to know each other and establishing trust. "How are you? What did you have for breakfast?" is how the conversation might start out. "Then we get into three pages of reading, and they are graded on their fluency. We spend the bulk of the time with the children doing up to five different games."

Hauser said there are several different ways the tutor can interact with the child. "You might read a couple of sentences, and then the child repeats those sentences. You get the sounds and rhythms of the tones," she said. "You might read together, or you can read and the child fills in the words you left out. Or you read a sentence, and the child reads the next sentence. Then we work on four to five minutes of comprehension."

She said that as a tutor, she gets a chance to bring out other things to enhance what the student has learned.

"For me, one of the major benefits of what I like to do with my kids is to enhance their sense of self," Hauser explained. "One little girl asked a question, and I told her how proud I was of her. She asked if she was really smart, and I told her that the smartest people in the world ask questions. Seeing her grow in confidence was so rewarding."

Hauser said that being a mentor is really exciting for her. "Reading books to the kids I have learned so much from ESLC."

She said there are workshops and monthly meetings on Zoom, with all tutors gathering with a speaker and then breaking into groups to find out what is happening in other schools. The tutors also have a three-day seminar in which they can plug in with others from all across the country. This is part of the Experience Corps, coming out of AARP. "I am really impressed with the constant learning experience," Hauser said.

She said the most challenging part of the tutoring experience is that not all the kids are always entirely focused. "They have different learning styles."

She recalled one little boy she worked with who had lots of problems at home, and his only stability was in class. "He sometimes acted out," she said. She said that one day when he was having a tough time, he brought his lunch in and they started having a conversation about different foods they liked and didn't like, and that calmed things down. "Some of the hardest things are the baggage they bring in, through no fault of their own," Hauser said.

She said that the most rewarding part of the tutoring experience is when the kids feel so good about what they have done.

"One little girl, her eyes shining, said she had read a book all the way through by herself. It's the realization they could do what they never imagined they could do."

Hauser said that the other tutors she works with are often retired teachers, and she finds them to be a kind, optimistic and hopeful group of people.

She said the volunteer tutoring is a wonderful thing for people who are retired and have some time to be involved. "You do have to be creative and work at it, but that's cool. It's a wonderful program the way it is set up. You really feel like you can make a difference in someone's life."

Anyone interested in volunteering can contact Amelia Wherland, outreach and communications coordinator at [amelia.wherland@eslcmn.org](mailto:amelia.wherland@eslcmn.org)

## KALEIDOSCOPE LEARNING >> from 6

Open play is available to children ages 0-6 Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. to noon and Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to noon.

"We try to be responsive in what people need and a big ask was weekend

hours," Kallmes said, so they added the Saturday time.

All of the weekly events are free of cost. The price of monthly memberships ranges from \$10-\$20.

"We don't want cost to be a barrier to anybody," Kallmes said. "My hope would be that we enrich the ecosystem of support and pull people in so that parents have access to resources."

Multi-age learning allows the older

children to be role models while the younger children follow, according to the American Montessori Society.

It strengthens the community and allows children to collaborate and socialize.

"It can be really rewarding for, say, a four-year-old to model sharing or taking turns for a two-year-old who's in the space," Kallmes said. "It's actually one of our strengths to have a mix of ages in the room."

Lynch and Kallmes said they hope to cultivate relationships with families raising young children who need support.

"We're just one piece of the puzzle in the larger ecosystem of family support," Lynch said. "So oftentimes when we look at other organizations and childcare centers, we think of it as a symbiotic ecosystem."

Lulu Jaekel is a University of Minnesota student majoring in journalism.

