



New plans being reviewed by neighborhood councils; clean-up to start first

Will ground break soon for United Villages?

By JANE McCLURE

Long-awaited redevelopment of the area around Allianz Field could get underway soon. Getting shovels in the ground requires several steps, which are under review by Hamline Midway Coalition and Union Park District Council. Coalition members got their first look at the plans July 25, 2023, with Union Park board members starting their review Aug. 2.

A 170-room hotel and parking facilities, four-story retail/office building, restaurant pavilion, playground and sculpture plaza are the latest plans for the 34.5-acre superblock, which is bounded by Pascal St. and St. Anthony, Snelling and University avenues. While those additions may be some time in the future, other steps are moving ahead.

Community members could see park and open space changes as soon as spring 2024.

Parkland dedication and preliminary plat changes go to the St. Paul City Council in September, following St. Paul Parks and Recreation Commission approval in July. Plat approval is needed to lay out development blocks and streets in the northern part of the superblock. Platting a property in St. Paul triggers a parkland dedication requirement.

The plat and site master plan changes are sought by site owner/developer Snelling Midway Redevelopment LLC. Along with its vote on the plat, the City Council will also have to agree that privately owned public land can be used toward its parkland dedication requirement.

Another development-related proposal is headed to the St. Paul Planning Commission: to renew an interim use permit for parking lots west of the stadium. The use was permitted in 2018. It expires this year. No date for action has been set.

A master plan for the site was approved by the City Council in 2016. Allianz Field opened in 2019. Various master plan changes for United Village have been floated in recent years, with high-rise offices along Snelling, a movie theater and other features dropped.

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BIKING WITH PURPOSE

Joyful Riders Club and Slow Roll MSP bring people together to bike, learn about their environments, and gain confidence in their abilities.

On Saturday, June 17, 2023, the Joyful Riders Club gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol before leaving for the DJ dance party ride at the Frogtown Fair. (Photos by Talia McWright)

By TALIA MCWRIGHT

Patrick Stephenson of Minneapolis peddled on his electric cargo bike from the Minnesota State Capitol, cheering as music blasted from DJ Eric on Saturday, June 17, 2023. The Joyful Riders Club was off to ride to the Choose How You Move Frogtown Fair, where fun activities and ice cream awaited their arrival.

Stephenson became passionate about biking in 2010 when he began commuting to work. In 2011, he launched a community biking challenge, 30 Days of Biking, on Twitter. Through 30 Days of Biking, Stephenson connected with Mario Macaruso, and the two led bike rides together. Five years later the challenge grew into an or-

ganization called The Joyful Riders Club. The bike club is open to the community, meeting at least once once a month.

"I just want these rides to create really cool experiences for people where they're making awesome memories," Stephenson said.

During the start of the 2020 pandemic, The Joyful Riders Club stopped meeting. Life changes, like growing families, also created a shift in the organization. Before the pandemic, a large focus for the club was adult connection through biking. The club was sponsored by Surly Brewing, where the group would often gather at the end of the ride for free drinks and conversation.

"Everytime people would walk out of

Surly, they'd have a Surly smile," Macaruso said. "That kind of became The Joyful Riders logo - you look at the smile."

The Joyful Riders Club picked back up in April of 2022, this time with a different focus and no longer sponsored by Surly Brewing. Stephenson met Eric Moran, a bike enthusiast that found a way to DJ during rides. Moran has been a rave and club DJ since the early 2000s. After discovering a video of a UK-based DJ who mounted music equipment on a bike, Moran was inspired to do the same. Stephenson and Moran built the DJ bike trailer at Perennial Cycle (3342 Hennepin Ave. S.), which started a new era of DJ bike rides.

BIKING WITH PURPOSE >> 10

Uncovering racial covenants and neighborhood evolution through the Know your Como project

Exploring Como's history

By AAMIRA REDD

Como residents are dismantling racial covenants and preserving untold stories through Know Your Como, a transformative neighborhood history project.

Thomas Frankson, a prominent figure in the early 20th century, left a lasting

impact on the Como neighborhood as a real estate developer and politician. Frankson, who served as Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota from 1917 to 1921, played a pivotal role in enacting some of the earliest racial covenants, effectively prohibiting people of color from purchasing property in Como.

In an effort to acknowledge the impact of racial covenants, Como's Neigh-

UNCOVERING HISTORY >> 6



Como residents learn more about their neighborhood. (Photo by Aamira Redd)



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THE BOUNDLESS AMBITION OF MISS MERCEDES

By AAMIRA REDD

Mercedes Yarbrough, 33, also known as Miss Mercedes, is an educator, activist, comic book author, and proud resident of the historic Rondo neighborhood with a dream to inspire the next generation.

For Mercedes Yarbrough, the power of manifestation is everything.

"I'm really big on the power of the mind and being intentional with your thoughts and power of the words," said Yarbrough.

Yarbrough's unwavering faith in the power of spoken words has been a catalyst for numerous life-changing opportunities, not only for herself but also for her family. The blessings began manifesting when they officially moved to the Rondo neighborhood in 2021.



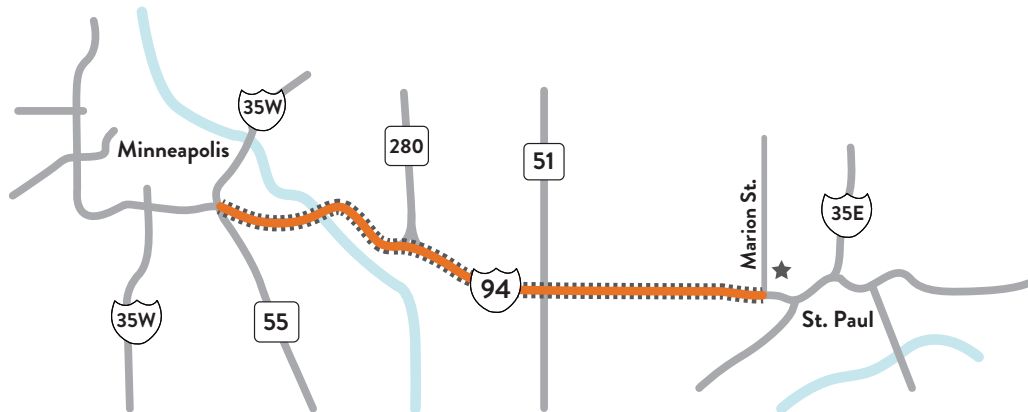
Mercedes Yarbrough moved to Rondo in 2021, and wrote her first two comic books in 2022, "Black to the Future" and "Black 2 the Future."



MISS MERCEDES >> 3

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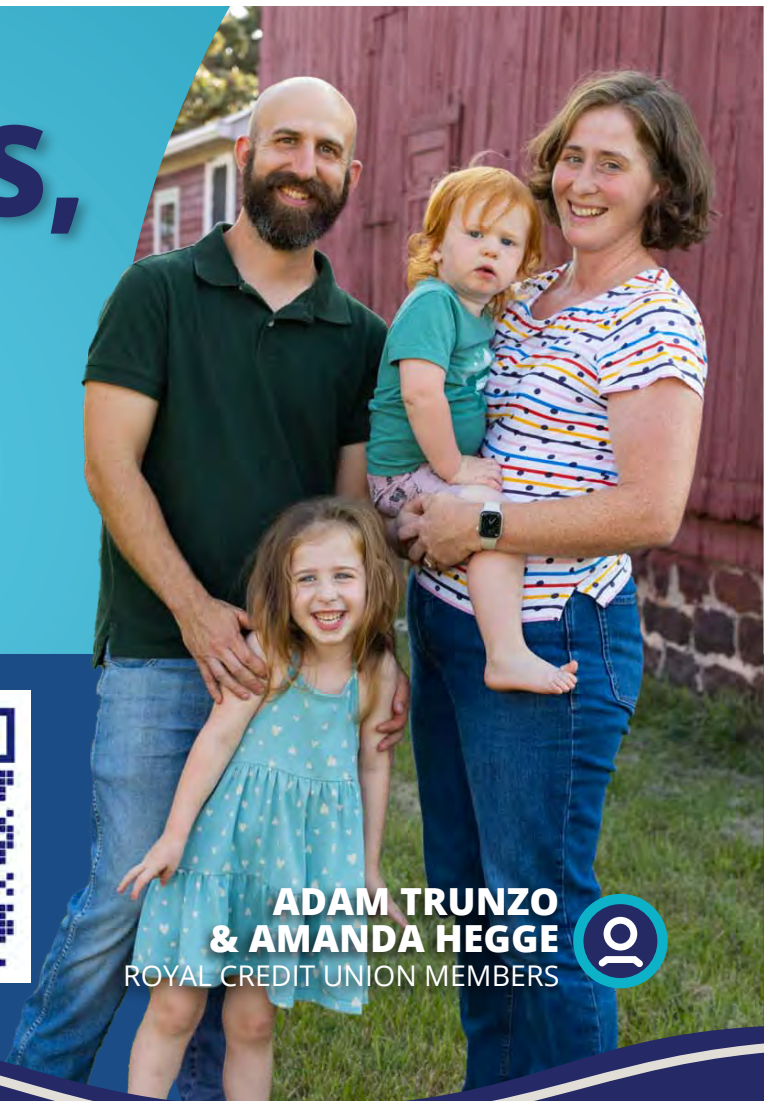
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MISS MERCEDES

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This neighborhood holds a unique significance for Yarbrough, as it has intertwined with her life story from an early age. She vividly recalls accompanying her mother on bus rides to Central High School and later attending the Martin Luther King Jr. Center and the Museum Magnet School. She ultimately graduated from St. Paul Central, just like her mother.

However, it was when Yarbrough and her family settled near Central Village Park that its true inspirational potential became evident to her. Before their arrival, the park had been largely vacant and uninviting, as Yarbrough described it.

But as the weather became nicer, Yarbrough's fiancé, Mack, and their children started to train for football at the park, and it was during this time that Mack had a revelation.

"He would say, 'We have to change the imagery of this park; this is our community. We live here now. It's our job to take on that responsibility,'" Yarbrough recounted.

