



Mira Klein, one of the worker-owners of the May Day Cafe Workers Cooperative, enjoys a cup of tea on her break from working as a barista at the May Day Cafe. Chatter fills the space as people connect with others in their community, which Klein said is the best part of her job. (Photo by Danielle Fraher)

MEET THE CHALLENGERS

Four vie to unseat Mayor Frey

By CAM GORDON

City elections will be held in November 2025, and by the time Mayor Jacob Frey kicked off his reelection campaign in January, four candidates had already stepped forward to challenge him.

Two challengers currently hold office, and all four have connections to south Minneapolis. Omar Fateh is the state senator for the southside's District 62. Emily Koski is the Ward 11 City Council Member, and Brenda Short ran unsuccessfully for the Ward 9 City Council seat in 2021.

DeWayne Davis has been a pastor at two southside churches; first at All God's Children Metropolitan Community Church and, currently, at Plymouth Congregational Church. He is seeking elected office for the first time.

CHALLENGERS >> 3

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 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:

RETHINKING I-94 >> 6

TWO CO-OPS, SAME BLOCK

By DANIELLE FRAHER

Ever since it first opened in the mid-1990s, May Day Cafe at 3440 Bloomington Ave. has been a thriving hub for its local community. Now, after a year of fundraising to buy the business, employees are keeping the cafe going by turning it into a worker-owned cooperative.

The May Day Cafe Workers Cooperative's year-long fundraising campaign just closed this December, and as of Jan. 27, the co-op now owns the May Day Cafe,

according to a post on the cafe's Facebook page. The cafe is currently closed until approximately Feb. 7 as it makes the transition, and the co-op will post further updates on its Facebook and Instagram.

The co-op has been working with previous owner Andy Lunning in making the transition go as smoothly as possible, according to Mira Klein, one of the four founding worker-owners who has made the co-op a reality along with other non-member workers and people in the community.

May Day Cafe transitions to worker-owned co-op, City Blocks Quilt Shop marks five years of community ownership

"[May Day Cafe] is such an important community gathering spot for Powderhorn and greater parts of South Minneapolis," Klein said. "I think a workers cooperative model actually offers a really sustainable future for that, so that's really exciting."

TWO CO-OPS, SAME BLOCK >> 10

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 pharmacies 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."

PHARMACIES >> 11



Minnesotans gather to demand 'All the way with the ERA!'

PAGE 4



A developer wanted to take away affordable housing, but community stepped up

PAGE 9



Brandon Long leaves NENA, Amy Arcand appointed interim director

PAGE 13



Soup for You! Café celebrates 10th anniversary

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

Soup for You! Café celebrates its 10th anniversary on Friday, Jan. 31st from 11:30-1:30 p.m. All are welcome enjoy a free bowl of soup and accompaniments in the basement of Trinity Lutheran Church at 2730 E. 31st St. Enter through the parking lot doors, where a greeter is waiting to direct guests to the café downstairs. Founder and Chef Judah Natif said, "It's a big deal for us that we survived this long through thick and thin and lots of challenges."

Over 120,000 meals have been served



Volunteers and staff celebrate offering free food for free people at Soup for You! Café. (Photos submitted)

over the last decade. The work is made possible in part through monetary gifts and grants, and regular ongoing food donations provided by Common Harvest Farm, Twin Cities Food Justice, Sisters Camelot, Turtle Bread, Asa's Bakery, Seward Co-op and United Noodles.

The vegetarian soup cafe was formerly located at Bethany Lutheran Church. When it closed, the soup cafe moved to Trinity Lutheran Church in June 2024.

Founder Chef Judah was born in the ghetto of Tunis, an Arab/Jewish child of

a Holocaust survivor. Chef Judah was orphaned at an early age and became a child beggar, one among many. "I was hungry the first 8 years of my life," said Chef Judah. Years later he landed in Minnesota (40 years ago), where he experienced homelessness and hunger once again. "I was a troll and lived underneath the Franklin Ave Bridge, a quarter mile from the Seward Coop, for an entire year," he said. After surviving the streets, Chef Judah found himself at St. Martin's Table, a non-profit Cafe and bookstore. He

opened Soup For You! on Feb. 2, 2015.

If you haven't visited before, you can expect to be treated with dignity and respect at the cafe, to enjoy a mix of guests from all walks of life, and to be nourished both by the healthy, homemade food and by the warm community environment. Lunch is offered daily Monday - Friday, noon to 1 p.m.

For more information, go to <https://soupforyou.info>.

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CHALLENGERS >> from 1

WHERE THEY COME FROM

Davis was born and raised in Indianola, Miss. in a family with 15 children. After high school, he moved to Washington, DC and lived there for 24 years before becoming a minister in 2012 and moving to Minneapolis in 2013. He has lived in the Willard-Hay neighborhood ever since. He was recently chaplain of the Minnesota State Senate, and co-chair of Mayor Frey's Community Safety Workgroup from Dec. 2021 to June 2022 when it presented its final report.

Fateh was born in Washington, DC and grew up in Annandale, Va. He moved to Minneapolis 10 years ago and currently lives in Stevens Square. His parents immigrated from Somalia before he was born. He holds a master's degree in public administration from George Mason University and has worked as a community engagement specialist for the city, as well as with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Minnesota Department of Revenue and University of Minnesota. In 2020, he was elected to the state legislature and became the first Somali American and first Muslim to serve in the state senate.

Frey grew up in Oakton, Va., graduated from the College of William and Mary and the law school at Villanova University. Then he moved to Minneapolis. He was elected to represent Ward 3 on the city council in 2013, and was elected mayor in 2017 and again in 2021. He lives in the Nicollet Island East Bank neighborhood.

Koski was born and raised in Northeast Minneapolis and has lived in the city all her life, except for when she attended the University of St. Thomas and lived in St. Paul. She now lives in the Page neighborhood by Pearl Park.

"My family raised me on the value of public service, and that is the grounding I have in politics," said Koski, whose father, Al Hofstad, is a former council member and mayor. Koski worked in corporate marketing and owned a small business prior to joining the city council in 2021.

Brenda Short grew up in Iowa and worked on farms and in meat processing plants. She moved to Minneapolis following a childhood tragedy, which led to a period of homelessness before she found her first apartment on 34th and Chicago Ave. She later bought a house in the Powderhorn neighborhood where she ran two small businesses and lived for over 30 years.

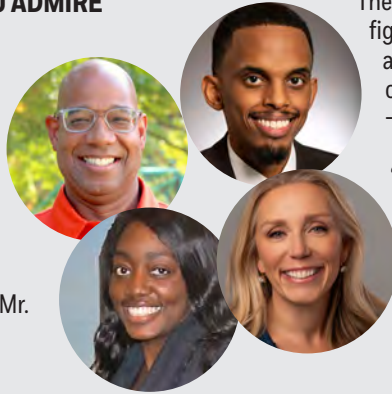
PROUDEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

"One of my greatest accomplishments was opening a 24/7 daycare in my home, which my parents lovingly referred to as the 'dream daycare,'" Short said. "Now, over 20 years later, grown-up children still run up to me, hug me, and share how

WHO IS ONE LEADER YOU ADMIRE AND MIGHT TRY TO EMULATE?

"Bishop Yvette Flunder, the founder of Ark of Refuge, Inc."
- Dewayne Davis

"Shirley Chisholm and former State Representative of Ohio, Mr. Les Brown."
- Brenda Short



"The working people that fight tirelessly for justice and positive change in our communities."
- Omar Fateh

"The late Senator Kari Dziedzic."
- Emily Koski

NOTE: Jazz Hampton announced his candidacy at press deadline.

much they loved being in my daycare. One of my last daycare kids even works for the city of Minneapolis, and I get the joy of giving her a big hug every time I attend a city council meeting. It reminds me of how important community support is for single families."