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Deadlines typically last or 1st Monday.  
 Publication typically 2nd Thursday.  
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Deadline date	Publication date
Jan. 6	Jan. 16
Jan. 27	Feb. 6
Feb. 24	March 6
March 31	April 10
April 28	May 8
June 2	June 12
June 30	July 10
July 28	Aug. 7
Aug. 29 (Friday)	Sept. 11
Sept. 29	Oct. 9
Nov. 3	Nov. 13
Dec. 1	Dec. 11

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### MARCH

Home Improvement  
 Living 50+/Good Neighbor

### APRIL

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 Drive & Ride

### MAY

Home & Garden  
 Summer in the City

### JUNE

Pride  
 Summer in the City  
 Living 50+/Good Neighbor

### JULY

Back 2 School/Education  
 Summer in the City

### AUGUST

Back 2 School/Education  
 Summer in the City  
 Nokomis Days

### SEPTEMBER

Back 2 School - Health  
 Living 50+/Good Neighbor

### OCTOBER

Home Improvement  
 Voters Guide

### NOVEMBER

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### DECEMBER

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**COMO PARK SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL**



BY ERIC ERICKSON  
Social studies teacher

**WINTER ONE ACT PLAY**

"The Seussification of Romeo and Juliet" was performed three times in the Como Auditorium during December. The play was directed by choir teacher Huy Tran and English teacher Michael Youle.

Audiences were entertained by the fun and clever adaptation of Shakespeare which was fast-paced with energetic acting. The set construction was impressive and colorful, and the show was accessible for people of all ages.

Cast members included Daleeya Logan, Genevieve DeGaetano, Mitch Pelzer, Tylena Davis, Danaya Evans, Amelia Raabe, Laura King, Lilly Werner, Zachary Prince, Ana Thao, Klay Paw, Chris Pitmann, Charlie Ernst, Ethan Imbertson, William Fable, and Nijia Wheeler.

Stage managers Lila Kopp and Clara Dunne led the tech crew consisting of Millie Huth, Levi Kallhoff, Alex Buhr, Sarah Paw, Linnea Common, Charlie McCabe, and Moo Lay.

**3DE CASE STUDY WITH API GROUP**

Como's freshmen class hosted the API

**CONCLUDING 2024, KICKING OFF 2025**



The cast of Como's winter one act play performing in the school auditorium. (Photo by Como senior Kong Yang)

Construction Group in the auditorium for the culminating event of this year's third case study. "The event went really well and the APi Group leadership repeated over and over how impressed they were with the ninth grade students," said Como's 3DE coordinator Le'Shon Archie.

The group with the winning presentation for the Case 9.3 Challenge was Azariah Freeman, Amethyst Gibson, Vivienne Dankert, and Anna Peltier.

**MARINE CORPS JROTC**

Como's cadets hosted their annual Devil Dog Drill Competition on Dec. 14. Eight JROTC schools from across the Midwest made their way to St. Paul, participating in a dozen events throughout the course of the day. Cadet Sergeant Nally See (a junior at Como) earned the Best Unit Leader Award.

In another December tradition, Co-

mo's cadets conducted their Toys 4 Tots Drive, sorting and packing thousands of toys at the Mall of America for those in need.

**SPIRIT WEEK**

The final week of school in 2024 was spirited with thematic dress-up days. Monday was "Pajama Day," Tuesday was "Dynamic Duo Day," Wednesday was "Denim Day," Thursday was "Ugly Sweater Day," and Friday was "Class Colors Day."

At the end of the academic day on Friday, students filled the bleachers in the gym for the "Battle of the Classes Futsal Tournament." The variation of soccer that's played indoors with a heavier ball is a popular activity. The team representing the junior class won the title, culminating with a convincing victory over the Como staff squad.

Students and staff were on winter break for two weeks before classes resumed on Monday, Jan. 6. The semester will conclude on Jan. 24.

**WINTER OPEN HOUSE**

Como hosted its Winter Open House for prospective students and families on Tuesday, Jan. 14 from 5:30-6:30 p.m. The open house is an opportunity for students and families to visit school, meet staff members, see the building, and envision a future as part of Como Park High School. Parents need to apply online by Feb. 14 for the best opportunity to get into the school of their choice.