Yarbrough noted that when her family started to frequent the park more often, people driving by would take notice and voice their appreciation.

"That really inspired the story 'Magic Glasses,' which I created. It was more based on the George Floyd incident. I kind of used that narrative to really speak to the kids on how the things in your community can be negative, but you have the power to change it by putting on your Magic Glasses and envisioning something better," said Yarbrough.

CREATING CULTURALLY RELEVANT COMIC BOOKS

With nearly a decade spent working with children in the education system, Yarbrough has acquired a wealth of knowledge in effectively understanding chil-

dren's emotions and ensuring their active engagement in learning.

"I learned a lot... and that was the main thing that I taught kids was how to control emotions, but also express what they feel and communicate their feelings," she observed.

As a behavior specialist at the Jie Ming Chinese Immersion School, Yarbrough had the privilege of receiving guidance from principal Bobbie Johnson, who emphasized the significance of preparing students for success on a global scale. Johnson's direction ignited Yarbrough's determination to publish her work globally, reaching children beyond her immediate community.

"I want to reach kids globally, so I started off with Black History to get the support of my community," said Yarbrough.

Yarbrough also credits her time teaching at Freedom School in aiding her to develop a culturally relevant curriculum for her students, which led to the creation of her first two comic books in 2022, "Black to the Future," and "Black 2 the Future." These books highlight the accomplishments of Black inventors and entrepreneurs from Minnesota and beyond.

"I mixed old previous history with new history. So, I like to have kids see connections to real life," said Yarbrough.

Yarbrough not only writes comic books, but also produces short animations, as well. Among these animations are "Black Girl Magic," "Girls Can Hoop Too," and "Galac on Iglehart St." These animations teach kids the importance of self-confidence and courage.

GOING BACK TO RONDO

While promoting "Black to the Future" at Central Village Park, Yarbrough was approached by Trust for Public Land, who showed interest in funding a comic series about the park.

"I already had the idea of making a

Rondo comic, but now this motivated and pushed me to get it done," said Yarbrough. "It was really just a blessing from God. And it just let me know, like, you need to do this. So I was like, yes, I'm game."

In her creative process, Yarbrough writes the story and then collaborates with artists on the website Fiverr, which is a platform that connects people looking for freelance services. Through Fiverr, she found graphic designers that could bring her comic books to life.

In 2023, Yarbrough released the first installment of the trilogy of comic books, "Going Back to Rondo," which dives into the history of Rondo, uncovering the origins of its name and chronicling the fate of the once-thriving Black neighborhood. The narrative sheds light on how the community was uprooted and displaced by the construction of the I-95 Interstate.

DRAWING INSPIRATION FROM ELDERS

To create the Back to Rondo comic book, Yarbrough interviewed numerous Rondo elders to help her gain more insight for the project. She describes this process as "motivating and inspiring." She expressed appreciation for the ways that the elders paved the way for the generations after them.

"And that's what is really sparking the fire in what I'm doing. Everything I'm doing is literally just repeating history in Rondo."

Yarbrough draws much inspiration from the rich narratives woven within the fabric of the Rondo neighborhood. Among these stories, she shares the account of her great grandmother's house – a symbolic haven catering to the needs of the community which served as refuge for those seeking shelter, nourishment, or even a helping hand with their hair.

She further shared the story of her neighbor, Dee Dee Ray, who had dedicated more than three decades to running a daycare in the Rondo neighborhood,

created a program that enabled Hmong women, who served as translators at the daycare, to attain their degrees.

"Those are the kind of Rondo stories that I've been getting from the elders when I worked on this Rondo comic book that were very inspiring and just really motivating to create real change," said Yarbrough.

BECOMING A VIRTUAL EDUCATOR

In 2020, while the world was grappling with COVID-19 and racial tension, Yarbrough noticed that kids were struggling with online learning, as well. She felt something needed to be done to make school more engaging for the kids.

"I just had this spiritual awakening that said evolution is coming with technology, and I found this as my time to create myself as a virtual educator. And that's Ms. Mercedes. Ms. Mercedes is a virtual educator where she can go all out, like teach everybody," said Yarbrough.

Yarbrough has many endeavors in the coming months. She's already started working on her next project with her fiancé called "Broken Robots," which will focus on educating this generation of kids on the balance of technology and the importance of being present in the moment.

"The goal is to inspire this generation to be a broken robot and not be a robot that's controlled by technology," said Yarbrough.

In the future, she wants to produce a show akin to Mr. Rogers that will hopefully have a similar impact on her community.

"The way that he was impactful on a large scale, especially nationally in America, just promoting love in the neighborhood and education, that's kind of where I see myself because I'm in my neighborhood," said Yarbrough. "I feel like that's what Mr. Rogers did. He made learning fun and made you feel like you wanted to be a part of your neighborhood."

LION PLANTS SEEDS

By JAN WILLMS

Community is the key word for Transition Town All St. Anthony Park (TTASAP) and Local Investment Opportunity Network (LION).

TTASAP is a neighborhood volunteer group in St. Anthony Park, focused on climate action and creating a lower carbon footprint "It follows the interests of who is participating," said Allie Rykken, who volunteers with the group.

She said Transition Town is an international movement that started in Ireland in 2005, focusing on neighborhoods and what the community could take control over.

"There was a national gathering at Macalester College in 2017, with a class on localizing communities," Rykken said. Transition Towns have broadened their focus, not only working with climate change but at all the challenges a community faces economically and in other ways.

"How can we take money out of corporate Wall Street and bring it home to Main Street?" asked Rykken. She said this is the phenomenon the financial system is built off. "We need to actually transition our money concept."

Rykkken said these ideas are espoused in Michael Shuman's book "Put Your Money Where Your Life Is." In it, he tells how to set up self-directed IRAs and how to look for and develop generative businesses.

"Transitioning your money is like exploring broader concepts," said Rykken who has been helping out with the LION



Members gather to chat about the Local Investment Opportunity Network (LION).

aspect of Transition Town. She said LION participants can ask a lot of questions about how business operates, how to instill their values, and how to set up legally sound agreements as they are looking to invest.

"LION looks at supporting local regenerative socially responsible initiatives or projects," Rykken added. She said LION is really a networking event that holds gatherings quarterly.

"Within the last year, we have had quarterly networking events," Rykken said. "We invite people who are interested in local investments to come and hear about opportunities. We can't have an actual pitch, but we can get people together and have conversations. They can connect later. It is based on the LION program out of Washington State."

Rykkken said the southern part of the St. Anthony Park neighborhood overlaps with the Creative Enterprise Zone, an area trying to support people with creative interests. She said a real estate investment co-op is hoping to start offering memberships in March.

"The project is lined up, but needs to prepare," Rykken explained. "Seeing the turnover in artists and business owners and each time a building sells, the rent going up, with the co-op (people) would

be able to buy some of the buildings in that area and keep the rent under control."

Rykkken said the idea of a co-op had its beginnings when a building on University Avenue changed hands and 300 artists were displaced.

"We're trying to find a place for people, and we're pretty excited that this aligns with what we are trying to support. We're still trying to find our niche with investments that fit our values and are possible for normal people who want to put their money into things. We are not dealing with millions of dollars and not making a ton of work for people needing investments. It's kind of a unique platform," she explained.

The LION group has been meeting at different coffee shops and restaurants around the area, according to Rykken. "There are just a few of us organizing it, but we are planting a lot of seeds with different development centers and groups doing cool things," she said. "Society is heading in the direction of local investments. We're just not there yet."

Rykkken said there is an email list of 70 for LION, with about 10 in attendance at each meeting. "We do try to get speakers, folks who want to talk about their businesses. So far we have not had a lot of investors come, but it will grow as we

Group offers alternatives to investing and seeks to keep money in community

continue to have more opportunities," she said. Rykken noted that the owner of Gingko's talked about what it is like to be a small business owner in St. Paul, the obstacles to getting loans, and the landscape of the city and how it has changed over the years.

"We have different topics each time, and we hope in the future to have two or three speakers for each quarterly meeting," Rykken said. She added that a lot of attendees are neighbors who want to put money into something that will benefit their local community.

"The biggest challenge is getting the word out that this is an option, and finding people who would like to invest and try to find a spot where they would come to us rather than a bank. We offer better terms and can connect with people who need funding."

Rykkken said the funding would vary, depending on what people are asking for. "It could be one person investing in a smaller scale project, and the person might need \$1,000 to implement the project," she stated. "One person could loan \$1,000 and have it paid back in two years with no interest or 2 percent interest." According to Rykken, if the project is larger, there might be multiple investors. She said a bank could provide a certain amount of a loan, but there might still be the need for \$100,000. "We could open that up to individual investors, so we are looking at these kinds of piecemeal opportunities."

Rykkken said the best way for people interested in learning more about LION is to email lion@transitionasap.org.

"We are excited people are having these conversations about money, and happy to be a small part of this. We are looking forward to seeing what we can do."

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

BLACK PHILANTHROPY MONTH: CELEBRATING BLACK LOVE IN ACTION

PLANTING SEEDS

BY DR. ARTIKA TYNER,
dr.artikatyner@gmail.com



August marks the 11th anniversary of Black Philanthropy Month. This annual celebration focuses on uplifting the Black community and building a more vibrant, sustainable ecosystem. The theme for Black Philanthropy Month 2023 is "Black Love in Action." This celebrates love as a necessary foundation for lasting social change and community-building. The theme is inspired by the writings of the late scholar and activist, bell hooks. Black Philanthropy Month 2023 spotlights the core meaning of philanthropy as a love of all humanity that includes the power of self-love within the Black community.

HISTORY OF BLACK PHILANTHROPY MONTH

Black Philanthropy Month was launched in August 2011 by Dr. Jackie Bouvier Copeland and the Pan-African Women's Philanthropy Network. It is celebrated each August in recognition of those of African American descent and focuses on topics like promoting economic justice and empowering funding equality in the nonprofit sector. It encompasses more than 19 million individuals in 60 countries. The underlying tenets of Black Philanthropy Month reach far beyond financial considerations. Giving during Black Philanthropy Month is a matter of universal human rights that supports racial, social, economic, gender, and envi-

THUBA NGUYEN
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Stop by to hear these authors on Saturday, Aug. 12 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Rondo Library (461 Dale St.) during the Black Author Read Alouds. There will be book giveaways and book signings.

ronmental justice.