Koski is particularly proud of her work on the city council that created the city's Community Safety Audit Division, supported the Behavioral Crisis Response Teams, enhanced the Domestic Violence Navigators Program, created pilot programs supporting small businesses, and advanced climate action and water initiatives.

Fateh noted several bills he has written and worked to get passed, including Northstar Promise Act that provides free tuition for residents from families making less than \$80,000 to attend public colleges in Minnesota. "I am proud to have championed this bill that has allowed thousands of students all across the state to be able to attend college for free," said Fateh.

One of Davis's proudest accomplishments was co-chairing the mayor's Community Safety Workgroup. "With respect and collegiality," said Davis, "we were able to agree upon a series of recommendations that would help the mayor address the city's public safety challenges head-on and provide the mayor with a set of recommendations that would set the foundation for substantive changes in policing and safety within our city."

POLITICAL BEGINNINGS

Davis first got involved in politics when people at his junior high school were protesting a school board decision not to hire a Black man as superintendent in the school district that served a majority of Black students. Later he participated in the Close-Up Foundation and American Legion Boys State and Boys Nation. After college he worked for members of Congress, including as the appropriations director for then-House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer.

Koski was introduced to politics early. "I watched my dad, a former mayor of Minneapolis, care deeply for residents and neighbors - that was his motivation to work hard for our city every day

and I share that." She also grew up with a childhood friend, Kari Dziedzic, living just blocks away from her. "She was also a mentor of mine, a steady perspective I could rely on when I needed it the most," Koski said.

Short was inspired "to bring real change to my city" by the police officer killing of Justine Damand and the lack of reform that followed. She remembers watching the trial seeing "the mayor make false promises to [Damand's] family, saying that police reform would happen, despite his background in criminal justice." This motivated her to run for city council in 2021 with a "campaign focused on Justine Damand and the urgent need for police reform."

Fateh recalls following local and national politics from a very young age. "It was always apparent to me that politics had a great impact on the lives of my family and the people in my community," he said. "I witnessed and experienced firsthand the harm and marginalization that immigrants, people of color and working-class people experience in this country."

TOP PRIORITIES

The four candidates have all identified priorities they hope to share in the months ahead. They all include housing and safety.

Fateh, for example, supports enacting rent stabilization, the Community Opportunity to Purchase Act, the Affordable Housing Right of First Refusal ordinance, increased funding for shelters and adopting "a compassionate response to encampments that centers public health and human dignity, rather than our current mayor's practice of criminalizing homelessness."

"Minneapolis desperately needs innovative public safety solutions that transcend traditional policing," said Fateh, who wants to invest in the Behavior Crisis Unit, strengthen the fire department, and implement the city's Safe and Thriving Communities Plan. "We must pursue bold and transformative approaches to public safety to end the cycle of violence and brutality that has held our city captive for so many years," he said.

In the area of energy and the environment, Fateh supports a city carbon emissions tax, 24-hour bus lanes on Hennepin Avenue, closure of the HERC incinerator, and the I-94 Twin Cities Boulevard project.

Davis, Short and Koski also highlight a more respectful and inclusive approach to governance.

Davis lists "dignity" as the first priority. "We need leadership that treats everyone with dignity, recognizing that all too often, in the pursuit of economic growth and prosperity, there is a risk that working people and families may get left behind," he said. "As mayor, I would keep the lines of communication and engagement to every part of the city so that we can hear the stories and concerns of the people from every corner of the city."

He also prioritized "opportunity" which, to him, includes "the opportunity to earn a living wage, have access to adequate affordable housing, and a responsive city that will partner with them to realize their aspirations for the good quality of life."

In terms of safety, he hopes to "coordinate a collective effort to pursue police and public safety reform and discern and implement best practices in community safety and violence prevention and intervention."

Short puts affordable housing, including homeownership, rental housing, and safe spaces for our unhoused neighbors and "financial growth that benefits everyone, no matter your zip code or background" at the top of her list.

She also prioritizes public safety. "Our city has not healed after four long years, and we need a leader who can build a bridge between the community and our peace officers," she said.

She also prioritizes the establishment of an "Ebony Alert" alert program. "Women and children of color, including Native, Latino, and African American communities, are not prioritized when they go missing, and this must change," she said. "The Amber Alert system has failed these communities."

Short observed, "We cannot rebuild our city if we cannot all come together. I understand this will be a difficult conversation, but as your mayor, I promise to allow everyone a seat at the table to voice their concerns, and I will stand by my word."

Koski agrees that safety, housing and supporting the local economy are critically important, and stresses working in collaboration, calling herself a "bridge builder." She supports investing in "comprehensive public safety that leads to effective oversight," stable, affordable housing and "bringing humanity and care to our homelessness crisis," supporting our local economy, including small businesses and working families, and "running a city government that works better, together."

WHY RUN FOR MAYOR?

Brenda Short:

"I never imagined in a million years that I would be running for Mayor, yet here I am. My perspective on politics changed in 2017 after a brief but impactful encounter with a woman I didn't know. I never expected to see her again, but I did—this time, on the news. Her name was Justine Damond. As a woman, I was devastated to learn that she lost her life while trying to protect another woman.... So, I ran for city council in Ward 9. That's what led me into politics—a desire to bring real change to my city. And now, here I am, ready to continue fighting for justice. I'm running for mayor because I want to ensure that the community members who live, work, and visit Minneapolis still have a place they can call home. I fear that under the current mayor, Minneapolis could become what next Detroit, where skyrocketing property taxes push people out of their homes, draining the city's resources and leaving no one to invest in or call this city home. I want to be mayor to protect the future of Minneapolis, to make sure it remains a city where every voice matters, and where everyone has a place to belong."

Emily Koski:

"I love our city and, like so many residents, I want it to be the best version it can be. Since becoming a council member four years ago, I have had a front row seat to city hall and I know that our city can and should run better because that's what the people of Minneapolis deserve. I came to the council with high expectations of the administration only to be disappointed by the lack of organization, coordination, and a broken culture unwilling to collaborate. I believe that our city runs best when we work to build trust with one another, care for our neighbors, and address our challenges and opportunities head on. Our city can work better when we work together, and that has to start from the top. I want to be the next mayor so I can set high expectations for who we are and what we can become. I truly believe our best days are ahead of us because I was raised with a deep understanding that public service is not about our own personal ambition—it's about serving the residents who call Minneapolis home. That's what I hope to do if elected."

Omar Fateh:

"I'm running for mayor of Minneapolis to work alongside our communities to achieve the vibrant, loving city we know Minneapolis can be. For working people, it's getting harder to build our lives in Minneapolis. And with Donald Trump stepping back into the Oval Office, everything we've worked so hard to create is in jeopardy. It's not enough to just stand up to Donald Trump. It's time to push back with forward-thinking leadership. Mayor Frey and the status quo are failing Minneapolis residents. We deserve leadership that makes it so people want to continue to live here, raise families here, and start businesses here. ... I'm committed to building a city that works for everyone. Serving in the Minnesota Senate, I've seen firsthand what a progressive legislature can do with the right executive. As mayor, I will work with the progressive city council to achieve tangible wins for our neighbors and uplift those of us who are struggling to get by. We need a Mayor who understands that a city that lifts up working people is a city that lifts up everyone. Because when the city invests in us, we have more time to invest in the people we love."

DeWayne Davis:

"Minneapolis needs new leadership. Since moving to Minneapolis, I've been advocating, organizing, and building capacity with my neighbors in health care, housing, and public safety. Wherever I saw a gap, I stood up. Wherever I saw an unmet need, I volunteered. Wherever I saw injustice, I helped organize against it. My running for mayor is a natural outgrowth of that. I co-chaired the mayor's Community Safety Working Group, and I watched him walk away from all the recommendations we delivered, all of which were in his authority to enact. And so, frankly, I'm fed up with the city's failure to meet the moment. I can't stand by and watch our repeated failure to meet the moment. I've worked in and around government my entire adult life, though I've never run for office. I think my values and approach as a community leader are missing in the office of the mayor. I'm running because the city needs a mayor who cares about the people, all the people, and is committed to bringing the city together so that we can all enjoy the best that Minneapolis has to offer."