**PEACE BUBBLES**



BY MELVIN GILES  
peacebubbles@q.com

"Go within every day and find the inner strength so that the world will not blow your candle out." Katherine Dunham

"[the] old road is rapid agin'. Please get out of the new one if you can't lend you hand. For the times they are a-changin'... The slow one now will later be fast. As the present now will later be past. The order is rapidly fadin'. And the first one now will later be last. For the times they are a-changin'". Bob Dylan

"I'd like to be remembered as someone who was a champion of peace and human rights." President Jimmy Carter

"We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles." President Jimmy Carter

Hello Monitor readers,

It's a bright New Year! Although, 2024 ended and 2025 started on sorrowful events and grieving passings, every New Year offers the shining lights of New Year's babies and new hopeful possibilities and self-discoveries. I am still working through drying my eyes from the recent tragedies, both natural losses and human-made losses. In times like these, I believe it is our faith that gives us strength and courage to mend and with time to restore our broken hearts. The late-former President Jimmy Carter left us lots of great lessons and excellent visions for a better and re-energizing world. Among the gifts he modeled for us were tolerance for disagreements, respect for Mother Earth and climate shifting, the awesome power of humility,

**CONSIDER THE GIFT OF PRESENCE**

caring and building for people in need of housing, being a global citizen – and the list could go on. However, the greatest examples he set for me are stand and speak for truth and justice regardless if it's popular or not; to be guided and act with love, particularly in work and play; and to use our muscles daily to exercise and practice the forces of empathy and forgiveness. Most of us will not have a century to experience the challenges, opportunities, and successes that turned and transformed a peanut farmer into a wonderful president for the American people and Best Friend to Countries Around the World. I can rejoice and believe that he is resting in peace with his dear beloved Rosalynn. Their synergy and life-companionship model will continue to inspire me to look on the bright side of life and stay optimistic!

And, now, a piece I had wanted to share two months ago from a returning guest-friend, Princess Titus.

**BEFORE YOU SAY NO TO A CHILD: A GIFT THAT LASTS A LIFETIME BY PRINCESS TITUS**

During this season, we're often reminded to spend our time, resources, and money as a way to show love to the people in our lives. Take a moment and reflect on how nature, at this time of year, seems to be dying or in a state of being dormant. The trees shed their leaves, animals hibernate, and the earth pauses – allowing space for renewal, growth, and rest to prepare for its evolution. It's a season of quiet transformation. Yet, during this time, we do the opposite. We rush. We buy. We give in to the pressure of 'not enough' and endless desire for more. This often leads to stress, overconsumption, and even conflict.

It's strange to think that just after a

day meant for giving thanks, we dive head-first into a frenzy of acquisition, trying to fill our hearts and homes with things, as though that will make us feel valued and appreciated. And when it doesn't work, when we fail to feel fulfilled, that's when the real gift often comes from the simplest source: the hug of a child.

A child's embrace can remind us of something incredibly important – our own wellness matters. Taking time for ourselves, giving ourselves the care and attention we need, is one of the most valuable gifts we can offer – not only to ourselves but to the ones we love. Just as children need our presence, our attention, and our touch, so do we.

When we say "no," "stop," or "wait" to children, it's important to remember that they are little humans developing their sense of self. They need our guidance, but they also need our connection. Holding their hand when we speak, getting on their level to see the world through their eyes, allowing them to express their feelings, and making space for their emotions are gifts that cannot be wrapped in a box.

In a world obsessed with materialism, the true investments we can make in children are not always toys or gadgets, but in our time, attention, and care. These gifts – rooted in presence – will last a lifetime. So, before you say "no" to a child, ask yourself if you're giving them the most important gift of all: your presence.

Thank you, Princess for your insightful and nurturing words of wisdom.

**'ARISE 2' BY MICHAEL CHANEY**

To kick-off a happy 2025, I asked a justice champion and urban farmer to compose a poem to christen in the New

Year. Thank you, Brother Michael Chaney!