BUILDING A BLACK ECOSYSTEM

A focus on philanthropy is essential for supporting a Black ecosystem that ministers to the needs of the community, in-

spires change, and creates access to justice. This is an invitation for everyone to invest their time, talents, and resources. Investing in Black-led youth-serving nonprofit organizations can aid in building a solid foundation for the future. It will provide youth with the tools to learn, grow, and lead.

Supporting Black-led youth-serving nonprofit organizations also provides a good yield on the investment. Did you know for every dollar invested in a youth program or early childhood education yields up to \$16? Further, for each additional dollar invested in education, another \$2 is gained in future earnings per student.

This August, you can share love in action by donating and supporting local Black-led nonprofits that are making a difference in the lives of our youth. These organizations rely on the generosity of supporters and strategic partnerships within the community to provide youth-oriented programs, initiatives, and services.

- Bolder Options (youth mentorship)
- Cookie Cart (STEAM, leadership development)
- Irreducible Grace Foundation (healing, arts)
- JK Movement (sports enrichment, creative arts)
- Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute (literacy, leadership development)
- Sweet Potato Comfort Pie (healing, arts)
- 30,000 Feet (educational programming)
- W.E. Win Institute (educational programming, leadership development)

Remember, bell hooks once stated: "Love is a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust." When each of us shares the gift of love, we are building a better world—one act of love at a time.

Through her organization, *Planting People Growing Justice Leadership Institute*, Dr. Artika Tyner seeks to plant seeds of social change through education, training, and community outreach.

BUILDING A STRONGER MIDWAY

BY CHAD KULAS,
Midway Chamber of
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It seems whenever I go out of town, especially to a smaller community but even to a surrounding suburb, I get asked about crime. From the perception some have of Saint Paul, Minneapolis, or the Midway specifically, you would think we all must walk around afraid and eager to move away. But actual crime statistics tell a different story.

Despite the perception many have that we live in a dangerous area, I have also been hearing that crime is actually going down. So I called Stacy Murphy, the Senior Commander of Saint Paul's Western District. Stacy is on the Midway Chamber's Board of Directors (we have had the Western District Senior Commander on for

What about the crime in St. Paul?

many years), and she is one of the nicest people in our neighborhood. She read off crime stats for both Saint Paul in general and specifically the Western District, and both show a fairly dramatic drop in crime.

In stats from the Saint Paul Police Department, between Jan. 1-July 15, city-wide crime is down in different categories between 14% (robbery) to 40.7% (shots fired) compared to last year. Most have declined over 30% (overall crime, theft, and auto theft). In the Midway, the numbers are similar through July 23 with a drop in shots fired from 480 in 2022 to 229 in 2023- a 52.2% decline.

What about nationally? According to the Council on Criminal Justice, crime is down overall nationally. But results vary widely between municipalities and not every municipality provides data. When particular categories are listed, the percentages tend to be much smaller for overall numbers than we have at the local level. One noticeable difference is auto theft, where the national trend is up. In a figure

showing 21 different cities, Rochester, N.Y. has seen an increase in auto theft of 355% from Jan. 1- June 30. They were a major outlier, with the next five cities falling between 162-107%. Number seven on the list? Minneapolis, with an increase of 77%. The bottom nine on the list all had a decrease in auto theft. At the very bottom? Saint Paul with a 42% decrease. The next two cities were at 27%, making Saint Paul quite comfortably in the best position.

So... the big question. What can we attribute this significant drop in crime to? On the local level, the Office of Neighborhood Safety has been working hard to reduce crime. Nationally, courts are back up after the pandemic made it difficult. Knowing you are more likely to end up in court and face consequences may be a deterrent to some. Senior Commander Murphy also stated different departments have done a good job working together; a trend she imagines also occurs in other metro areas. The HART team (Homeless Assistance Response Team) is an initiative that began in

late 2021, and is housed at the City of Saint Paul's Department of Safety & Inspections and works closely with homeless encampments.

It's natural for people to think crime is up. In today's world, they are more likely to read about an incident on social media, especially NextDoor where an "incident" might simply be a misunderstanding or a case of profiling. But it's important to know the stats and the actual trends. We are not back to pre-pandemic levels yet but are certainly trending in that direction. It's also important to remember one of the best tools to combat crime: eyes. The more eyeballs in an area, the less likely someone will want to commit a crime. Encourage large gatherings in the community and find reasons to invite friends to the Midway.

Even with crime going down, it is always important to be safe and be smart. Consider ways to make yourself and others safer, including getting to know your neighbors better. The Midway is strong and it becomes stronger when people know each other. Thank you to everyone who has helped build our community.

We want to hear from you. Submit a letter on our website at MonitorSaintPaul.com or email tesha.christensen@MonitorSaintPaul.com.

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News for you!

The *Midway Como Frogtown Monitor* is a monthly community publication in the Midway, Como, Hamline and Frogtown neighborhoods of St. Paul, owned and operated by TMC Publications, CO. Visit our website for our calendar and publication dates.

Story ideas always welcome.

Keep in touch with the *Monitor*. Letters to the editor under 200 words and news releases for publication can be sent via e-mail to tesha@monitorsaintpaul.com. Unsigned letters will not run.

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consider ourselves a zebra company, one that is both black and white, both/and. As a media company, we work to highlight issues, solve real, meaningful problems, and repair existing social systems. We are working with our readers and advertisers to create a more just and responsible society that hears, helps and heals the customers and communities we serve.

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GUEST COLUMN

BY TOM GOLDSTEIN,
Midway resident

In nearly every issue of the Monitor appears a guest column by Chad Kulas, Executive Director of the Midway Chamber of Commerce. The columns are almost always upbeat, often highlight unique businesses in the Midway, and in the last year have covered topics ranging from the area's rich cultural diversity and the importance of disabled workers to notable coffee shops and new apartment construction.

As the unofficial spokesperson for the mainstream Midway business community, it's understandable that Mr. Kulas is focused on feel-good stories and the occasional new store or restaurant opening. After all, talking about vacant buildings, empty lots, crumbling streets, litter everywhere, and a general pattern of disinvestment during the past decade isn't usually "good for business." But to ignore those things, which were further exacerbated by the civil unrest that followed the tragic murder of George Floyd three years ago, requires those connected with the city's power structure to regularly don "rose-colored glasses."

How else to explain the general myopia and indifference at City Hall regarding the sorry state of affairs in the Lexington-Snelling-University corridor, generally thought of as the business and entertainment hub for the Midway?

Unfortunately, if you spend any time walking on those commercial streets, which I do on a regular basis, you'd have to be blind to overlook the blight more characteristic of neglected, poverty-stricken neighborhoods than the manufactured image we're routinely fed by the local papers and our elected officials, citing all sorts of alleged "progress."

Yes, some good things are happening in the Midway, thanks to the ingenuity and determination of individuals working to add vibrancy and variety to our community. However, outside investment is primarily coming from deep-pocketed developers, seeking to capitalize on the city-wide housing shortage and the multi-billion-dollar taxpayer-funded light rail system. While several housing projects have been recently completed along University Avenue in the past year, who really benefits from those projects – the investors or local residents?

Nearly all of these buildings feature market-rate units, targeted at a more affluent demographic, which does nothing to lower the overall cost of housing or meet the dire need for affordable housing throughout St. Paul. And while these projects certainly benefit the construction trades, they are doing little to increase the tax base, contrary to what city leaders claim. After all, if this new boom in con-

THE DECLINE OF THE MIDWAY



struction activity was a boon to city coffers, why are so many homeowners experiencing double-digit property tax increases?

One clear explanation for this phenomenon can be found in the heart of the Midway: the superblock parcel that is now home to Allianz Field and, thanks to all the businesses removed to make way for the stadium, pretty much nothing else. Gone are Office Max, Rainbow Foods, Walgreen's, Midway Bowl, the Dollar Store, the Peking Garden, Golden Gate Café, Big Top Liquors, and, more recently, Apollo Locksmith and Little Caesar's Pizza. (Last time I checked, Target doesn't replace keys.)

Anybody at the city who still claims that the \$500 million complex of hotels, housing, and retail shops promoted by Minnesota United principal owner Bill McGuire is going to materialize anytime soon is deluded – and no politicians pretend anymore that the soccer stadium has resulted in meaningful job growth. Or that 20-25 matches a year has created appreciable amounts of new revenue for the city.

And don't forget that the stadium is exempt from property taxes for the next 50 years (estimated by the Pioneer Press in 2016 as representing an annual revenue loss to the city of \$3-5 million), with the parking lots, interior streets, and other "infrastructure" specific to the stadium fund-

ed by \$25 million in tax-increment financing. Somehow the city has to make up this property tax loss, and they're doing so on the backs of taxpayers like you and me.

Imagine how the larger community might have benefitted if that \$25 million had instead been made available for improving business storefronts, beautifying Snelling and University Avenues, addressing vacant lots, providing interest-free loans for small business startups, or even repurposing some of the empty buildings in the area as business incubators? One doesn't have to stray far from Allianz Field to appreciate the need for real investment to combat the neglect and disrepair.

In the five-block stretch along University Avenue between Hamline and Snelling one is greeted by not one or two – but four – vacant lots strewn with trash, surrounded by broken down fences, and almost always overgrown with vegetation. Two of those empty lots – at Albert and University – have been that way for 20 years, and they are now complemented by another "vacancy" at Hamline and University (the former BP site) and one where the Sports Dome establishment was destroyed by arson. In addition, the Trend Bar sits empty, a building that once housed law offices (next to Midway Books) remains boarded up three years after the civil unrest, and graffiti grows

daily like weeds anywhere taggers desire.