NOTE: The Frey campaign did not respond to an interview request.

Join the conversation, and let us know your diverse thoughts on the issues that affect your neighborhood. Send letters and guest commentaries to tesha@LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com.

guest column

BY BETTY FOILLIARD



MINNESOTANS DEMAND EQUAL RIGHTS

Hundreds of people gather on first day of 2025-26 legislative session to cry, "All the way with ERA!"

On Tuesday, Jan. 14 amid a tectonic start to Minnesota Legislature 2025-26 Session, one bright spot emerged: a resounding collective voice for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) echoed throughout the hallowed halls of the Minnesota Capitol exclaiming: "All the way with ERA!"

Hundreds of participants from all across the state gathered for Forward Together: Rally for Equal Rights in the Capitol Rotunda to declare that equal rights are non-negotiable: they are our birthright, our inalienable right, and they must finally be constitutionally protected in both our state and federal constitutions. Anything less is simply that: less.

The Rally for Equal Rights was the launch of a brand new, greatly expanded coalition called "Minnesotans for Equal Rights" <https://www.genderjusticeaction.us/era/> (#MN4ER), that intends to pass a state ERA to allow the voters to decide whether to include Minnesota values in our state constitution. The message is clear: let the people vote!

It was made crystal clear that activists and the myriad organizations are simply not going to lie down and play dead for the next four years while watching our rights eroded away by reactionary legislatures, judges, and courts. A wide array of partner organizations in this diverse new MN4ER coalition include organizers ERA Minnesota & Gender Justice; AAUW MN, the Asian American Organizing Project, Compassion & Choices, FairVote MN, Indivisible North Metro; Island of Discarded Women, Jewish Community Action, League of Women Voters of MN, MN AFL-CIO, Minnesota Council on Disability, Minnesota Move to Amend, Minnesota NOW, National Council of Jewish Women



On Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2025 hundreds gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol, exclaiming, "All the way with ERA!" (Photos submitted)

Minnesota, OutFront Minnesota, TakeAction MN, The ARC Minnesota, The Paper Lantern Project, RISE-Reviving the Islamic Sisterhood for Empowerment, Voices for Racial Justice, Women's Foundation of MN, Women's March MN, and YWCA Minneapolis.

Currently 29 states have some form of state ERA, but not Minnesota. At a time when the rights of citizens are under systemic attack, the purpose of this ERA effort is to provide constitutional safeguards against discrimination based on race, color, sex, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation, pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes, and more. This charged political environment has brought about rollbacks of people's rights happening on an epic scale, making it critically necessary to pass the ERA to protect our freedoms.

Equality speakers at the rally includ-

ed Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan; MN State Auditor Julie Blaha; Senator Bobby Joe Champion, President of the Senate; Minnesota ERA bill chief author Senator Mary Kunesh; Bernie Burnham, President of Minnesota AFL-CIO; Tenzin Choesang, Strategic Partnership Manager at AAOP; the Rev. Dr. DeWayne Davis, Senior Pastor at Plymouth Congregational Church; OutFront Minnesota President Kat Rohn; High School Students Max Nguyen, Kyle Chen, & Dheekshi Jayaprakash representing The League of Women Voters MN; Gloria Perez, President & CEO of Women's Foundation of MN & Janett Jimenez, WFMN fellow in the Young Women's Initiative; Megan Peterson, Gender Justice Executive Director; Trevor Turner, Director of Public Policy at Minnesota Council on Disability; AAUW MN President Kelsey Waits; Shelley Carthen Watson, President & CEO of YWCA Minneapolis; and MCs for the rally were Kate Quinlan-Laird, Co-President of ERA

LETTERS

BUILDING A STRONGER MINNESOTA: THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVE ZONING REFORM

I've lived in Minnesota for nearly 30 years. One of the things I love about this state is the sense of community and belonging. However, I'm concerned about the community's future due to the lack of new, climate-secure housing being built statewide.

Exclusionary zoning laws, some of which were enacted during the days of redlining, have helped lead to a shortage of at least 100,000 homes in our state. This drives up home prices and rent. There is simply not enough housing for all of our community members.

Everyone in Minnesota should have access to affordable and climate-secure housing. To do this, we must create

more housing options and end exclusionary zoning. Inclusive zoning reform opens us up to more connected communities and provides stability for families and future generations to thrive. I urge you to join me in asking our legislators to take action this session on passing zoning reform in Minnesota.

Lauren Rosenberg
Morris Park

PENNY WISE AND POUND FOOLISH - BAD-ANCESTRY

The old phrase "penny wise and pound foolish" captures the short-sightedness of grabbing gains in the near term at the expense of greater gains over the long term. "Penny wise" is our new administration's greed-driven neglect of the climate emergency that swamped Asheville and is torching LA. Exiting the Paris Climate Accords while shouting "drill baby drill," axing clean energy incentives that make heat pumps and

electric cars more affordable, ramping up LNG (methane) exports to bolster the appearance of a profitable economy, and blaming victims of climate disasters for their losses - these are short-sighted, visionless moves by American leaders who deny calamitous climate realities in favor of short-term profit. This "head-in-the-sand" abrogation of leadership fails our grandchildren.

Elders Climate Action members seek to act as "good ancestors" mindful of future generations. Bad ancestry is behaving as if tomorrow is not ours to care for.

The surging climate disaster will not retreat. Nor will the great work people everywhere are doing despite the "hoax" narrative. We continue to grapple with climate challenges undaunted by irresponsible rhetoric. In Minneapolis and communities across our country carbon-free geothermal networks are heating and cooling homes, businesses, and schools. Wind and solar are powering

lives. Millions are eating less meat (especially beef), getting more protein from climate-friendly plant sources, and saving hundreds of dollars and tons of CO2 yearly by driving electric vehicles.

Keep it going! Let's act as the ancestors our children and grandchildren need.

Elders Climate Action Twin Cities members: Todd Bartholomay, Arlene Mathison, Joan Stockinger, Paul Thompson, Katy Lowery, Barbara LaRose, Mickey O'Kane

CORRECTION

In the January edition of the Messenger, the address for the Premier Health Chiropractors of South Minneapolis clinic was incorrectly listed. It is at 3042 Bloomington Ave. We apologize for any confusion caused by the error.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? EMAIL LETTERS, GUEST COMMENTARIES, PRESS RELEASES AND NOTES TO TESHA@LONGFELLOWNOKOMISMESSANGER.COM

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guest column

BY CHUCK PETERS
chuck@ambit.community



Shortly after initiating the acquisition of Twitter in 2022, Elon Musk posted, "For Twitter to deserve public trust, it must be politically neutral, which effectively means upsetting the far right and the far left equally."

Today much of the public trust Musk aspired to earn has eroded. His actions since acquiring the platform, now re-branded as X, have increasingly contradicted his early proclamations of neutrality. Musk's strong embrace – to put it lightly – of Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election stands as a glaring departure from his promise to remain politically neutral.

X itself has undergone a transformation alienating many users. Musk fired the majority of the Trust & Safety team, reinstated accounts previously banned for promoting hate speech—including neo-Nazi profiles—and reconfigured algorithms to favor content aligning with his own ideological leanings. This shift has turned X into a space where extremism and division are the norm.

Disillusioned users have responded by departing to alternative platforms like BlueSky and Threads, which are the leading beneficiaries of Musk's controversial stewardship. Both platforms reported a surge in new users following the 2024 elections. Journalist Nick Halter of Axios Twin Cities noted several Twin Cities reporters—some with over 100,000 followers—who've abandoned X for these alternatives.

