

Mayo Clinic expanding offerings in London 5

Seamstress stitches past and present 10



POSTBULLETIN

UNLOCK DIGITAL AT [POSTBULLETIN.COM/ACTIVATE](https://postbulletin.com/activate) | ROCHESTER, MINN. | THURSDAY, JULY 15, 2021 | ONE SECTION

COMMUNITY CONCERNED

5 common questions about the meeting

BY JORDAN SHEARER
jshearer@postbulletin.com

Dozens of people congregated Tuesday night for the Rochester School Board meeting, raising concerns about “government speech,” critical race theory, and the mandatory use of masks.

We answered a few of the questions that arose from the meeting.

WHAT IS THE DISTRICT'S STANCE ON CRITICAL RACE THEORY?

“Critical race theory” is an academic concept that has been around for decades.

According to Encyclopedia Britannica, it’s an “intellectual movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color.”

The concept has surged to the forefront of the national conversation, taking on a new definition in the process. According to Minnesota Public Radio, the concept has been used as a catch-all to “describe the teaching of systemic racism and efforts entailing diversity, equity and inclusion.”

After the meeting, Interim Superintendent Kent Pekel clarified that while the district doesn’t teach critical race theory, it does care about equity and making sure all students succeed.

Last year, the School Board approved a three-year equity plan that included the hiring of an executive director of diversity, equity and inclusion.

WHAT PROMPTED THE LARGE TURNOUT?

The crowd was not objecting to anything listed on the School Board’s agenda. Rather, they were protesting larger issues that have been, or were perceived to have been, ongoing in the district.

See **MEETING**, Page 3



Joe Ahlquist / jahlquist@postbulletin.com

Audience members cheer and wave signs during a Rochester School Board meeting Tuesday at the Edison Administration Building. A group of people opposed to critical race theory and masking to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 filled the audience during the public comment portion of the meeting.

Students, parents unnerved by disruption

BY JOHN MOLSEED
jmolseed@postbulletin.com

Mary Gorfine thought Tuesday night’s School Board meeting would be a chance for students to see civil discourse in action.

What she saw, she said, was far from civil. The sights of agitated commenters commandeering the meeting left those students and other students of color and their parents unsettled.

Gorfine, program coordinator for the Rochester-Olmsted Youth Commission, said the students she brought felt intimidated and scared. One declined to speak on the record for fear of their safety.

“It kind of seemed like a mob,” said Yasmin Ali, who will be a senior at Mayo High School this fall. “It kind of seemed like mass hysteria.”

She first learned that a group was there via text messages from friends who

attended the meeting.

Members of a group decrying “government speech,” critical race theory, and the mask mandates within the district spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting. They carried signs denouncing the Black Lives Matter movement, dominated the public comments portion of the meeting, and talked over other commenters.

They interrupted the meeting with a group prayer and left before the School Board took up the business on the meeting agenda.

Ali’s friends at the meeting, who are Muslim, said they were intimidated by the display.

“They were worried, and I was just very concerned and worried about them,” she



Ali

“It kind of seemed like a mob ... like mass hysteria.”

YASMIN ALI, MAYO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

said.

Multiple commenters claimed the district was indoctrinating students with critical race theory, which isn’t taught in any RPS K-12 curricula, district officials said.

“I don’t know where they got the idea it’s embedded in our curricula,” Ali said, adding that she would like to see racial equity explored more in school.

She said she took an ethnic studies class that is offered in all three high schools. However, much of the conversation about race, equality and other issues

she hears are initiated by students.

“I think they got it all wrong,” Ali said of the group that disrupted the meeting Tuesday. “We’re the ones who want to learn about each other and have these conversations.”

Parents and others who regularly attend the School Board meetings said the behavior was unsettling.

“As a Black parent, I look at our school board, our cabinet, as stewards of the community,” said Kamau Wilkins, co-founder of Rochester for Justice. “To have people come at them like this ... to see them railroaded like this, is pretty disgusting.”