But the blight is not limited to just those five blocks. At the Snelling intersection, fences surround the empty, rubble-strewn lot where the American Bank Building once stood, while across the street an ugly CVS building sits empty and boarded up.

Sadly, this dismal situation stretches in all directions. The Midway Marketplace pattern continues, with the same "for rent" signs dotting the avenue year-after-year. Hamline Hardware is gone and empty, as is Dan's Fan City, though three years later a new use of the boarded-up building is reportedly in the works. Other than the rebuild of Lloyd's Pharmacy, a replacement of the aging (and annoying) Taco Bell drive-through establishment, and the opening of the Flying Pig Thrift store, new business activity near Hamline University has been at a standstill for years.

Sadly, this dismal situation stretches in all directions. The Midway Marketplace has been at its home to the cavernous, vacant Herberger's store (until recently, utilized as a covid-testing site by the state), and the At Home Superstore that replaced Wal-Mart is lucky if a mere 5% of its huge parking lot is occupied – other than during soccer games. Venture a block east, and you'll find more vacant storefronts, Target's huge, underutilized "overflow" parking lot, and a few blocks farther down, an empty, glass-strewn lot where Napa Auto Parts once did a thriving business.

While many of us who live in the Midway are embarrassed by the rampant neglect, disinvestment, tax giveaways, ever-present litter, and runaway graffiti, our City Council, incredibly, has already agreed in principle to commit \$208 million in TIF funding for McGuire's Midway pipe dream! How can a city that has no funds to carry out essential repairs of our dilapidated infrastructure justify forgiving new property taxes on yet another major project? They can't. But one thing is sure: the entrepreneurs and companies creating the high-paying, cutting-edge jobs of the 21st century are not looking to St. Paul to expand their operations. Why would they?

When I moved into the Midway in the fall of 2004, I genuinely thought the area had a chance to shed its undesired image of rundown shops and rampant crime. But a decade ago when all the planning around a revitalized Midway Shopping Center was quickly jettisoned in favor of turning that parcel into a soccer stadium surrounded by parking lots, I knew a golden opportunity had been squandered. And while our elected officials continue to pretend that "good days" are ahead, the evidence on the ground overwhelmingly says otherwise. My house goes on the market next week.

Tom Goldstein is a lawyer and former school board member. Every morning for the past 18.5 years he has been greeted by two empty lots across the street from his front door.

UNCOVERING HISTORY

>> From 1

borhood Relations Committee proposed the idea of creating an informational piece near the Frankson Mansion.

"If we can come together to have a historic marker, some sort of signage, or artwork that tells the story and memorializes the actions we took to raise awareness then we can become more thoughtful about our neighborhood's past and future," said Laura Oyen, who is a part of the District 10 Community Council and has also worked closely with the Como History Project.

While the effort to get a commemorative piece acknowledging racial covenants is still underway, the project has evolved into something much greater. Know Your Como, as it is known, has gained the involvement of a dedicated group of neighborhood volunteers who are passionate about discovering more about Como's past.

These individuals have taken on the role of historians, archivists, and storytellers, working to document the personal narratives and cherished mementos that have been shared by long-time residents. Documenting these stories are another way for neighbors to connect over similar life experiences.

"[Como residents] may have gone to the same schools or went to the same church, so they have a lot of the same experiences, but even within those pieces that are the same, I'm really amazed at the unique remembrances that are very unique to each individual person," said Oyen.

RECOGNIZING RACIAL COVENANTS

Like many other neighborhoods in the United States, Como was once subject to racial covenants that limited the ability of people of color to own property in the area.

Racial covenants were legally binding agreements that prohibited property owners from selling or renting their properties to people of certain races or ethnicities.

In June of 2022, St. Catherine's University and Mapping Prejudice launched the "Welcoming Dear Neighbor?" project that aimed to uncover the discriminatory housing practices in Ramsey County. According to research conducted by Mapping Prejudice, around 350 racist deeds were found in Como.

As part of the Neighborhood History Project's comprehensive approach, Dr. Rachel Neiwert, a professor at St. Catherine's



Laura Oyen (left) of the District 10 Community Council chats with neighbors about Know Your Como and the Mapping Prejudice project. "If we can come together to have a historic marker, some sort of signage, or artwork that tells the story and memorializes the actions we took to raise awareness then we can become more thoughtful about our neighborhood's past and future," said Oyen.

Thomas Frankson, a prominent figure in the early 20th century, left a lasting impact on the Como neighborhood as a real estate developer who enacted some of the early racial covenants.



The dots show where racial covenants are in the Como neighborhood.

University, and her students embarked on a journey to uncover the intricate ways in which historical housing discrimination continues to perpetuate inequality in Ramsey County.

Their research, conducted in collaboration with the project, delved into newspapers and digitized archives, unearthing stories that highlight the struggles for housing equity and the presence of racism.

One story that Neiwert often tells is that of Nellie Francis, an African-American woman who was an activist and suffragist in the early 1900s. Francis along with her husband, William T. Francis, lived in the

Mac-Groveland area, which like Como, had racially covenants.

Francis and her husband were subjected to violence and harassment by White neighbors who were determined to keep their neighborhood Whites-only. While the Francis' fought hard to stay in their home by reaching out to law enforcement and politicians, they eventually left after William was offered a job in Liberia.

For Neiwert, she believes retelling these stories is a way to have deeper conversations about racial injustice and inequities in our communities.

"I do think White people need me to show up and say, 'I have learned these things, so let's learn together and see how it helps us effectively talk about what's happening in our community,'" said Neiwert. "Because if they could stop imagining that the homeownership gap is just a natural thing, it is not a natural thing. Our world is structured by racism."

Although racial covenants officially became illegal in 1968, the racist and discriminatory language used in these racial covenants can still be found today. For this reason, many neighbors have taken the initiative to remove these deeds from their homes.

"The impetus for the history project was to gain a deeper understanding going beyond just the pretty history of the park and looking a little bit more at the complexity of these neighborhoods, who lived here, and how the neighborhoods grew and changed over time," said Como resident Lija Greenseid.

The project holds significant importance, particularly considering the impact of the murder of George Floyd, which sparked a nationwide conversation about systemic racism.

"I think the racial covenants ties in with this history project because in both cases it links back to the murder of George Floyd and the aftermath of which touched really close to our homes here," said Greenseid.

THE FUTURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY PROJECT

This summer, Know Your Como is broadening its reach by exploring stories from other neighborhoods. The goal is to get perspectives from folks who have spent time in different areas of Como to see how their experiences compare to others.

"We want to caution against saying that everyone in Como had the same memory, because we've only scratched half the surface," said Oyen.

As the story of Como's history continues to unfold, the ongoing project is constantly evolving to capture the essence of this ever-growing community. A significant aspect of this evolution is the goal to gather more present-day, contemporary stories from the residents themselves.

"We are approaching [Know Your Como] from two different ends of the spectrum, trying to think of it over time as: if you were to interview someone today, what would their experiences be living in the Como neighborhood in 2023? Those will be the historic stories of tomorrow," said Oyen.

ELECTION 2023

CHENIQUA JOHNSON FILES IN WARD 7

Cheniqua Johnson, DFL-endorsed candidate for Saint Paul City Council in Ward 7, filed to run for office alongside a historic slate of progressive, women of color.



"I'm so proud to file for office to represent Eastside neighbors in Ward 7," said Johnson. "We are in a historic moment for Saint Paul with an opportunity to elect the first, all-women council that will work to improve the lives of all residents across our city. I am running to be the positive, community-focused leader who has the experience, relationships, and Eastside coalition to get things done with and for Ward 7 neighbors. I will be a fighter and advocate for more affordable housing, a communityfirst public safety plan, big funding investments in all our communities, expansion of our transit system, and ensuring that we do our best to protect our climate."

Johnson is a lifelong Minnesotan, community organizer, and first-generation homeowner on the Eastside in Dayton's

Bluff.

As a Program Officer at the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation and member of the East Side Funders Group, she has worked to invest millions of dollars into local neighborhoods and organizations on the Eastside and across Minnesota. She is the sole candidate who has worked in every level of government, including for Governor Mark Dayton, Senator Al Franken, Attorney General Keith Ellison, and Commissioners Angela Conley and Rena Moran. If elected, she would be the youngest and the second African American woman elected to the council.

Johnson has built the a diverse coalition of supporters in Ward 7. Endorsements of Cheniqua Johnson's campaign include the Saint Paul DFL as well as unions and organizations like: The Saint Paul Firefighters, the Saint Paul Build Trades Council, SEIU State Council, LIUNA, Faith in Minnesota, Women Winning, and Stone-wall DFL. She has also been endorsed by elected leaders like: Congresswoman Betty McCollum, Attorney General Keith Ellison, Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter, Saint Paul Council President Amy Brendmoen, Ramsey County Commissioner Mai Chong Xiong, MN House Majority Leader Jamie Long, State Representative Jay Xiong, and many more. For a list of all endorsers and more information about Cheniqua Johnson, visit: cheniquajohnson.com.

MITRA JALALI FILES FOR SECOND FULL TERM

Councilwoman Mitra Jalali proudly filed again to continue representing the neighborhoods of Meriam Park, Union Park, Raymond-University, Saint Anthony Park, Hamline-Midway, and parts of Como and Mac-Groveland on the Saint Paul City Council. Jalali filed with a broad coalition of support alongside a historic field of candidates.

Over the last five years, Jalali has led efforts to develop and pass comprehensive renter protections, including rent stabilization; championed and supported the creation of thousands of new homes across the city at all income levels; led the work to create an expanded public safety system with a range of trained emergency responders and more funding for community intervention programs; secured millions in public and private funds to help businesses in neighborhoods experiencing commercial displacement; and fought for sustainable city policies and practices that take on the climate crisis.

In 2018, Jalali's election brought a salvo of "firsts" for the council, as its



then-youngest member, only renter, only woman of color, first Asian-American woman in Council history and only out LGBTQ elected. Five years later, as she files for office, she is joined by the most diverse and progressive field of council candidates in city history – like social entrepreneur and organizer Anika Bowie (Ward 1), civil engineer and district council leader Saura Jost (Ward 3), non-profit executive director and former policy aide HwaJeong Kim (Ward 5), organizer and current Councilmember Nelsie Yang (Ward 6).