These platforms come with their own

A NEWS ERA

limitations as it relates to news:

Do they adhere to fundamental journalistic standards? No.

Do they implement robust user verification to ensure accountability? No.

Do they compensate journalists? Again, no.

Do their algorithms even prioritize news content? For Meta's Threads, the answer is a resounding no.

These platforms are fundamentally no different from X. Their distinction lies primarily in not being owned by Musk, but this alone doesn't make them better suited for journalistic or community engagement. Twitter, BlueSky, Threads, et al are destructive disinformation machines masquerading as "social" networks amplifying division, loneliness and eroding the fabric of informed civic discourse.

Let's be clear: these platforms were never designed to serve as reliable news sources. Continuing to treat them as such risks further damaging the already fragile state of journalism. We risk seeing an increase in news deserts, the decline of credible news outlets and an overall gutting of America's media ecosystem.

The crisis in journalism is real, and it's urgent.

In Minnesota, for instance, the media landscape has been shrinking at an alarming rate. Since 2005, we've lost 34% of our local newspapers and 64% of our local journalists. Newsrooms are being forced to do more with fewer resources. Consider The Pioneer Press: when Alden Global Capital acquired the paper in 2006, its newsroom employed around 200 people. By late 2023, that number had dwindled to just 29, according to a report from Racket.

This decline in local journalism is fueled by the rise of social media platforms where over half of Americans now get at least some of their news. Among adults under 30, trust in information from social media (52%) is almost on par with trust in national news organizations (56%), according to a Pew Research study from October 2024.

But as I've emphasized: these platforms weren't built to be trusted sources of news, nor will they be.

Rather than trying to retrofit platforms like BlueSky or Threads to serve as news hubs, it's time we rethink the entire model. What would a platform designed specifically for local news look like?

At a minimum, such a platform would need the following features:

- **User Verification:** Accounts should be verified to ensure accountability and trust.

- **Reserved Posting Rights:** Only credible community leaders—such as local businesses and journalists—should have the ability to build an audience, preventing the platform from devolving into petty disputes.

- **Chronological Feeds:** Algorithms distorting perceptions and amplifying ideologies should be replaced with straightforward chronological feeds to ensure timely information.

- **Compensation for Journalists:** Just as Big Tech platforms compensate content creators, journalists should be fairly compensated for their reporting.

Creating such a platform from scratch is undoubtedly a challenge, but it's also necessary. In the Twin Cities, one such initiative already exists: Ambit Media Company.

Launched in October 2024, Ambit is a tech startup designed to support local journalism and strengthen community ties. Despite being new, Ambit has been met with enthusiasm. In its first official

month, the platform hosted nearly 1,000 visitors, 65% of whom were returning users—evidence of real, authentic community.

Ambit users utilize the site to discover and support over 130 verified local businesses. Tools like the Pop-Up Map highlight neighborhood vendors, such as Mogi Bagel, recently named Best Bagel in Star Tribune's Best of Minnesota competition. Other features, like the Grand Opening Registry and Events Calendar, connect residents with new establishments and local events.

At its core, Ambit's mission is to support local journalism by compensating news organizations based on user input. This innovative model empowers journalists while encouraging user-focused reporting. I'm honored to share that the Longfellow Nokomis Messenger, Midway Como Frogtown Monitor and Southwest Connector, along with eight other local news organizations, have partnered with Ambit Media Company on our mission.

As Ambit continues to grow, it poses an opportunity to revitalize local news—not only by directly compensating newsrooms, but also indirectly pressuring Big Tech to compete for journalists and their followers.

Let's seize this opportunity to support a positive, more informed, connected future and put this era of toxic social media behind us.

The groundwork for a better alternative is already in place. The question now is: will you use it?

Prior to starting Ambit Media Company, Chuck Peters was a manager in Deloitte's Data & Digital Trust practice advising the Big Tech industry through the dynamic internet regulatory landscape to create safer digital experiences for users. Learn more about Ambit at www.Ambit.community.

HOPE LOCALLY. THE MINNEAPOLIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON AGING.

More than ever I need to stay rooted and grounded in south Minneapolis and focus what I am calling 'hope locally.' For example there is the Minneapolis Advisory Committee on Aging.

Tuesday Jan. 9. It was billed as an open house. Right away when I walked into the meeting a woman asked me if I write a column in the Southwest Connector. I said yes. Turns out she showed up because she read about the committee in a Stories and Journeys column.

ELDER VOICES (TELLING OUR STORIES/SHARING OUR JOURNEYS) IS SCHEDULED TO MEET FEB. 28, 10-11 A.M. AT TURTLE BREAD, 4205-EAST 34TH ST.

It's International Stand Up to Bullying Day. Look for the table with the Elder Voices sign. In December, I was joined by my neighbor and Messenger reader Judith. She wanted to know about the history of Elder Voices. She thinking about coming back. Me, too!

IN GRATITUDE.

Donald L. Hammen is a longtime south Minneapolis resident, and serves on the All Elders United for Justice Board of Directors.

Stories and Journeys

BY DONALD L. HAMMEN



As I start to write, I am aware that the Trump inauguration is coming. When he leaves office, I will be 84 years old.

LOST AND SEARCHING I HAVE ADOPTED GUIDES

The holidays in 2024 have come and gone. I seems like I was barely conscious. Feeling lost and searching. Still trying to absorb the shock of another four years of the Trump oligarchy. My primary guide but not my only guide is "The Hidden History of American Oligarchy: Reclaiming Our Democracy from The Ruling Class" by Thom Hartmann. I am currently focused on the chapter entitled "America Slides into Oligarchy and Dances Close to Tyranny." At the outset he reminds me that, "Democracy is rule of, by, and for the people; oligarchy is rule of, by, and for the rich." He goes on to remind me that two other times oligarchs have tried to replace American democracy with oligarchy. Today we are living through a third effort

LOOKING FOR AND FINDING HOPE LOCALLY

to change the American experiment from democracy to oligarchy, but also pushing beyond oligarchy to outright tyranny. Tyranny....." a form of government that entirely abandons even the pretense of the rule of law and reigns through police-state terror." I fear we a perilously close to tyranny if we don't find a way to resist and fight back.

The Trump presidency is just one expression of America's third struggle with oligarchy that began in 1971 with the Lewis Powell Memo. Hartmann writes. "..... Lewis Powell, himself a proud agent of tobacco oligarchs, laid out in a famous memo to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce a plan for various oligarchs of America to stop competing and organize to take over the U.S. government."

I am keeping in mind that for me the greatest U.S. Presidents in my lifetime were Franklin D. Roosevelt and his vice president Henry Wallace, who warned us about the danger of American fascism in the New York Times on April 9, 1944. Add to my list Jimmy Carter and Joe Biden. They spoke to me in ways that others did not because they were pro-democracy and for the most part pro-farmer-labor.

And so, dear reader, if you have read

this far you have taken the plunge into the river(flow) of life experiences which is Stories and Journeys.

DESPAIR IS NOT AN OPTION OR SO I TRY TO TELL MYSELF

I have adopted other guides so far to help me get through this period of being lost and searching. I am discovering the world of Podcasts through an app on my phone called Spotify. These podcasters are helping me get through each day. There is the Mary Trump Podcast, The Weekly List with Amy Siskind, the Coffee Klatch with Robert Reich, The Hartmann Report with Thom Hartman along with others. They all comprise a library of sorts. All these progressive podcasters seem to be echoing one theme which is despair is not an option. If not despair, then what? I'm trying to re-ground myself in my south Minneapolis life and what I call 'hope local.'

So, dear reader, what are your sources of information and inspiration besides the Longfellow Nokomis Messenger and the Southwest Connector for local news and views to help you through the next four years? Tell me, tell others or tell me via tesha@tmcpub.com.

Minneapolis artist recognized by hockey league

The Minnesota Hockey Recreation League is pleased to announce that a design by south Minneapolis resident Leo Fortune has been selected as the winner in its annual competition.