Arise 2  
Dearly beloved  
Mother Earth  
Awaken from your deep  
winter's sleep & Bless  
this New Year

Oh man winter  
Slowly pull back your  
blanket of cold & snow  
for we farmers have seeds  
that need to be sown

Anoint this age old  
sacred ritual so that  
we your humble children  
can reap the bountiful harvest  
that we annually seek

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5)

Enjoy our winter wonderland days with taking time for rest, self-care, fun, mourning and grieving together when needed, replenishing self, and cultivate the values and lessons of the peanut farmer who became president of the United States. And, of course, be and stay optimistic!

May Peace Be In the Rondo, Frogtown, Hamline/Midway, Como, and Surrounding Communities... May Peace Be In Our Homes and Communities... May Peace Prevail On Earth (MPPOE).



Musician and climate justice champion Michael Chaney

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# ST. PAUL OPTIMIST CLUB CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

How does a 65-member community service club that was started between two World Wars reach the milestone of its 100th anniversary?

"From the beginning in 1924 to today, our members have never lost focus of the club's mission to bring out the best in our St. Paul youth, our community and ourselves," said Karl Olson, member of the Optimist Club of St. Paul since November 1976. "Every year, we find numerous ways to support the youth of our community and provide them with opportunities to advance."

The club's mission has been served in a wide variety of ways. Among a long list of programs, the St. Paul Optimist Club has:

- Provided over \$650,000 in scholarships through its Friends of Youth Foundation. Scholarships are given to St. Paul high school seniors who have succeeded in overcoming significant obstacles in their young lives.
- Created the Ms. Minnesota Basketball recognition program in 1978 when

the Minnesota sports associations only honored a Mr. Minnesota Basketball player. This recognition was created nine years before women were even allowed to join any Optimist Club.

- Served over a thousand meals to families at Jeremiah Program's St. Paul campus and to young people at Safe Zone (and provided hundreds of socks and other essential items to at-risk youth).

- Rang the bell for the Salvation Army for a day each holiday season.

- Honored and rewarded dozens of students over the years in annual essay and oratory contests, as well as contests for the deaf and hard of hearing.

- Sponsored young athletes in golf tournaments.

- Helped an Afghan family acclimate to life in the Twin Cities after they were evacuated as part of the families where a member had worked for the U.S. government during its tenure in Afghanistan.

- Brought in speakers such as Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, St. Paul Police Chief Axel Henry, and Minnesota

Supreme Court Chief Justice Natalie Hudson to speak at the club's monthly meetings.

- Recently partnered with Neighborhood House to help raise funds for Neighborhood House at their Revel for a Cause Gala.

- Organized an ongoing drive to provide paper bags with handles, egg cartons, toilet paper, peanut butter and more for those in need at Keystone's Food Shelf near the corner of Fairview and University.

On Dec. 5, the St. Paul Optimist Club celebrated its Centennial at a gala at the Town & Country Club. The featured speaker was Na Eng, one of the club's early Youth Appreciation Scholarship recipients and now an award-winning journalist and humanitarian. (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/naeng/>, <https://www.fulbrightprogram.org/na-eng/>) Earlier this year, Eng, was inducted into the Johnson High School Hall of Fame. That ceremony marked a historic moment as Eng became the first Asian American inducted.

Ms. Minnesota Basketball 1980, Janet



St. Paul Optimist Club members (left to right) Kevin Megan, Colleen Hegranes, and Linnea Solem are excited about the club reaching a milestone: its 100th anniversary. (Photo submitted)

Karvonen Montgomery, gave a reflection at the gala. Karl Olson presented the history of the club.

Members of the Centennial Committee included Karl Olson (co-chair), John Kingrey (co-chair), Diane Koch, and Margie Bodas.

Anyone interested in donating to recognize the club's 100 years of service can contact the club at [optimist100th@gmail.com](mailto:optimist100th@gmail.com). Visit [www.stpauloptimists.org](http://www.stpauloptimists.org) and the St. Paul Optimist's Facebook page.

## How St. Paul funds public projects under review

### Committee to take a close look at CIB process

By JANE MCCLURE

How St. Paul funds large and small brick-and-mortar public projects could change in the future. Proposed revisions to the Long-Range Capital Improvement Budget (CIB) process are under study by the St. Paul City Council's Audit Committee. Wilder Research is to bring the committee a report in February 2025, with more work after that.