"I'm running for re-election to the Saint Paul City Council because our work isn't finished, and together, we're leading Saint Paul forward," Jalali said. "I am so proud to file alongside passionate, motivated and experienced leaders from the East Side to Highland Park. This November, we have the chance to elect leaders who truly reflect our city and bring our community's agenda to the council table."

Even more importantly, these campaigns are united around a community policy vision of taking urgently needed city action on climate change, championing and expanding affordable housing, restoring strong rent stabilization, fully funding long-overdue investments in core city services and neighborhood institutions like streets, parks, libraries and rec centers, and taking a more holistic approach to public safety. More at mitrajalali.com.

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GUEST COLUMN



BY ERIC ERICKSON
Social studies teacher

A ROAD TRIP THROUGH AMERICA'S DEEP SOUTH

One car, three teachers, seven days, 10 states, and 2,850 miles. In late July, we journeyed through the Deep South as curious learners with goals of connecting places with the content of our courses.

The Civil Rights Movement and key events of that era from southern states are essential to the U.S. History courses I teach at Como Park High School. My fellow travelers were my former Como colleague Brian McCarthy (who now teaches AP Human Geography at Two Rivers High School), and Dave Stahlman (who recently retired after 25 years of social studies instruction at Como).

Our shared interests inspired us to navigate states less traveled, where courageous actions by leaders and citizens inspire while the history of Jim Crow simultaneously marks the cities, towns, and countryside across the region.

Our ambitious agenda took us

through Iowa and Missouri to reach Little Rock, Ark. on our first day. We began day two with a visit to the state capitol where a monument honoring the Little Rock Nine stands today.

The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court case desegregated public schools. But implementation was slow. White resistance in southern states was fierce. The first nine African American students to try and integrate Little Rock Central High School in 1957 were denied entry by White students, parents, and the governor.

The bravery and resiliency of the Little Rock Nine were eventually aided by President Eisenhower's deployment of federal troops who escorted the students through the doors and into Central High School three weeks later.

We made our way over to the infamous school and walked through those doors. A flood of feelings accompanied my steps into the building that we so easily accessed – a building that was shut down for the 1958 school year by the White residents of Little Rock who preferred no school over school with Black students.

Change was slow. The arc of civil rights gains has never been a consistent upward trajectory. There was one issue

and battle after another as our trip destinations revealed.

After some time in the interpretive center across the corner from Central High School, we visited the Clinton Presidential Center in downtown Little Rock. Limiting social studies teacher time in a presidential library is challenging, but a couple hours later, we were on the road to Memphis, Tenn.

Beyond historical sites and museums, we were excited to experience the music and culture of the south and interact with everyday people. A night of blues music on Beale Street accelerated that goal as we enjoyed the sounds of Earl "The Pearl" Banks at the Blues City Band Box.

Our plans for day three were built around the Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on April 4, 1968. A wreath adorns the spot on the balcony outside Room 306 where King was killed. A placard below explains the tragedy. The motel's exterior has been preserved in its 1968 style and the interior converted into the museum.

Due to an overnight storm, the museum's air conditioning wasn't working and the building was closed. Disappointing since we heard such positive reviews about it, but to stand and see that place

where Dr. King's life was taken profoundly impacted me.

We used the day to meander through the Mississippi Delta. The agriculture of the expansive plain was fascinating for my geography colleague, and the roadside markers reminded us we were traveling through the birthplace of the blues. We ate southern barbeque in Clarksdale and stopped in the Grammy Museum in the small town of Cleveland before lodging in Mississippi's capital city of Jackson.

On day four, we traveled along the Natchez Trace – a corridor used by Native Americans for centuries. The Choctaw were Indigenous people of the land before European colonization and forced removal, and our time at the Choctaw Cultural Center of Mississippi provided education about its effect. We left with new knowledge of Choctaw customs and the return of over 10,000 tribal members during recent decades.

We crossed over into Alabama and headed further south toward Selma. Many know the story. For those unfamiliar, the voting rights of African Americans were denied across the south into the 1960s and Selma became a flashpoint in 1965.

African American leaders and citizens

A ROAD TRIP >> 9

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A ROAD TRIP >> From 8

attempting to peacefully cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge were beaten back by law enforcement on what became known as Bloody Sunday. Marchers tried again two days later, but turned around before confrontation.

Two weeks later with the world watching, an integrated group of over 3,000 marchers were able to walk across the bridge toward the capital of Montgomery and rally with a crowd that grew to 25,000.

Walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma was spiritual and humbling for me. My thoughts raced to the brutality marchers endured, the fear they faced, the prayers they offered up, and the ultimate triumph of the federal Voting Rights Act passing five months later.

Day five began by walking the marchers' route in Montgomery, which happened to pass the corner where Rosa Parks famously stayed seated on the bus in 1955 - 10 years before the march.

The Rosa Parks Museum and simulation provided insight to the Montgomery Bus Boycott that will elevate my class discussion.

We walked on to the Civil Rights Museum founded by the Southern Poverty Law Center which honors 40 martyrs, followed by a tour of the Dexter Ave. Baptist Church where Reverend King was the pastor from 1954-1960 and the first bus boycott meeting was held after Parks' arrest.

A parishioner shared the church's stories and King's leadership there, but what enhanced my time in the sanctuary were conversations with the welcoming people who were visiting as part of two different family reunions.

They had unique connections to the place, had grandparents who attended the church, knew the same people, or even received piano lessons from the church organist. There was a shared his-

tory and connection evidenced through infectious smiles. And while we White men from Minnesota weren't connected to Dexter Ave. Baptist Church, we were welcomed in just the same.

After concluding the walk to Alabama's capitol steps, we returned to our vehicle bound for Birmingham. We walked the city at night to try and get a feel for it, knowing we would spend the next day reviewing its sins.

Day six started with walking through the sculptures depicting the civil rights struggles in Birmingham. Horrific events broadcast on television in 1963 such as dogs and water cannons being unleashed on Black citizens and children teach or remind visitors of the vicious policing.

The sculptures stand in the shadow of the 16th St. Baptist Church, which was bombed on a Sunday morning in 1961, and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute which concludes with a nod to justice. Eventually the church bombers were caught, tried, and convicted, leading the civil rights activist and Birmingham minister Fred Shuttlesworth to say, "Justice will shine for Black and White people now."

Shuttlesworth said that in 2002. Have we regressed? Are we a work in progress? Our journey to America's Deep South produced more questions than answers. Some were discussed on our long ride that afternoon from Birmingham to Louisville, Ky. where we'd stay the night. Countless thoughts drifted in and out of our minds on day seven as we drove through Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa on our return to St. Paul.

One consistent thought was this - being in a new place is powerful. Connecting history with a place and its people is informative and energizing. I'll be bringing the information and energy I gained into my classroom to enhance the learning of my students.

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BIKING WITH PURPOSE

>> From 1

"We have two origin stories," Stephenson said. "The origin story of The Joyful Riders Club, and then the origin story of where Eric came into the picture, because he gave us a lot of new energy."

Now The Joyful Riders Club host more family-friendly rides for bikers of all skill levels. The rides are often during the daytime, but some still take place at night, with plenty of bike lights to ensure safety, and music to encourage dancing.

"We're riding slow, we're making friends, we're not judging each other," Stephenson said.

The DJ Dance Party ride on June 17 started with Macaruso handing out donuts to all who came. The ride was around 30 minutes long. Families, adults and kids joined to experience the event, and enjoy the Choose How You Move Frogtown fair at the end of the ride, hosted by Move Minnesota at the Lilypad Garden in St. Paul.

"The joyful riders always have some cool destinations, and do things to support the community," said Jeanne Kaplan, a Joyful Riders Club member since 2016. "I'm glad to see more of Frogtown."

The Joyful Riders Club has partnered with organizations like the Lynx and held a ride for the Lynx home opener on Friday, May 19. The club also hosts donation-based rides for back to school supplies, cold weather supply drive, housing insecurity and more. Their hope is to continue working and partnering with the community to meet needs and foster joy on their bike rides.

"We always make people smile when you have a big ol' group of bikers roll past," Stephenson said. "And then the music adds a new spontaneity to it because then we might get people dancing."



On Saturday, June 17, 2023, the Joyful Riders Club gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol before leaving for the DJ dance party ride at the Frogtown Fair. (Photo by Talia McWright)

BLACK BIKERS OF MINNESOTA

Slow Roll MSP is another local biking organization that cultivates community through movement. St. Paul resident Anthony Taylor brought Slow Roll to Minnesota in 2015 after a trip to Detroit, Mich. An avid cyclist, Taylor belonged to the Major Taylor Bicycling Club of Minnesota, which was founded in 1999. The group

centers itself with the Black community, and focuses on the sport of cycling. Slow Roll, also centered on Black community, offered a difference in pace and purpose.

"It really is not a bike ride," Taylor said. "It happens on a bike, but it really is a program to reintroduce people to the community, experience new art, restaurants and find some freedom."

A large aspect of Slow Roll is about encouraging people, specifically Black people, to have autonomy over their bodies through movement. Taylor curates the rides so that the pace is slow and consistent. Ride leaders are stationed at the front and the back of the group. Traffic is

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BIKING WITH PURPOSE

>> From 10

blocked off to ensure safety, and gestures like raised fists, and vocal cues like "Hole on the right!" communicate to the group when to stop or move.

"The struggle for Black people has always been around mobility," Taylor said. "It has been that historically White supremacy has been about controlling Black bodies, controlling their mobility and their ability to move freely."

The beginning of the pandemic and the murder of George Floyd were a turning point for Slow Roll. The group grew in size and relationship as the community mourned together. During that time, the group had its first "Blackout Ride," intended solely for Black community members to join together in solidarity. The goal of the "Blackout" ride was to care for the emotional needs of the community.

"I mean it was literally crazy," Taylor said. "And we had 300 Black people show up."