Wilkins, who has been critical of the district for its racial disparities in discipline and achievement among students of color, said he always felt pressure to keep his tone and demeanor calm and non-threatening.

See **DISRUPTION**, Page 3

Inside the Olmsted County weather station

Employees, trained storm spotters work together on severe weather

BY EMILY CUTTS
ecutts@postbulletin.com

Before the rain started to fall Wednesday morning, Olmsted County Sheriff’s Capt. Jonathan Jacobson was ready.

Sitting in the weather station at the Emergency Operations Center, Jacobson watched the computer screens in front of him showing him radar and weather reports from the area, as well as a screen that held the county’s emergency alert notification buttons, and another that would allow him to communicate with sheriff’s deputies throughout the county.

About seven months into his job as the director of emergency management for the Olmsted County Sheriff’s Office, Jacobson is one of the people the sheriff’s office relies on when severe weather is in the forecast.

But Jacobson doesn’t work alone. All members of the sheriff’s office are storm-spotter trained. Using patrol deputies and volunteers who are SKYWARN-trained spotters and ham radio users, Jacobson relies on technology and people power to keep an eye on the skies as weather develops.

Just before 10 a.m. Wednesday, Rochester resident

Steve Wiebke walked into the weather station and took his seat at the second desk in the room. A ham radio enthusiast and a SKYWARN-trained spotter, Wiebke traces his love of ham radio back to childhood. He’s been a trained spotter for about two decades.

Wiebke spent the morning communicating with the other volunteers serving as storm spotters spread throughout the county. He is also able to track the volunteer storm spotters, which can be helpful in directing one person to a specific area to gather a report.

See **WEATHER**, Page 3



Ken Klotzbach / kklotzbach@postbulletin.com

Capt. Jonathan Jacobson, director of emergency management for the Olmsted County Sheriff’s Office, monitors a storm Wednesday as it approaches Rochester.

Weather

From page 1

Once a spotter radios information to Wiebke, he will then relay that information to Jacobson, sitting to his right. If necessary, Jacobson will radio the information to the National Weather Service in La Crosse. Jacobson can also sound off any siren in Olmsted County if needed.

Those in the weather station mainly rely on spotters to get a glimpse of the outside. While those in the weather

station are able to see the outside world through surveillance cameras, there are no windows in the basement room, nor can the outside world be easily heard.

A set of two potentially strong storms were forecast to hit the county Wednesday — one in the morning, and another that afternoon. Jacobson attended a webinar Tuesday put on by the National Weather Service in La Crosse about their storm potential.

On Wednesday, Jacobson started the day in his office, but by 9 a.m. had moved down

to the weather center. With reports of 50 to 60 mph winds, he also sent out alerts to the city and county parks.

By 10 a.m., the strong storms that appeared to be approaching Olmsted County had petered out. The radar picked up little lightning or hail. Once the band of rain passed through the county, Jacobson and his team took a break from the weather center, with the expectation to return in the late afternoon.

Post Bulletin reporter Erich Fisher contributed to this report.

Disruption

From page 1

Seeing video of people yelling and pointing, Wilkins said he would have been met with sterner rebukes, or possibly police escort from the room.

The meeting also demonstrated the organization of opponents to equity efforts in schools.

“When Rochester for Justice or the racial equity advisory team merely asked for people to show up in support, we’d get maybe five people there,”

Wilkins said. Ali said that concerns her. “It kind of worries me, because oftentimes, the loudest voices in the room are the first you hear,” she said. “The student voices should be at the center.”

“These people, from what we saw last night, are motivated,” Wilkins said. “Meanwhile, the well-meaning non-racists are just sitting on the sidelines cheering on the Black and brown people, but do nothing under the hot, seething anger of what amounts to white supremacy.”

to the editor about the board’s decision. “The fact they were trying to find a way around the First Amendment in order to reserve authority for their own preferred speech is unconstitutional. Literally un-American,” Kaskubar wrote.