The committee review comes after a 2025-2026 community projects cycle that some community members described as frustrating.

The audit committee could suggest changes going forward. It typically doesn't hold public hearings during its study process but instead seeks out people to interview. The audit committee is made up of city council and community members and makes recommendations on various city operations.

Heather Britt, executive director of Wilder Research, and committee members discussed the ongoing study at the Dec. 17 committee meeting. Key issues that have come up include the project submission and selection process itself, how community engagement is conducted, and how equity issues are addressed, said Britt.

"It's clear that's there's going to be a lot of different perspectives there," said Britt. One of many issues raised is how to

make the process more open, and less like something that is accessed by "insiders" or people who are savvy to how the process works.

St. Paul's CIB program was set up in the 1960s by the Minnesota Legislature, and began in 1967. Citizen committee members are appointed by Senate district.

Ward Two Council Member Rebecca Noecker emphasized the need for district councils to be included in the study process. District councils had a long history of involvement with the CIB process. That changed over time. For many years district councils would meet with and interview candidates for CIB seats. That process was dropped when Norm Coleman was mayor.

In the longtime CIB process, projects were submitted every other year. Some years, more than 200 projects competed for funding. But this drew complaints. One objection was that dollars would be taken from streets projects to fund recreation center, playground and library projects. Street paving work then got behind. That mean creating separate bonds for streets.

The greatest objection was that in the most recent years of the old funding cycles, a few large projects took the lion's share of the capital bond funds. Smaller projects were squeezed out.

Another issue was that some district councils couldn't muster volunteers for each subcommittee. For many years three subcommittees, made up of volunteers from the city's 17 district councils, reviewed and ranked projects. The subcommittees covered streets and utilities,

community facilities and housing and economic development. Their review cycles took several weeks before recommendations were ready for the full CIB Committee.

Mayor Chris Coleman's administration announced projects changes, which were largely taken on by Mayor Melvin Carter's administration. City departments' projects are reviewed and funded in odd years, with smaller, neighborhood-generated projects funded in even years. There have been three rounds of neighborhood projects, with \$1 million typically split over a two-year cycle. The vast majority of the projects have been for traffic calming or pedestrian and bicycle amenities.

The 2024 neighborhood project funding round for 2025-2026 drew criticism from community and CIB Committee members. The application process was reopened last spring after fewer than two dozen projects came in. Two council wards had no projects submitted. That was compared to 86 projects for the previous neighborhood funding cycle.

Reopening the process citywide was seen as a way to provide equity for all parts of St. Paul, but groups that met the original deadline were unhappy that the rules were changed.

Having two online polls, for original projects and then all projects, also met criticism.

Only a handful of Monitor area neighborhood projects were funded. The top-ranked request, from Union Park, is to install flashing pedestrian safety beacon lights between Skyline Tower and Midway

Peace Park. At \$65,000 it is the smallest project funded for 2025-2026.

Another area project funded is safety improvements of the Thomas-Griggs intersection, at \$225,000.

The six recommended projects, plus money for public art and contingency, totaled \$1,567,847.

Area projects shut out include Horton Park improvements, Robbins/Transitway lighting improvements, Westgate Commons park shade structures and bicycle connections along Pierce Butler Route, and a bike improvements along Wabash Avenue in West Midway.

## ELECTION NEWS

### ELECTIONS SHIFT TO EVEN YEARS

On Nov. 5, St. Paul voters approved a shift in city elections (mayor and city council) from odd to even years. On Dec. 3, the Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) Board of Education voted 6-1 to move their elections to even years in line with city elections. This means there will not be a school board election in 2025 and that current board members' terms will be extended by one year. The next school board race will occur in November 2026.

### COUNTY COMMISSIONER SPECIAL ELECTION

There is a special election being held for the Ramsey County District 3 County Commissioner seat vacated by Trista Martinson in August. Special Election Day is Feb. 11.

On the ballot are Joshua David Bau and Garrison McMurtrey.