On Thursday, June 29, Slow Roll MSP held a Hotter than July Southside Late Solstice Roll. Bikers started on 3rd Avenue in Minneapolis, traveled around Lake Harriet, and returned to 3rd Avenue. Bikes and helmets are provided to those who need them. Before each ride, The Slow Roll team reviews bike safety measures. During the ride on June 17, the team even gave a demonstration on how to change a flat tire.

No one knows the entire route except for Taylor and his Slow Roll team. The reason is because for Slow Roll, the ride truly is about the journey and not the destination. Doing so ensures safety by tailoring the ride to people that need support but, more than this, it promotes relationships and a sense of togetherness, said Taylor. The only rules are that everyone has to meet someone they don't know, and see something in the neighborhood they've never seen before. The ride always starts and ends at the same place. At the end of the ride, food is served and prepared by a community chef using produce grown from community gardens. Riders gather to eat together as the DJ plays music.

"The bike ride is fun," said Shonda Thomas of Plymouth, a Slow Roll member since 2022. "It doesn't feel like exercise, and I always walk away meeting someone I would have never crossed paths with in my regular life."

At some point during each ride, Taylor will stop to explain the historical significance of a community, business or orga-



Joyful Riders Club DJ, Eric Moran puts his headphones on for the DJ dance party ride on Saturday, June 17. (Photo by Talia McWright)



On Saturday, June 17, 2023, the Joyful Riders Club gathered at the Minnesota State Capitol before leaving for the DJ dance party ride at the Frogtown Fair. (Photo by Talia McWright)

nization and how it relates to historically marginalized communities in Minnesota. Doing so allows community members to gain new knowledge and perspectives of the neighborhoods.

"It changes the way that they [riders] understand the community," Taylor said. "Cars inherently never put you in community. They move you through community, and bikes put you in community where you can feel the texture of the road."

Slow Roll often partners with art, health and youth initiatives and organizations across the state. The group has also held rides with other Minnesota biking organizations. One ride included Major Tay-

lor, Biking with Baddies, Slow Roll, and the West African Bike Club on a ride that provided information on how sickle cell disproportionately impacts Black lives.

"I think the idea of connectedness for a cause really brings people together," Taylor said.

Taylor is also in connection with the Joyful Riders Club, and referred to the group as a good friend of Slow Roll.

"I think Slow Roll is absolutely amazing, and especially love that it's a complete community-building experience that includes local food, local music, and even lender bikes for folks who need a bike for the ride," Stephenson said.



Joyful Riders Club member Mario Macaruso high fives Joyful Riders kids on Saturday, June 17. (Photo by Talia McWright)



Anthony Taylor and Slow Roll members started and ended at 3rd Avenue and 38th St. and then rode around Lake Harriet during the Hotter than July Southside Late Solstice Roll on Thursday, June 29. Taylor spoke about the area's history at points during the ride. Riders know the start point but not the route of rides and take it slow together. (Photos by Talia McWright)



At Slow Roll events, there are bikes for those who need them, and the June 29 event included a demonstration on how to change a tire. The event ended with an outdoor picnic at 38th and 3rd. (Photo by Talia McWright)

Street project sticker shock felt

By JANE McCLURE

Potential assessments for mill and overlay work through St. Paul are prompting objections from residents, including those who live in part of St. Anthony Park.

More than a dozen people turned out for a St. Paul City Council public hearing on July 26, 2023 on upcoming projects, with many more sending letters of objection. While the council approved moving forward four arterial street project and two neighborhood mill and overlay projects, council members asked that the actual costs and cost-sharing decision be brought back before final bills are sent out.

Council members are unhappy that they didn't get a say in the policy as to how rates were set. They asked that rates be discussed with them before final decisions are made. While the city cannot bill for work until a project is completed, es-

timates are sent to property owners before projects are approved. The estimates sent out, some of which reach several thousand dollars, are causing some sticker shock.

Arterial streets targeted for work this year are in Highland, Summit-University and Greater East Side neighborhoods. A fifth arterial street project, Front Avenue, was dropped.

Neighborhood-scale projects are in St. Anthony Park and Highland. The neighborhood project are two of the city's first street reconstruction projects under its past sewer separation and street reconstruction project, which ended in 1996. Those streets in the Como-Valentine and Cretin-Bayard neighborhoods now need resurfacing.

Most people objected to high costs, and, in the case of arterial streets, why the benefits of work aren't spread out citywide. Valentine Avenue residents brought in a unique concern about their street.

Gail Brinkmeier and other neighbors said Valentine is treated as an arterial street, even though it is a very narrow east-west residential street. Her family has owned their home there since 1968.

She said Valentine was a quiet street until about 2008. "There was a huge, significant change for smartphones and GPS," said Brinkmeier. Valentine has become a major cut-through for traffic coming off of Highway 280. Even though it is not a truck route and is posted as such, large trucks constantly roll up and down the narrow street. Neighbors want a turn ban and other measures to reduce cut-through traffic.

The work on all project streets consists of milling off the top few inches of street surface and laying new bituminous material. Streets also get new curb ramps that are compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Some streets are getting corner bumpouts and small pedestrian refuge medians.

St. Paul's street needs outpace available funding, said Nick Peterson of the

St. Paul Department of Public Works. The current street cycle is that neighborhood streets may not be rebuilt for 124 years. Mill and overlay work can extend the life of a street surface.

Because of legal challenges to the city's old right-of-way maintenance assessments, the city must carefully look at how it assesses property owners. A "special benefit" to the property owner must be determined. The estimated market value increase after the work is done is estimated at 1 to 1.5 percent.

Council members said they are concerned about what they see as high assessments, reaching several thousand dollars in many cases. They're also concerned that the policy used by city staff wasn't brought to the council for approval.

Public Works Director Sean Kershaw said the July 26 vote only authorizes projects to go forward, not to set the rates. He said the rates can be reviewed with the council before a final vote.

The research is in.
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57% of Consumers Turn to Print or Digital Advertising in Minnesota Newspapers when Deciding Which Brands, Products and Services to Buy. Source: 2021 Minnesota Market Study, by Coda Ventures)



PEACE BUBBLES

BY MELVIN GILES
peacebubbles@q.com



"We have to deal with breaking down the barriers, so our children can live in a better society and justice can be restored in our community." - Dr. Delores Henderson

"You can't fly with Eagles if you hang out with turkeys." - Nathaniel Bronner, Sr.

"May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears." - Nelson Mandela

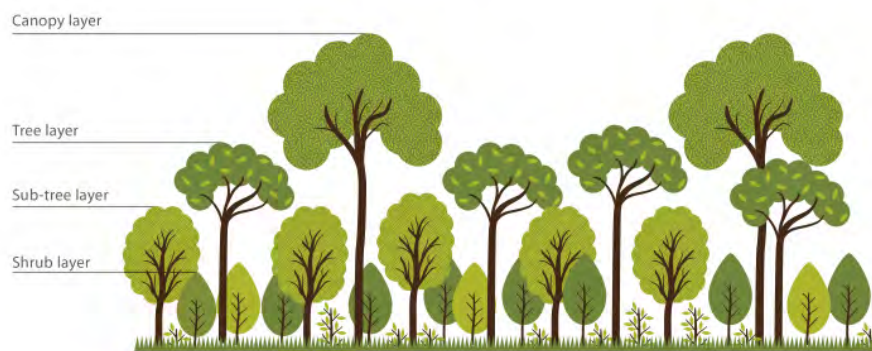
Hello Monitor readers,

As we are hearing, the month of July 2023 was Mother Earth's hottest month on record, which followed the warmest month of June on record, too! This year has also experienced record numbers of mass shootings, hate crimes, stolen cars and car parts, and for sure petty and stupid robberies, and senseless acts of violence. It also seems like we have a recording number of lawmakers openly and boastfully gaslighting (psychological abuse in which a person or group causes someone to question their own sanity, memories, or perception of reality) and acting/behaving on fear (belief that someone or something is dangerous).

On the other hand, I'm sure that we have been experiencing and witnessing a record number of good and positive things happening and/or being created. For instance, a record number of moviegoers, an increase in cities pledging and working towards green and clean technology, additional medical discoveries and cures, enhanced appreciation for cheerful engaging with folks of different cultures, and more community gardens being cultivated.

However, we have a habit of hearing and focusing on the not good things. The good news is that a habit can change with patience and willing determination.

ON BOUNDARIES AND MINI FORESTS



One of the key fundamentals of the Miyawaki Method is the creation of dense, multi-layered native forests. These dense, native "forests" can be planted by kids and adults in the small spaces around where people live and work, and bring down temperatures.

I recently read a social media post from the former Director of the Summit-University Planning Council. I considered Irna Landrum's post a good message or definition for the word "boundary":

Yo, I have seen ENTIRELY too many people saying people have a right to their boundaries without knowing what a boundary is:

- a boundary is a line you draw around YOURSELF, where, if crossed, you have pre-emptively determined what your responses will be.

- a boundary is NOT a set of rules to impose upon another person's clothing, colleagues, friends, or social media posts.

- a boundary is NOT an attempt to change another person's behavior.

HERE IS A BOUNDARY:

"I have found that your social media presence makes me feel a bit insecure so I am going to unfollow your accounts."

HERE IS NOT TF A BOUNDARY:

"I have found that your social media presence makes me feel insecure so you must change how YOU post to social media."

One is managing one's own capacity. The other is controlling bs.

Y'all out here calling WILDLY controlling and manipulative behavior boundary-setting

and it's upsetting me and my home girl.

Thank you, Irna for shedding light and clarifying the difference between managing one's own capacity and controlling bs.

PLANT A MINI FOREST, FIGHT RISING HEAT

I'm still on my Mini-Forest education journey, and this month I'm very happy to share words directly from the author of the "Mini-Forest Revolution" book, Hannah Lewis:

The three hottest day on Earth every recorded happened last month - July 2023. With human-caused climate change happening in full force, heat records will just keep breaking as the years pass. In cities, that problem is intensified by all the concrete and asphalt, which absorbs the sun's energy during the day and radiates it back out as heat day and night.