WHY DID THE LIVE FEED QUIT RIGHT AFTER IT STARTED?

The School Board doesn’t film the public comment section at its meetings. That means the live feed for Tuesday’s meeting began just after the public comment section ended and the main meeting was set to begin.

After the live stream started, a section of the crowd spontaneously started reciting the Lord’s Prayer as it was leaving. Once the audience began doing so, the live stream cut out. Communications Director Heather Nessler said it was most likely due to confusion about whether the main meeting had actually begun.

“We don’t start the feed until the meeting’s called to order; my assumption is that they just stopped the meeting until we were in a position where we had full order,” she said. “I think it was just a matter of not being able to hear and then waiting to make sure we were gaveled in.”

Meeting

From page 1

Much of the turnout for the meeting came together through grassroots efforts.

• For more, visit PostBulletin.com.

Matter

- ▶ All Are Welcome Here
- ▶ Stop Asian Hate

The district’s attorney, John Edison, explained how the concept of “government speech” intersects with the First Amendment.

“On this issue, it is the government itself that is speaking,” Edison said during the April 27 meeting. “What the courts have to say about that from a First Amendment standpoint is that it is the government’s message that it is putting out there when it is speaking, and it can control what that message is. So you don’t have the same issue about people coming forward and saying by expressing a certain message that you have to allow others to be expressed, too. That concept does not apply when you’re talking about government speech.”

The resolution prompted backlash, with critics arguing that the implementation of “government speech” is another form of free-speech infringement. In addition to receiving criticism during Tuesday’s meeting, Former Olmsted County Republican Party Chairman Bruce Kaskubar wrote a letter

to the editor about the board’s decision. “The fact they were trying to find a way around the First Amendment in order to reserve authority for their own preferred speech is unconstitutional. Literally un-American,” Kaskubar wrote.

WHAT’S THE DISTRICT’S POLICY ON MASKS?

According to the district’s summer school policy, students under 11 are required to wear masks. Students over 12 are not required to wear masks if they’re vaccinated. However, all students have to wear masks while they are on the bus. No students have to wear masks when they’re outside.

The School Board on Tuesday approved a resolution, directing the superintendent to provide possible changes to the face-covering policy based on current recommendations from authorities such as Olmsted County Public Health and Mayo Clinic.

WHAT IS THE DISTRICT’S STANCE ON ‘GOVERNMENT SPEECH’?

On April 27, the School Board approved a resolution on “government speech.” The resolution said the rainbow-colored Pride flag would be considered government speech, as would the following statements:

- ▶ Black Lives Matter
- ▶ Brown Lives Matter
- ▶ Indigenous Lives

WHY DID THE LIVE FEED QUIT RIGHT AFTER IT STARTED?

The School Board doesn’t film the public comment section at its meetings. That means the live feed for Tuesday’s meeting began just after the public comment section ended and the main meeting was set to begin.

After the live stream started, a section of the crowd spontaneously started reciting the Lord’s Prayer as it was leaving. Once the audience began doing so, the live stream cut out. Communications Director Heather Nessler said it was most likely due to confusion about whether the main meeting had actually begun.

“We don’t start the feed until the meeting’s called to order; my assumption is that they just stopped the meeting until we were in a position where we had full order,” she said. “I think it was just a matter of not being able to hear and then waiting to make sure we were gaveled in.”

LOTTERY

- Minnesota Daily 3**
Wednesday: 4-9-1
- Minnesota Northstar Cash**
Wednesday: 3-14-22-24-26
- Minnesota Gopher 5**
Wednesday: 6-7-9-37-46
- Wisconsin Supercash**
Wednesday: 10-11-20-22-25-30

- All or Nothing**
Wednesday: 4-5-10-11-12-13-14-16-17-19-22
- Wisconsin Badger 5**
Wednesday: 12-14-16-23-31
- Wisconsin Pick 3**
Wednesday: 3-8-6
- Wisconsin Pick 4**
Wednesday: 9-7-9-3

HEALTH NOTIFICATION

Are you hard of Hearing?