The yearly open call for art invites artists from across Minnesota to submit a creative interpretation of the Rec League logo. The winning design is printed on hundreds of t-shirts that are given to all athletes at the season-ending festival in March.

The Minnesota Hockey Recreation League began the search for a design in August 2024 with an open call for art inviting submissions from artists throughout

Minnesota. "Constellation" by artist Leo Fortune was selected as the winning design.

Leo Fortune, an emerging artist and longtime educator, is known for their contemporary eco healing watercolor paintings. Fortune portrays nature through the depth of color contrasts and the detailed use of line. Their signature touch is a background of colorful spirals, which sets the tone for grounded meditation. Their work has been shown at the Powderhorn Art Fair (2024) and the Arboretum Art In The Garden (2024).

The Minnesota Hockey Recreation League is entering its 16th season of offer-



ing a low-cost, low-commitment hockey alternative in the greater Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area.

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RETHINKING I-94 >> from 1

"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."

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.

"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.

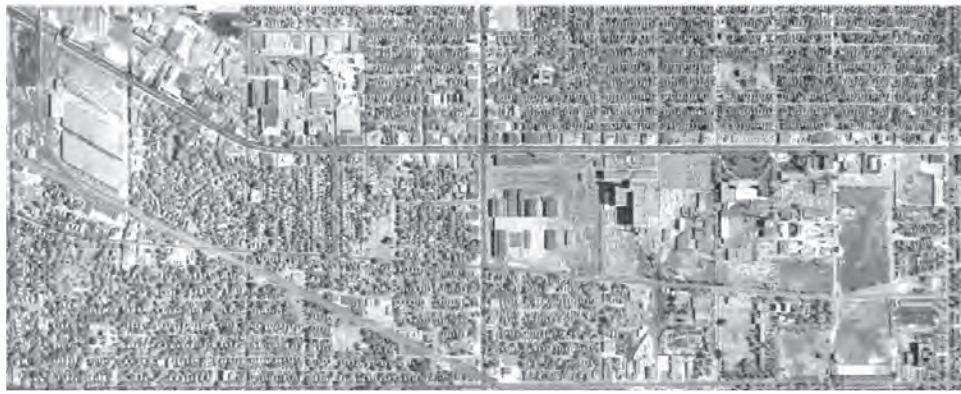
Our Streets has long touted the idea of highway property being returned to surrounding communities for new affordable housing, small businesses, community centers, parks and other uses. The at-grade proposals ranked highly in a recent MnDOT survey.

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

Aerial photo from 1954 (before I-94)



Aerial Photo from 1969 (shows I-94)



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.

"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 passed committee approval at the Jan. 17 meeting. At the five-hour virtual meeting, 145 people signed up to speak but there was not enough time for everyone.

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 focused 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.

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Next Good Neighbor coming in the March edition.

THERE'S A SUMMER CAMP FOR EVERY KID

Summer camp season will be here before parents know it. While children anxiously await the last day of school, adults know that it can be challenging to keep kids occupied and mentally stimulated when they aren't in the classroom.

Camps catering to a variety of interests are open to youngsters, so there's likely one out there to excite every child. Each year, more than 25 million children and adults take part in the camp experience, says the American Camp Association. Summer camp gives kids a chance to spread their wings and enjoy new adventures. When seeking camps, families can consider interests, proximity, cost, and other variables.

Day camps are a popular choice. Day camps tend to be general recreation camps that offer an array of activities. Campers are dropped off (or bussed) in the morning, and arrive home early evening. These camps are readily accessible and run by

various organizations. Some camps enable you to pay by the week, rather than committing to an entire season.

Academic camps focus their attention on various subjects, putting like-minded children together. Academic summer programs ensure children's brains stay active, helping students avoid that dreaded "summer slide." Some of these camps mimic a school day so they are familiar to kids. Academic focus may vary from general academia to specific subjects like STEM to astronomy to the arts.

Fitness-minded campers or those who play particular sports can investigate camps that focus on fitness and sports performance. These may be more rigorous than other types of camps since they involve lots of physical activity. Wilderness preparation camp is another type of camp that may fit into this category. It will highlight survival training and help mold active hikers and campers.



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Neighborhood realtor carves his own niche

South High grad bands with fellow Johns to fashion ice sculptures at St. Paul Winter Carnival contest

By MARGIE O'LOUGHLIN

You may have seen John Njoes around the neighborhood. He's lived in the 55406 zip code nearly all of his life, and has been a Longfellow resident since 1984. After more than 15 years of donning his handyman hat, Njoes started his career as a realtor specializing in residential sales. He said, "I was doing a lot of remodeling work, and decided to make a pivot to real estate during COVID. I've always loved working with people, and I love old houses."

Njoes is also a person who loves cold weather and all things winter. For a few days each January, he exchanges his Sotheby's Realtor's vest for a thick parka as the St. Paul Winter Carnival Ice Carving Contest unfolds. Njoes said, "Ice carving is a pretty obscure art, special to the Midwest. When people grumble about how much they hate the long months of winter, we're just getting ready for our favorite time of year."

TEAM JOHN

The "we" he's referring to is his ice carving team: Team John. The other two team members are also named John (John Nusser-Cooper and John Matis), and they all graduated from South High School. Njoes said, "We've been competing as a team in the Winter Carnival for more than 20 years. Every Thanksgiving, we get together and decide what we want to carve next."

This year, they'll be carving a giant scale with symbolic objects on it that throw the scale out of balance. All three team members have a young child, and feel the sometimes conflicting demands of parenthood and their respective careers/interests pulling them this way and that.

Each team received 10 blocks of clear, shining ice weighing 300 pounds apiece. As Team John has evolved, they've built their own lathes, cranes, and table saws unique to working with ice. Njoes said, "Ice carving is hard on the body, so we have to get creative in how we work with it."

Having grown up in a creative family, Njoes was grounded in making props and sets for Richfield Flowers & Events, his dad's flower shop. He said, "As someone who was used to building things, making signs, and working with stencils, the art side of ice carving made sense to me – but roughing out designs in ice with a chain saw was one of the new skills I had to learn."

DESIGN CRITERIA

He continued, "People have a hard time understanding why we put so much



For a few days each January, John Njoes, exchanges his Sotheby's Realtor's vest for a thick parka as the St. Paul Winter Carnival Ice Carving Contest unfolds. (Photo by Margie O'Loughlin)

energy into something that lasts such a short time. Our House of Cards sculpture in 2015 lasted just 12 minutes before it collapsed – but we made it to the finish line. We took second place that year."

What makes for a good ice design? The categories that all contestants are judged on are impact, attention to detail, technical difficulty, finishing, site clean-up, and whether or not the final sculpture matches the initial design.

The pool of entrants for the Winter Carnival Ice Carving Contest is getting smaller each year. Fewer and fewer chef schools offer training in ice carving these days, which means beginning carvers have to learn their skills elsewhere.

If you'd like to try your hand at carving ice, you'd better dress for it. Njoes explained, "I have two different carving coats, and wear several layers of warm clothes underneath. You need to be able to transition from working hard with a chainsaw to standing still with a hand tool. We often wear heat packs in our mittens and socks too."

In addition to being flexible with clothing, a carver has to be flexible with design. Njoes said, "You try to get a warm weather and a cold weather option for your sculpture. It can be the same design, but you have different ways of executing it depending on the weather."

COUNT DOWN

The contest officially started at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 23. Each team had 48 hours to finish their carving. Njoes said, "There have definitely been years when we've spent the last six hours on Saturday checking the big clock on the Landmark Center tower, wondering if we'd finish in time. That's the clock that judges use for counting down."

He continued, "For finishing, we use a weed burning torch and a plumber's torch to melt away any scratches we've made on the ice. We have to move all the torches, electrical cords, tools, bags, and scaffolding before 7 p.m. on Saturday. We also like to rake our way out of the work area so the ground looks nice. Sometimes we have



In 2021, Njoes worked alone to carve a phoenix rising from the ashes for the drive-thru Winter Carnival during the COVID-19 Pandemic.