Leaves, on the other hand, never get hot. That's because they use the sun's energy to release water vapor, similar to what our skin does when we sweat. Trees bring temperatures down in the space around them. A single mature tree has the cooling power of several air conditioners, and woody parts of cities can be as much as 18F cooler compared to nearby areas with no trees!

Knowing that Frogtown and Rondo have fewer trees than average in St. Paul, a handful of community partners are exploring opportunities to plant ecologically robust "mini-for-

ests." These are dense, native "forests" that can be planted by kids and adults in the small spaces around where we live and work. A mini-forest can be as small as six parking spaces or much larger, and it can be any shape (circle, crescent, square, strip, or donut with a path to an interior space). A mini-forest is made up of the multiple native tree and shrub species that one would find growing at a given site if that land had never been cleared in the first place.

The idea is to return at least a small patch of the land around us to its most natural state. And, when we do this, we cool the space around the mini-forest, and we help clean up polluted air and water. Healthy native vegetation and the soil beneath it also absorbs floodwater, and holds moisture through droughts (both flooding and drought are also becoming more common due to climate breakdown). Planting a mini-forest is also fun! When we come together as a community to heal the land, we open doors that connect us to nature and to each other. Planting a mini-forest is a chance to learn the names of trees, and observe a tiny ecosystem as it matures and attracts native insects and birds over the months and years that pass.

Urban Farm and Garden Alliance, Renewing the Countryside, and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, in collaboration with valuable community partners like Frogtown Green, are reaching out to schools, churches, community gardens, private property owners, and others in the Frogtown, Rondo, and Hamline/Midway neighborhoods to find out where people would like to see a mini-forest planted. If you're interested, please contact me at info@rtc.org or visit <https://worldoftopia.com/mini-forest-revolution-miyawaki-method/>.

Thank you, Hannah!!!

Keep the good thoughts, stay optimistic, consider joining the mini forest revolution, and set your boundaries around yourself, where, if crossed, you have pre-emptively determined what your responses will be.

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

A LOOK BACK

BY JANE MCCLURE

Eighty years ago, a center for year-round fun was repurposed for the World War II wartime effort. The original Minnesota State Fair Hippodrome and nearby structures that housed livestock at fair time were transformed in 1943. The buildings were used for the manufacture of airplane propellers, led by the A.O. Smith Corporation of Milwaukee. About 50 acres of fair property were taken by the U.S. government, fenced off from the rest of the fairgrounds.

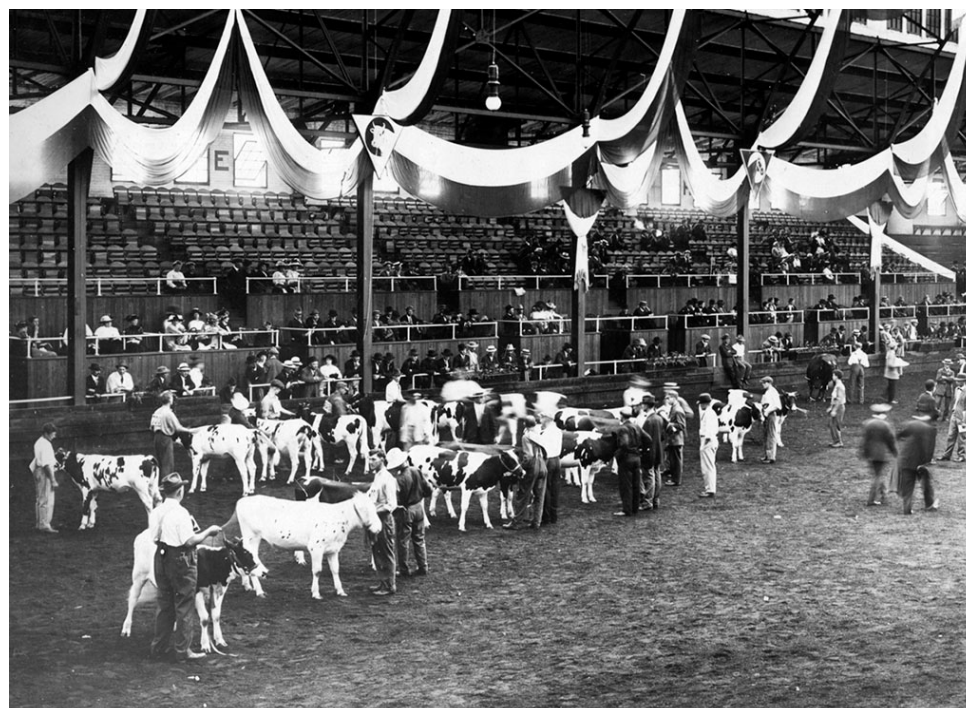
Minnesota State Fair livestock and poultry shows were suspended. Some shows were moved. An example is the 1944 4-H horse show, which was moved to Watonwan County and held in conjunction with the county fair there.

The war effort was the curtain call for the original Hippodrome. It was built in 1906 to house livestock judging and horse shows. Starting in 1909, it did wintertime duty as an ice rink. State fair histories say that the Hippodrome was considered to be the world's largest indoor ice rink, at 270 by 119 feet.

"The Hipp" was a popular place for open skating, as well as hockey games. It even had its own skating club and also hosted the St. Paul Skating Club. The Hippodrome was where Ice Follies founders Roy Shipstad, Oscar Johnson, and Eddie Shipstad got their start in 1936.

The hulking structure also hosted boxing matches and University of Minnesota football practices during inclement

Did you know about the old Hippodrome?



The original hippodrome at the State Fairgrounds was built in 1906 to house livestock judging and horse shows. It also did wintertime duty as an ice rink.

weather.

Those days of fun would be in the past. "The Hippodrome Goes to War" was a headline in the July 10, 1943 Minneapolis Daily Times. That structure, as well as the nearby livestock pavilion, horse barn, poultry building, swine/sheep building and arcade, were taken over and interconnected to become a huge factory.

"In the old Hippodrome on the Minnesota State Fairground where the equine kings and queens were parades in the northwest's outstanding horse shows;

where brilliant hockey stars of a past era scorched the ice; where speed and figure skating champions were reared, the wheels of Uncle Sam's gigantic war effort will soon be grinding, turning out propeller parts to help carry the fight for freedom against the Axis," stated the article.

The article described the Hippodrome's past glory days as an entertainment venue. Workers tore out the seats, livestock stalls and dressing rooms, leaving only the huge structure's shell. Wartime production equipment was moved

in. The work continued through the 1943 and 1944 fairs.

A.O. Smith, like many manufacturers, shifted to wartime production in the 1940s. Its facilities made bomb casings, aircraft propellers, undercarriages, torpedoes and air tanks. By 1945, the company had built 4.5 million bombs, 16,750 sets of landing gear, and 46,700 propeller blades. They also built nose frames for the B-25 bomber, water heaters, jeep frames, and components for the atomic bomb project, according to a company history.

No fair was held in 1945, the same year that World War II ended. The 1946 fair was canceled due to the polio epidemic.

After World War II ended, property was deeded back to the state fair. But fair officials determined that the "Old Hipp" would have to be replaced as it was structurally unsound.

Again the newspapers extolled the old structure's virtues. One writer even described it as the birthplace of U.S. hockey, although that claim seems far-fetched.

There was excitement for a new structure, for year-round sports use. Consider that in those days, the Twin Cities had few large-scale entertainment venues. A new Hippodrome was eagerly awaited. It opened in time for the 1951 fair.

The name "hippodrome" went away in 1975. Installation of a new ice rink brought a new name - the Coliseum. Skating would remain until 2014, when the old equipment was removed and not replaced.

The facility name was changed to the Lee and Rose Warner Coliseum in 2006. Lee Warner was a member of the Minnesota State Agricultural Society Board of Managers and the vice president of the Agricultural Society from 1919 to 1944.

Development UPDATE

By JANE McCLURE

SNELLING BUILDING GETS NEW LEASE ON LIFE

The long-awaited rehabilitation of a Snelling Avenue building can move ahead, following the July 12, 2023, St. Paul City Council approval of the project. African Economic Development Solutions (AEDS) has been granted 180 days to rehabilitate the building at 678 N. Snelling Ave.

AEDS hopes to convert the former auto garage into Little Africa Plaza.

The council vote ends a process that has gone on for some time. The first council hearing on orders to remove or rehabilitate the building was in May 2020.

Legislative hearing officer Marcia Mormond said the project has had no fewer than 28 legislative hearings, as the non-profit developer worked to line up project funding. A fire in the building several

months ago added further delays.

Ward 4 Council Member Mitra Jalali thanked city staff for helping shepherd the project along. She believes it will be a great addition to the neighborhood.

AEDS has several more steps to take. The developer must submit a letter to the city stating that already-dispersed grant funds of \$1,055,000 have been retained by AEDS for the purpose of rehabbing this property. Those include Otto Bremer Trust \$500,000; Bigelow Foundation \$200,000; St. Paul Foundation \$150,000; Hardenbergh Foundation \$100,000; McKnight Foundation \$100,000 and Neighborhoods United Funding Collaborative \$5,000. If funds have been spent, details on how they were used must be provided.

Other funds will be released later, including a Neighborhood Sales Tax Revitalization (STAR) grant of \$65,000; Ramsey County Critical Corridors Grant \$103,507; St. Paul Foundation DEED Main Street Grant \$750,000; state appropriation \$1,500,000; Sunrise Bank loan \$615,000 and Housing and Redevelopment Authority request of \$1,085,213

AREA PROJECTS GET FUNDING

The Metropolitan Council awarded nearly \$3.4 million in Livable Communities grants in June and July, contributing to economic opportunity, redevelopment, and job creation in the seven-county metro area. Two grants were for Midway projects.

Grants awarded funds for polluted-site cleanup at properties included the area near Allianz Field along University Avenue in St. Paul for an office building and hotel.

"This is the latest round of funding from the Livable Communities grant program to invest in our region," said Lisa Barajas, Met Council Community Development Director. "The program benefits the whole region by helping communities to advance economic development projects, housing choices, and transportation connections."