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**FROGTOWN GREEN**

BY RENNIE GAITHER



# SOLSTICE AND SEEDS IN 2025

Happy New Year! The winter solstice, harbinger of the beginning of astronomical winter in the Northern Hemisphere and sunlight curmudgeon, has passed. It's a good thing we have such Grand Poobahs to remind us of our uncanny ability to admire and indulge in nature and the supranatural at once, if only imaginatively. We celebrate instances of these apparent natural fulcrums – "bedposts" in Latin – that anchor our sense of balance over the course of seasonality.

As a species our reverence for seasonal change, historically and transnationally, perhaps makes us true cultural globalists.

The winter solstice, at its core, captures a symbolic and spiritual trifecta. Its cultural significance lies in collective notions of human interconnectedness, light's victory over darkness, and the cycle of death and rebirth.

Centuries before our present culture war battles over economic globalism became a "thing," many societies seemed to share one historic aspect of culture: celebration and festivity around astronomical winter. The Zuni and Hopi (Hopitu Shimumu) conduct Soyal, their traditional celebration of the winter solstice. The Buru-



sho (Hunza people) of northern Pakistan conduct their Thumushelling festival on the solstice to celebrate harvest's end. The modern St. Lucia's Day festival or festival of lights, celebrated at the time of the winter solstice in Scandinavia, is a Christian festival meant to honor St. Lucia, an early Christian martyr. The fest combines earlier

**WINTER SEED-SOWING EVENT FEB. 6**

Frogtown Green will host a winter seed-sowing event, with guests from the Minnesota Seed Project demonstrating how to make mini-greenhouses for sowing and growing native, pollinator-friendly flowers and grasses. This free family-friendly event includes a home-cooked meal and runs from 5:30-7:30 on Thursday, Feb. 6 at Frogtown Community Center, 230 Como Ave.

Check [frogtowngreen.com/events](http://frogtowngreen.com/events) for details.

elements of pagan Norse solstice celebration with Christian traditions.

Winter solstice, however, is more than celebration of death and rebirth; it invites us to consider how to responsibly manage this transition in nature. For me, this means taking on small tasks to help nature better complete its renewal functions.

One simple way to position ourselves as one of nature's BFFs is to foster wildflower seeds over winter indoors via cold stratification. Stratification involves exposing seeds to moist, cold, or warm conditions (warm stratification) in order to break dormancy. Many native wildflowers, especially those that produce seeds in the fall, undergo stratification naturally when exposed to winter's cold and moisture. Ideally, they'll germinate in spring. However, proper indoor stratification mimics

natural conditions that bring about necessary seed dormancy and germination. Also, doing so increases seed survival rates by protecting them from becoming a menu item for birds and rodents.

A common stratification method used for native seeds is to first soak culled seeds for 1-2 hours, drain the water with a paper towel or coffee filter, spread seeds on the towel, wrap another paper towel around the moist one, and finally refrigerate in a sealed Ziploc bag. It's a good idea to label the plant species, if known, with the date. Leave refrigerated for about a month before planting.

The MnSEED Project ([mnseedproject.org](http://mnseedproject.org)) provides great learning opportunities on native seed cleaning, processing, stratification and sharing.

Also, check out Frogtown Green's Monarch City ([www.frogtowngreen.com/our-village-community-garden](http://www.frogtowngreen.com/our-village-community-garden)), an urban prairie garden covering 10,000 square feet of pollinator-friendly plantings. Monarch City's a wonderful place for native plants and seed discovery.

I find winter's associations with human connectedness and the cycle of death and rebirth palpably compelling. I'm less sanguine about light's triumph over darkness. I wonder if I'm looking in all the wrong places? Stars felled by light pollution. Transactional politicians. Deepfakes. Perhaps, I'll try some seeds.

Rennie Gaither is a Frogtown Green volunteer. Frogtown Green is a resident-led and volunteer-powered environmental initiative in St Paul's most diverse neighborhood. If you'd like to know more, browse [frogtowngreen.com](http://frogtowngreen.com) or call 651-757-5970.

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