The House of Cards carved by Team John in 2015 stood for only 12 minutes before crashing to the ground.

to carve all night, or at least wait until the sun drops down below the City Center. It can be a real grind. Sunshine is as big a factor as temperature. Cloudy skies and temperatures around 10 degrees are best – but I don't find ice carving stressful, even when the weather isn't cooperating."

The Saint Paul Winter Carnival will run through Sunday, Feb. 2. This year marks the 139th anniversary of the St. Paul tradition: Minnesota's oldest and best loved winter celebration.

John Njoes can answer questions about buying or selling your home at John.njoes@lakesmn.com, but maybe wait until the St. Paul Winter Carnival is over.

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When a developer wanted to take away affordable housing, community members stepped up to save Seward Towers

By IRIC NATHANSON

In early 1987, Caren Dewar, Redesign's executive director, was in her Franklin Avenue office when she got a call from Kathy O'Brien, then Seward's representative on the Minneapolis City Council. O'Brien was calling with disturbing news about Borson Towers, the twin apartment buildings serving more than 600 low-income Seward residents.

The building's managing partner, a developer named Tony Bernardi, was considering a plan to convert the towers to market-rate housing. That conversion, if and when it occurred, could displace hundreds of the Towers' current tenants. O'Brien urged Dewar to help organize a community effort to block the conversation.

The two 21-story apartment buildings on Seward's northern edge were built in the late 1960s at a time when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development was encouraging private developers to build affordable rental housing.

In Seward, HUD agreed to provide long-term, low-interest financing for the Towers. In exchange, Borson's original developers gave the federal agency control over the rents paid by their tenants. Later HUD provided additional support by making Section 8 housing subsidies available to the towers' low-income residents.

In the 60s, the Borson developers were at the right place at the right time, when federal support for affordable housing was at its high point. But that support, generated by the Johnson Administration's Great Society, began to ebb in the 1970s as Washington was caught up in the turmoil over the war in Vietnam and Watergate.

All across the country, for-profit developers like Bernardi were beginning to wonder if affordable housing was a wise investment over the long term. Soon they were eyeing an escape clause in their HUD contracts which let them convert their projects to market-rate housing by pre-paying their HUD mortgages and allowing their Section 8 contracts to expire.

For Bernardi, now in control of the Towers, conversion was an attractive option because it gave him access to the University of Minnesota's huge student housing market.

Dewar, then in her mid 30s, learned about the threat facing Seward's affordable housing when she was just beginning her career as a leader in the Twin Cities non-profit development world. Later she would serve as executive director of the Urban Land Institute and a member of the Metropolitan Council. But prior to her Seward appointment in 1985, Dewar's community development experience was limited mainly to a stint as an organizer for a nearby community group in Powderhorn Park.

Now, she was engaging in a monumental effort to preserve a multi-million housing asset for the Seward communi-



One of the two 21-story apartment towers that continue to provide affordable housing for Seward residents. The Seward Towers are located off Franklin Ave.



Caren Dewar spearheaded the successful effort to preserve affordability at Seward Towers.

ty. Luckily she was able to draw on the support of two, well-regarded non-profit organizations, the Westminster Corporation (later renamed CommonBond Communities) and the Greater Metropolitan Housing Corporation (GMHC). Both had more than 20 years' experience in the

non-profit housing field. Westminster, with its ties to the Archdiocese of St. Paul, played a key role by encouraging Bernardi, a staunch Catholic, to consider options for preserving affordability at the Towers.

Redesign and its two partners established a new non-profit organization,

Redesign's early years as southside community builder, part II: The Borson Chapter

later renamed the Seward Housing Corporation, to purchase the towers and maintain them as affordable housing. The 11-member board was composed of representatives from each of the three partner agencies, the tower residents and the locally-based Seward Neighbor Group (SNG).

The newly formed corporation was able to gain backing from a broad range of public and private organizations. They included SNG, the Minneapolis Community Development Agency, the city council, the local HUD office and the Minnesota congressional delegation.

Initially, Bernardi refused to meet with Dewar and her team to discuss the towers' future. But he finally came to the negotiating tables when he heard rumors that city of Minneapolis might be willing to pay as much as \$40,000 per apartment for the Borson property. HUD was also able to use a combination of carrots and sticks to prod Borson's management group to start negotiating for the sale of the Towers.

After two years of arduous discussions, the two sides began moving towards an agreement. In March 1990, Dewar was able to report that an acquisition plan to preserve the Towers affordability was finally in place. "The next step will be to submit an action plan to HUD," she explained. "We fully expect this will be an arduous task which will most likely present numerous problems yet to be solved, but it will only be a matter of time before the deal is done!"

The deal was finally done 10 months later, on Dec. 20, 1990, when the Seward Housing Corporation was able to complete the purchase of the newly renamed Seward Towers (later managed by CommonBond), at a cost of \$18.5 million. Funds to cover the cost of the acquisition were provided from a variety of sources that included tax increment and city bond financing.

In his January 1991 column, the Star Tribune's editorial writer, Leonord Inskip, commented on successful Borson conversion. "The changeover demonstrates how federal and local agencies can work with non-profit and community groups to save housing threatened by possible conversion to market rate. It could be a model for such housing elsewhere in the country."

"Today, with affordable housing in such short supply, Seward has been able to maintain a major community resource because of the efforts of Redesign and its partners to preserve affordability at the Towers," says Kathy O'Brien. "Those efforts need to be remembered."

This is part two of a two-part series about Redesign's early years building community in the southside. Find the first part at www.LongfellowNokomisMessenger.com titled, "SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY BUILDER." It printed in the January 2025 edition of the Messenger.

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City Blocks Quilt Shop sits right on the corner of Bloomington Ave. and 34th, just down the street from May Day Cafe at Bloomington and 35th. (Photo by Danielle Fraher)



The May Day Cafe Workers Cooperative relied on community donations during their year-long fundraising campaign in 2024, which raised \$104,000 toward buying the cafe. They are still accepting donations. (Photo by Danielle Fraher)



City Blocks Quilt Shop Co-op board member Val Heath (left) and board president Lily Lamb (right) discuss quilt patterns, discounts and other work matters at the shop's front counter outside of business hours. (Photo by Danielle Fraher)



A range of sewing and embroidery tools line the aisles of City Blocks Quilt Shop, and quilting projects of all patterns and colors blanket the walls. People in the quilting and craft community hold classes in the space upstairs, and anyone can volunteer to host a class through a proposal form on the shop's website. (Photo by Danielle Fraher)

TWO CO-OPS, SAME BLOCK >> from 1

In addition to the \$130,000 Great Streets loan the Minneapolis City Council granted May Day Cafe, the campaign raised \$104,000 out of the original \$125,000 goal over the last year, something Klein said blows her away.

"If I thought I knew before how much people love this cafe, I really know it now," Klein said.

When Lunning told his staff in the fall of 2023 he planned to retire and sell the cafe, Klein and her co-workers spent the following few months considering what it would mean to buy the business as a

workers co-op, meeting with other co-ops in the city to learn about their experiences. By January 2024, they made the decision to move ahead with the process with help from Nexus Community Partners, a developer for cooperatives and community-based organizations.

"It's really hard," Klein said. "Being a business is really hard as one person, and it's really hard as a group, but we get to share the load."

ALONG BLOOMINGTON AVE.

Just down the street from May Day Cafe, City Blocks Quilt Shop at 3400 Bloomington Ave. has been a consumer-owned co-op for almost five years, relying on support from volunteers and co-op members in their tight-knit sewing com-

munity, in Minneapolis and beyond. The co-op now has almost 500 members from all over the country, who get discounts and a vote at the annual board meeting, according to board member and volunteer shopkeeper Val Heath.

