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WAPS directs committee meetings be posted, public

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

The Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Board directed staff members to have committee meetings open to the public and posted on the district's calendar following public notice of a June Diversity and Equity Committee (DEC) meeting not being

given and a request from the Winona Post for greater transparency and access to such district committees.

The shift to posting more meetings on the calendar and ensuring they are open to the public is a reversal from a prior position stated by WAPS Superintendent Annette Freiheit. District-wide committees such

as the DEC, which consist of WAPS staff members, community members and a board member, were not open to the public, Freiheit told the Post earlier this month, though she said committees could make them open if members elected to do so. Other committees composed of mostly School Board members are subject to laws requiring they

be open, she argued at the time.

Previously, public notice of district-wide committee meetings had been given for years through the district's open meeting calendar, for example, and Winona Post reporters had attended such committee

see **POSTED** page 8a

Small health depts. respond to big crisis



Photo by Chris Rogers

Melanie Tatge is Winona County's new public health supervisor. Across the area, small county health departments are playing a crucial role in one of the biggest public health crises in over a century.

by CHRIS ROGERS

It can be easy to imagine government as a vast bureaucracy with bottomless resources and armies of employees. Some governments are, but in rural Minnesota and Wisconsin, small county public health departments with limited staff are playing a crucial role in the biggest public health crisis in over a century.

"It's a very difficult situation," Trempealeau County Health Officer Barb Barczak said flatly. Barczak's department has to contend with both infections and misinformation spreading among the county's citizens. "We've seen obviously the number of communicable diseases that the health depart-

see **CRISIS** page 4a

Winona County Public Health shrank over decades

by CHRIS ROGERS

Like communities across the U.S., Winona County's public health department is a fraction of its former size. Following cuts in state and federal funding, Winona County's public health office shrank and consolidated over decades and its workforce is now one-quarter of its former size, according to for-

mer county leaders, current county staff, and financial records.

From a staff of around 30 in the 1970s, the public health department grew to a peak of roughly 60 staff members in the 2000s, Winona Lynn Theurer, who served as the director of Winona County Public Health from 1978 to 2010, re-

see **HEALTH** page 4a

Who will be Winona's next mayor?

by CHRIS ROGERS

Grab a lawn sign, the four-way race to be Winona's next mayor is underway. Sitting City Council member Michelle Alexander, former Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Board member Ted Hazelton, downtown business owner Jovy Rockey, and Trinona co-owner Scott Sherman are all competing to replace retiring Mayor Mark Peterson. On August 11, a primary will cut the field in half, and two candidates will advance to the November general election.

"For me, it's always budget that's at the top," Alexander responded when asked what issues are most important to her. The city is fortunate to have a diverse and expanding tax base, but raising property taxes can really impact how affordable it is to live in Winona, she stated. "It's really a balancing act in understanding what the budget can and cannot handle, how our tax rate affects homeownership and businesses here, and how we can leverage some of our growth in tax to help some of the projects happen," she stated, referring to projects on the city's wish list. In addition to the budget, Alexander pointed to the city's response to the COVID-19 crisis as a key issue. "How are we as a community going to address some of the concerns that are in the making right now — loss of jobs, loss of business?" she asked. The new mayor will need to work with many partners to try to mitigate the damage and position

see **MAYOR** page 8a

WAPS' equity group tries to define purpose

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Following two settlements with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (DHR) on discrimination, Winona Area Public Schools' (WAPS) Diversity and Equity Committee (DEC) has been tasked with overseeing implicit bias and cultural competency staff training, along with guiding equity work district wide. Last week, the committee struggled to agree on its focus: should the student group

see **EQUITY** page 5a

Uncertainty, planning amid school opening



File photo

Jaclyn Buege and Jessica Rislov helped keep Central Lutheran Church Child Care Center in Winona up and running during the shutdown this spring.

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

With the COVID-19 pandemic continuing, questions about schools possibly opening in the fall, from how to keep students and staff members safe if they are on-site to how to support students if they are back in the classroom after months of distance learning and summer break. How to support students' families is a question as well, particularly in relation to families who are not able to have their children remain at home due to their work obligations. Feelings on school in the fall from local school

administrators, teachers and parents are tinged with some anxiety, some hope and a wish for students to continue learning, however that may look.

As local schools await further guidance on opening that will arrive from the state later this month, they are preparing for three scenarios: in-person learning at school buildings, hybrid learning consisting of in-person learning and distance learning, and entirely distance learning. They are also reviewing what went well with distance learning last spring through surveying stakeholders such as students' parents and getting a sense of how teach-

ers are feeling about returning to school. They are working on improving internet access for all students to help with potential distance learning in the fall, applying what they have learned from providing some child care this summer to planning social distancing, health check and hygiene protocols that could be used during the school year and determining how to rearrange classrooms to adhere to guidelines for limiting building occupancy as well.

Bluffview Montessori Head of School

see **UNCERTAINTY** page 3a

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