United Village Phase 1, St. Paul Port Authority was awarded \$652,400 for cleanup and environmental oversight at a mostly vacant 7.4-acre site on University Avenue. Redevelopment will include

construction of an 87,000-square-foot, four-story office building with retail space, and a 170-unit hotel, creating 455 jobs. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) is a funding partner.

Creative Enterprise Zone was awarded \$174,900 for mitigation at an 8.8-acre site on Prior Avenue North. Redevelopment includes renovation of about 100,000 square feet of vacant space within existing buildings, and adding commercial, office, and industrial multi-tenant spaces, and 425 jobs. DEED is a funding partner.

The Metropolitan Council awarded nearly \$3.4 million in Livable Communities grants in June and July, contributing to economic opportunity, redevelopment, and job creation in the seven-county metro area.

Grants targeting polluted sites help fund cleanup and investigation for redevelopment. They also help pay for environmental assessments in areas with concentrations of low-wage jobs, low-income households, and Indigenous, Black, Latino, and Asian populations.

UNITED VILLAGES >> From 1

There's considerable community frustration that the area north of the stadium hasn't been developed, and sometimes is strewn with litter. Community members include the area in neighborhood clean-ups.

Midway Center's main and smaller buildings and a bank occupied the block for decades. Part of Midway Center came down to make way for the stadium. A liquor store and the remaining section of Midway Center were destroyed by fire in 2020 during civil unrest that followed George Floyd's murder. Only McDonald's and a small multi-tenant building remain.

In the 2016 plan, the Snelling-University corner was tabbed for office space and a cinema, with a fitness club and office use to the south. The block where the hotel and parking ramp are now planned was to be part of green space extending from the stadium to University. The restaurant pavilion was always some type of commercial space. The playground site was eyed for the hotel.

At the southeast corner of University and Snelling, a public plaza with some type of sculpture is planned. South of that area would be interim parking along Snelling, and a retail/office building. The office building would be four stories high and would have a combination of office and retail space. To the east, where McDonald's is, would be a hotel with parking ramp and underground parking along University. A restaurant pavilion would be south-east of the hotel.

East of the soccer stadium would be a traditional playground, with what Wolf described as a "Minnesota twist."

The plat changes would mean more than 10 percent of the superblock would be privately owned public space. That ownership arrangement can be used to meet a development's parkland dedication requirements, said St. Paul Parks and Recreation Director Andy Rodriguez.

Parks commissioners had mixed reactions to the open space changes. Commissioner Dave Burns said he's heard support for a commercial space at the Snelling-University corner. Commissioner Theresa Paulson said the sculpture park is an "amazing idea."

"It would bring art to a very busy corner," she said.

Although the stadium and its surrounding block are technically in Union Park District 13, "A lot of what happens plays out in our neighborhood," said Hamline Midway Coalition Board President Cole Hanson. From his home, he can see the empty, fenced lot at Snelling and University.

Coalition board members raised site needs ranging from more shade trees to public restrooms. They also wanted more details on environmental cleanup that is



A playground "with a Minnesota twist" is planned for east of the soccer stadium.

to get underway this fall.

Recently retired St. Paul Parks and Recreation Director Mike Hahm and Carolyn Wolf of the real estate consulting firm Tegra are project consultants. The consultants will be meeting with both district councils to present regular updates.

"A lot has changed in the last four years," Hahm said.

The consultants said the property needs "significant" environmental cleanup and has grants for the work. Grants dictate cleanup timing.

Three areas of the superblock have required cleanup and/or testing in the past - the former bus barn site where the stadium, its green space and parking area are, the southeast corner and the northeast area.

Union Park District Council members

have been vocal in their frustration with the lack of development. They asked for the July Parks Commission vote to be delayed, citing a lack of time to review it. District Council Executive Director Leah Timberlake Sullivan said that trust between the developers and community has been fractured. Similar frustration about site conditions and lack of action were expressed in letters to the Parks Commission from area resident Jonathan Oppenheimer and April King.

"People are unhappy with the site conditions," said Union Park District Council Member Dean Cummings, who chairs the district council land use committee. "There's a lot of history and a lot of bad feelings."

Cummings also questions rumors of large loon statue at the Snelling-Universi-

ty plaza, and wonders if it would just be a large advertisement for the Minnesota United Loons soccer team.

Paul Sawyer, who works in design and construction for Parks and Recreation, said there will be opportunities for the public to weigh in. All of the development blocks will require site plan review, which could go to the Planning Commission. The redone plan for the site could also go back for commission review.

The challenge is that once a plat is filed, state law dictates that the city has 60 days in which to act, Sawyer said. City staff is drafting an agreement that will retain the open space for public use in perpetuity, and will cover issues including maintenance.

The benefit for the city is that while there is public use, the plaza and playground will be privately developed and maintained in perpetuity. "We have no budget for (parks) development," Sawyer said.

The platting process is being pushed along by the need to spend environmental cleanup grants within deadlines and get work started in September, said Wolf.

The Metropolitan Council in July approved a \$652,400 cleanup grant in July for United Village Phase 1. The site also has other cleanup funding, for a total of about \$2 million. The initial cleanup would be focused along University on 3.8 acres. The state and county have provided cleanup funding. The St. Paul Port Authority will lead the cleanup.

Once the site is cleaned up, infrastructure can be installed.

SAVE MONEY AND THE PLANET. READ ON!

GREENING FROGTOWN

BY AARON BACKS



This month's Frogtown Green column has a guest writer – Aaron Backs, a sustainability project coordinator with CERTs, a state-wide clean energy partnership. Aaron walks through a beginners' guide to green energy. Here's what he had to say:

They say the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. But the best time to save energy at your home is today! Through new legislation called the "Inflation Reduction Act," trillions of dollars in tax credits and rebates will soon be available for you to use for clean energy home upgrades. Taking advantage of these opportunities can help you save money and make you a climate leader in your community. There's an entry point for everyone in St. Paul – here's a simple path for your clean energy journey, starting with an easy, free or low-cost first step!

• Step One, Climate Supporter:

Get a home energy audit through Home Energy Squad. A visit from the squad analyzes where the greatest energy-saving potential lies in your home, and includes free energy-saving goodies. They will leave you with a report to help guide your energy upgrade planning. Home Energy Squad is available to renters and homeowners, with tax credits available for visits through the Inflation Reduction Act. Visits are free for income-qualified residents. This is an ideal place to start saving energy and money. More at www.mncee.org/home-energy-squad.

• Step Two, Climate Champion:

Use your Home Energy Squad report to start an energy plan that fits your budget and your living arrangement. Energy STAR (www.energystar.gov) has information on what to consider when upgrading to more efficient appliances and what re-

bates are available. Rewiring America has several guides to help you plan, including energy saving checklists for renters, landlords, and homeowners, and a template for designing an energy plan. Upgrade to energy efficient or electric appliances with your plan – if you work with an installer or contractor, ask them what other rebates and tax credits may be available, or check with Xcel Energy for additional rebates.

Find Rewiring America guides: <https://www.rewiringamerica.org/electrify-home-guide>

• Step Three, Climate Leader: Start thinking about solar!

The Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) website has a Simple Steps to Solar guide to help. Get 2-3 bids from local solar installers and compare the estimates before making a decision. If you rent, or if your home is not ideal for solar, consider signing up for a Community Solar Garden (on.mncerts.org/CSG). The CERTs Community Solar guide at on.mncerts.org/simplesolar explains how you can receive the benefits of solar without needing to install panels on your rooftop.

You don't need to be a Climate Leader to start spreading the news about the new rebates and tax credits available through the Inflation Reduction Act. Share this Monitor article, or share the CERTs website with friends and neighbors to get ready to make clean energy updates and upgrades for your home – some for little to no cost at all!

If you have any questions about your clean energy journey, feel free to email info@CleanEnergyResourceTeams.org

Aaron Backs is a CERTs Sustainability Project Coordinator. He wrote this piece in partnership with Frogtown Green's Patricia Ohmans.

Frogtown Green is a volunteer-powered initiative to build green beauty in the Frogtown neighborhood. We plant trees, cultivate gardens and work toward a healthier environment. If you'd like to know more, our website is frogtown-green.com and our phone is 651-757-5970.

IN BRIEF

NEW SKATE PARK

The City of Saint Paul has a new seasonal skate park at Dayton's Bluff Recreation Center. This project was started when recreation center staff noticed the tennis courts being underutilized in recent years. They reached out to City of Skate, and began conversations around creating a pop-up skate park, an amenity growing in popularity, instead. Utilizing recycled materials like old basketball hoops helped reduce costs while providing creative, eco-friendly, and unique design features for this skate park. This is the 7th skate park feature in Saint Paul, and the 3rd skating feature built in the past year. To view a map of all the skate parks around Saint Paul, visit www.stpaul.gov/parkmaps.

AWARD FOR FROGTOWN COMMUNITY CENTER

JLG Architects has been awarded the AIA Minneapolis Merit Award for the 2019 design of Frogtown Community Center in St. Paul. The \$7.3 million community center replaced the prior 1970s Scheffer Recreation Center at the corner of Como Avenue and Marion Street. The new facility gives the neighborhood 24,500 square feet of culturally inclusive community, educational, fitness, sports, and activity space. The Frogtown neighborhood is home to thousands of first- and second-generation Hmong and East African immigrants. To create an equitable space that would meet diverse needs, JLG kicked off planning in 2016, engaging members of the neighborhood, St. Paul Parks & Recreation, and local artists to advance the design of a multi-generational hub for amenities and wellness-driven recreation.

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Summer Fridays: Pick-up community soccer in Hamline Park
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Want ads must be received by the Monitor by Friday, Sept. 1 for the Sept. 14 issue. Call 651-917-4183 or email Denis@MonitorSaintPaul.com for more information. Your classified ad will also be automatically placed on the Monitor's website at www.MonitorSaintPaul.com. Contact Sandra to place a Help Wanted ad at 612-260-7967, sandra.tmcpub@gmail.com.

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