A major name brand hearing aid provider wishes to field test a remarkable new digital hearing instrument in the area. This offer is free of charge and you are under no obligation.

These revolutionary 100% Digital instruments use the latest technology to comfortably and almost invisibly help you hear more clearly. This technology solves the “stopped up ears” and “head in a barrel” sensation some people experience.

If you wish to participate, you will be required to have your hearing tested in our office **FREE OF CHARGE*** to determine candidacy and review your results with the hearing instruments with our hearing care specialist.

At the end of this evaluation, you may keep your instrument, if you so desire, at a tremendous savings for participating in this field test. Special testing will be done to determine the increased benefits of this technology.

Benefits of hearing aids vary by type and degree of hearing loss, noise environment, accuracy of hearing test, and proper fit. This is a wonderful opportunity to determine if hearing help is available for your hearing loss and get help at a very affordable price.

SOME FEDERAL WORKERS AND RETIREES MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR HEARING AIDS AT NO COST!

THAT’S RIGHT... NO CO PAY! NO EXAM FEE! NO ADJUSTMENT FEE!

MOST INSURANCE PLANS ARE ACCEPTED INCLUDING BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD

CALL NOW IF YOU WISH TO BE INCLUDED IN THIS FIELD TEST

2 FOR \$995*

*Valid on MINI Solution 1 hearing aids. Expires 7/30/21.

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

Come in today and let us help you start your hearing journey

Call today to make your reservation for the Hearing Aid Field Test

FREE

\$20 CVS or Walgreen Gift Card*

*Limit one \$20 gift card per customer. Not redeemable for cash. Hearing test must be performed and customer must be 60 years of age or older to qualify. Must bring a spouse or relative for hearing tests. While supplies last. Offer expires 7/30/2021.

FINANCING OPTIONS AVAILABLE THROUGH JULY 30TH, 2021

100% FINANCING APPROVAL^{††}

Because everyone deserved better hearing!

OR

12 MONTHS^{††} INTEREST FREE FINANCING

On Any Miracle Ear Hearing Aid!

CALL TOLL FREE

1-888-387-3068

MIRACLE-EAR HEARING AID CENTERS

SHOPPES ON MAINE

4270 Main Ave SE
meoffer.me/rochester-mn

WINONA

East Lake Plaza
940 Frontenac Dr.
meoffer.me/winona

RED WING

3049 S. Service Drive
meoffer.me/redwing

CODE: VH135491

Hillcrest Shopping Center
1654 US-52 Rochester, MN
Charlieseateryandpub.com
507-285-9229

DAILY BREAKFAST SPECIALS

BREAKFAST

SERVED UNTIL 2 PM

Rochester Elks Lodge #1091 sponsors

BAR BINGO

EVERY MONDAY AND
THURSDAY NIGHT AT 6:30 PM

JOIN THE FUN!

KARAOKE EVERY
WEDNESDAY NIGHT
AT 7:30 PM

*Risk Free Offer - The aids must be returned within 45 days of delivery if not completely satisfied and 100% of the purchase price will be refunded. **Hearing test is an audiometric test to determine proper amplification needs only. These are not medical exams or diagnoses. Blue Cross Blue Shield, the Blue Cross, the Blue Shield, BCBS, and Federal Employee Program are a registered trademark of Blue Cross Blue Shield Association. Blue Cross Blue Shield Association and its independent licensees are not affiliated with, nor do they endorse or sponsor, the contents of this advertisement. Trademarks referring to specific providers are used by Miracle Ear for nominative purposes only: to truthfully identify the source of the services about which information is provided. Such trademarks are solely the property of their respective owners. ††Financing options may not be combined. See stores for details. Available through 7/30/2021.