The shop's volunteers, members and visitors love to buy from and support May Day Cafe, according to co-op board president Lily Lamb, who said she was very excited about the cafe becoming a worker-owned co-op.

"The more cooks you have in your kitchen, the longer your conversations are, the more complicated things can be," Lamb said, "but the more diverse voices you have in what you're doing and the more diverse lived experiences and opinions and perspectives, the stronger and

richer your business is going to be at the end of the day."

As for how two co-op businesses happen to be so close together, it comes down to not only the money needed to own and run a business but the community it's based in, Lamb said.

"People wanted to keep it in the neighborhood and keep what's special and unique about it," Lamb said. "And one of the ways to do that if one person doesn't have enough resources to just purchase a business outright [...] is to collectively organize together, share the risk and share the ability to raise capital among a group of people."

May Day Cafe in particular has a deeper co-op history, a legacy that the co-op feels very aware of during their transition, Klein said. Before the cafe, the building was home to a non-profit, volunteer-run grocery co-op called the Powderhorn Food Community Co-op from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s, according to the Minnesota Historical Society.

Being exposed to the non-traditional business structure of co-ops also has a political and economic impact, Klein said.

"It's not a way that we usually see business run, at least in this moment in this country," she said. "I think it's cool that someone can walk down the street and see two co-ops and say, 'Oh, wow, this is a really viable way that things can be done. I want to learn more.'"

Danielle Fraher is a University of Minnesota student majoring in journalism.

CLASSICS LOST 'N' FOUND THEATER COMPANY ANNOUNCES 2025 PLAYBILL

Classics Lost 'N' Found Theater Company (CLFTC), your neighborhood community theater in the Nokomis Neighborhood, invites you to explore its 2025 playbill. With the exception of the summer production, all performances take place at Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church, 1620 46th Street East.

The season will open with Oscar Wilde's "Lady Windermere's Fan." First presented in 1892, it's been labeled "a play

about a good woman." Lady Windermere, a young, seemingly perfect aristocratic woman, is on the verge of making a drastic decision due to a scandalous secret from her past, which is revealed by a mysterious woman named Mrs. Erlynne. But Lady Windermere is in for a big surprise! The CLFTC production will be directed by Greg Bastien. Auditions for this Oscar Wilde classic will be Feb.10-11, from 6:30-9 p.m. The production runs April 18, 19,

25, 26, 27, May 2 and 3.

In summer 2022, CLFTC will present an original collection of pirate scripts under the title "Pirates in the Park" at Lake Nokomis Community Center, 2401 E. Minnehaha Pkwy.

A rediscovered classic by Sir James M. Barrie ("Peter Pan") will fill the Autumn slot at Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church. Barry's 1920 play, Mary Rose is a mysterious love story and a ghost story.

Mary Rose run Oct. 10, 11, 17, 18, 24 and 25.

CLFTC is always looking for something different, and the 2025 holiday presentation will be a trio of short plays by Russia's most renowned playwright, Anton Chekhov. Performances are Dec. 5, 6, 12 and 13. Auditions will be held Sept. 29 and 30, from 6:30-9 p.m.

Find more information on their Facebook page as well as their website, classicslostnfoundtheatercompa.godaddy.com.

PHARMACISTS >> from 1

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.

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 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."

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



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

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 in-



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

Jim Stage

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.

BRANDT ANNOUNCES REELECTION BID FOR BOARD OF ESTIMATE AND TAXATION

Steve Brandt announced that he's seeking a second term this year on the Minneapolis Board of Estimate and Taxation, the body that sets the city's property tax cap annually and approves the city's issuing of debt.



"I'm running because I believe that the principle that I promoted in my first campaign--balancing the needs of the city against the ability of property owners to pay -- continues to serve the city well," Brandt said.

In a second term he'd like to:

- Get creative on reducing the city's dependence on property taxes to balance its budget;
- Promote city charter changes involving the board; and
- Mentor the board's sole staffer who will be hired this year to research financial topics as directed by the board.

Brandt currently serves as board president. He was elected to the board in 2021 as the leading vote-getter in the election to fill the two seats on the board directly elected by the public.

Here's what he's worked on during his first three years on the board:

- Won commitments this year from Mayor Frey and Council President Payne to systematically investigate alternative taxes that the city could use to relieve the reliance on an ever-more burdensome property tax. He's heard the complaints of those on fixed incomes, such as many

seniors, and he's open to a variety of ideas. Brandt thinks that the city needs to explore the feasibility of income-based taxation to avoid excessive future property tax increases. This could raise tens of millions of dollars, which should be devoted to property tax relief and to absorbing the cost of new spending. Brandt also favors a review of city spending, as many residents suggest, either by an outside blue-ribbon committee or by pursuing zero-based budgeting so that current spending is justified.

- Quizzed city finance officials persistently when they present quarterly finance reports or levy requests to the Board. "I ask more questions than any other board member and perhaps as many as all other members combined. It's a habit that I learned as a reporter -- be relentless in getting the facts," Brandt said.

• Supported the reactivation of a public housing levy that will provide money to renovate public housing units that the federal government has neglected through inadequate funding. This also will create small clusters of new units for qualified applicants.

- Supported efforts to open up the BET to the public. Each meeting agenda now has a time for the public to weigh in on topics in that meeting's agenda, something previously allowed only at the annual levy hearing. Meetings now are webcast live and also are archived on YouTube.

• Led an effort to save money on city borrowing in the face of the Fed's planned interest rate increases in 2022 and 2023. Some city projects like utility work are funded year after year by a combination of borrowing and cash from sewer and water bills. His proposal would have moved some 'out year' borrowing ahead a year to beat interest rate increases, shifting an equivalent amount of cash to the 'out year' to compensate. That's complicated, and would have required city council action, but would have saved the city substantially. It fell one vote short of winning board approval.

• Promoted two proposed City Charter amendments. One would give BET a seventh member to replace the one lost when the Library Board was abolished in 2009. BET now the only elected body in Minneapolis that lacks an odd number of members to break ties. Brandt proposed that the number of members elected by voters increase from two to three, maintaining the current tripartite split in which neither City Hall, the Park Board or directly elected public representatives hold a majority of seats. The companion charter proposal would change the board's name to the Board of Debt and Taxes, which more accurately reflects its duties.

• Led an effort that will restore the BET's sole staffer, its executive secretary, as provided for in the charter. The board employed a full-time staffer for almost a century until 2019, when the 38-year in-

cumbent retired. Those serving then on the board tried to employ a highly qualified finance professional at half time pay and no benefits. Not surprisingly, neither person hired stayed long. This destroyed the Board's institutional memory, which is vital with a rotating group of elected officials moving onto and off of the Board. This staffing is vital if the Board is to fulfill its role of giving city finances an independent look separate from a mayor and his or her finance department. Brandt's initiative authorized a full-time staffer.

Brandt is seeking DFL endorsement for his reelection bid. He is a 48-year resident of the Kingfield neighborhood, and a retired Star Tribune reporter who spent most of his 40 years there focused on Minneapolis issues. He leads habitat restoration crews at Coldwater Spring, serves on the District 62 DFL central committee, is on the Great Northern Greenway Coalition board, and served on CLIC, the city's capital budgeting task force, for five years.

"My decision to run again for a four-year term was not taken lightly," he said. "I did some soul-searching, weighing the demands of the job against personal considerations. But I know city finances well, maintain a balanced approach to property taxes, I'm committed to the Board's role as an independent watchdog for city finances, and I'm eager and able to serve."

Brandon Long leaves NENA, interim director appointed

By TESSA M. CHRISTENSEN

Following the termination of Brandon Long, the Nokomis East Neighborhood Association (NENA) has appointed Amy Arcand as interim executive director.

Upon being told of his termination on Monday, Jan. 20 at Nokomis Beach Coffee around 10 a.m., Long, 37, threw a cup of coffee at volunteers, and police were involved due to destruction of property.

This is not the first time that Long has faced scrutiny.

While serving on the board of the Highland Park District Council where he lives, Long was fined \$190 by Ramsey County Conciliation Court over missing yard signs. Long was chair of the Sustain Ward Three (now Sustain St. Paul) at the time, a group that supported high density redevelopment at the Ford plan site. Sustain had sparred with Neighbors for a Livable St. Paul, who supported reduced density.

Jim Ginther filed a case in small claims court in 2017. His home on Colby St. backed up to the Ford plant, and the 11 missing signs from his yard said, "Stop the Ford Plan: Rethink Development." They were among 80 of 800 similar signs that disappeared.

Not long after the incident, Long posted to Twitter: "Wonder who had the time today to bring a step ladder out and rip down Livable signs illegally stapled high up on the trees in the public right-of-way?" A witness testified that Long looked like the person he had seen taking down the signs. Long denied taking the signs. Long said he is "a pretty average-looking young male" and that someone else removed the signs, according to an article

written by Jane McClure for the Villager newspaper in March 2018. (McClure also writes for TMC Publications CO.)

Long was forced to resign from his position as executive director with the Union Park District Council in St. Paul in August 2020. When asked by the Pioneer Press, Long said he had signed a separation agreement and could make no formal comment. Henry Parker was the Union Park District Council (UPDC) Board Chair at the time and said he could not comment on Long's resignation. When asked this week, UPDC declined to make a statement to the Messenger.

Long was hired by NENA in 2022, following the resignation of Becky Timm, who left to pursue a career in community health and now works for Advocates for Better Health.

Long stated, "I'm proud of the work that I did at NENA. I especially appreciated my staff and the talents and effort they brought to their job."

MEET AMY ARCAND

Amy Arcand also filled in as interim executive director at NENA before Becky Timm was hired.

Arcand operates her own consulting business, Willow Consulting. She previously facilitated a strategic planning retreat with the NENA board. As executive director of the Corcoran Neighborhood Organization for 10 years she, along with many community volunteers, started the Midtown Farmers Market. She has also worked with Webber-Camden, Harrison, Marcy-Holmes, Nicollet Island/East Bank, Victory, Shingle Creek and Southeast Como neighborhoods, assisting some in evaluating whether they want to merge.

"I am honored to lead NENA during

this transitional period," said Arcand. "Community is at the heart of everything we do, and I look forward to working closely with residents, staff, and stakeholders to build a strong organizational foundation in which to advance our shared goals."

"We are grateful to have Amy stepping into this role during a time of change," said NENA Board of Directors Chair Christina Meyer. "Her leadership, vision, and dedication, along with the board's commitment to our community, will guide the organization forward as we embark on this new chapter. The NENA Board of Directors and other key volunteers will be putting in additional time to ensure that things run smoothly. There will be a lot of opportunities to get involved so reach out if you are interested."

Visit www.nokomiseast.org or email Board Chair Christina Meyer at christina.meyer@nokomiseast.org.

The NENA Board of Directors is committed to ensuring a seamless transition while maintaining programs and services. An assessment of future staffing needs will commence shortly.

NENA's community organizer, Adrian Flournoy recently resigned and his last day was Friday, Jan. 17. Program and communications manager Sarah Friedman works part-time.

Like other neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis, NENA has experienced funding cuts over the last couple of years. "The changes to funding by the city are affecting neighborhoods all over," said Arcand. "Neighborhoods are trying to look at things differently."

She said they're asking: What does the next iteration of neighborhoods look like? How can they remain effective? What do



Amy Arcand, left, has been hired as interim executive director at the Nokomis East Neighborhood Association following the departure of Brandon Long (right).

key initiatives look like?

"People care about where they live and their neighborhood organizations and having a voice," said Arcand.

While working at Corcoran Neighborhood Organization, Arcand helped launch the Southside United Neighborhood group. Participating organizations include NENA, Standish-Ericsson Neighborhood Association (which no longer has any paid staff), Longfellow Community Council, Powderhorn Neighborhood, Corcoran Neighborhood Organization, Hale Page Diamond Lake Community Association, Central Area Neighborhood Development Organization, and Bryant Neighborhood Organization. More at www.ppna.org/one-south.

"How do we want to better collaborate moving forward?" Arcand asked.

Nokomis East Neighborhood Association serves the neighborhoods of Keewaydin, Minnehaha, Morris Park, and Wenonah. Arcand is expected to be with NENA for six months.

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CITY BRIEFS

BET LEADERSHIP

The Board of Estimate and Taxation (BET), which sets the maximum property tax levy and coordinates taxing and borrowing for the city, has reelected Steve Brandt as president and Samantha Pree-Stinson as vice president. Cathy Abene was also reappointed to serve as the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board member. The other members are Council Vice President Aisha Chughtai, Mayor Jacob Frey, and Council President Elliott Payne.

MPD OFF-DUTY FEES

The City Council's Public Health and Safety Committee will hold a public hearing on a proposed off-duty fees ordinance on Jan. 22 starting at 1:30 p.m. People can testify in person or submit comment in writing any time to CouncilComment@minneapolismn.gov. The city council is expected to vote on the ordinance on Jan. 27. For more information visit <https://lms.minneapolismn.gov/File/2024-00147>.

GAS AND ELECTRIC FRANCHISE AGREEMENTS

The city has published draft franchise agreements with the current electric and gas utility companies, Xcel and CenterPoint. The agreements, if approved by the city council, will allow the companies to continue having exclusive rights to provide natural gas and electricity in the city until Dec. 2034. They also include memorandums-of-understanding that re-establish the Minneapolis Clean Energy



CO-OP CREAMERY BUILDING SOLD

Seward Cooperative General Manager, Ray Williams, has announced the sale of the "Creamery building" located at 2601 E Franklin Ave., to North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS), the nonprofit founded by Sioux Chef Sean Sherman. As NATIFS' operational headquarters, it will be called named NATIFS Wóyute Thipi ("food building" in Dakota), and will include a counter-service restaurant, a commissary kitchen, and a coworking space designed to support other businesses.

Partnership, a collaboration between the city and the utilities to help Minneapolis reach its climate equity plan goals. The documents are available on the city website for review prior to the public hearing before the city council's climate and infrastructure committee tentatively set for Feb. 6.

STEP UP INTERNSHIPS

Applications are now open for 14-21-year-olds to apply for the city's Step Up summer employment program. Internships at public, private, nonprofit and community organizations will be available, with applications are open until Feb. 14.

PARTNERSHIP ENGAGEMENT FUNDS

The city is now accepting applications from community-based groups and individuals to fund small-scale projects aimed at making communities more socially connected, healthy and safe. Those interested are required to complete an interest form before starting applications. Interest forms are due by Feb. 19.

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

The city council has approved the appointment of Ward 9 resident, Michael Gordon, to the city's planning commission that will run from Feb. 1, 2025 to Dec. 31, 2026. He will serve as one of the two city-resident members on this commission that reviews applications for land use reviews, including site plan reviews and conditional use permits, and makes recommendations to the city council on rezonings, public land sales, as well as amendments to the zoning code and comprehensive plan.

NEW SOUTHSIDE ARTS COMMISSIONER

The city council has appointed southside Ward 12 resident Kelly McKay to serve on the Minneapolis Arts Commission for the next two years, ending Dec. 31, 2027. McKay, an arts educator and administrator with a theatre background, currently works as the director of education at the Museum of Russian Art. The commission advises the council, mayor and city staff specifically on the purchase and placement of public art and more general on developing a strong and vital arts community throughout the city.

- Compiled by Cam Gordon

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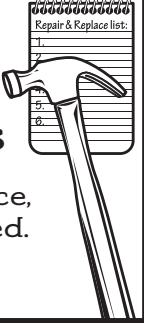


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