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WAPS to gauge referendum support

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) will soon survey community members about a multi-million dollar facilities referendum that would upgrade local schools and possibly be on the ballot this fall. School Board members recently approved the survey with the firm Leatherman at an estimated cost of \$16,000. School Board members also recently held

a meeting with members of the task force that recommended that the district upgrade all of its buildings and address high priority deferred maintenance. WAPS' architecture firm Wold estimated the cost of doing so would be about \$85.5 million. At the meeting, task force members explained their recommendation and discussed when they would hold a referendum with School Board members.

The group that will conduct the survey

and the district are still in the process of developing questions, School Board Chair Nancy Denzer said in an interview. The board will review the questions, she added. She said the board will want to find out through the survey whether community members would be willing to support a referendum and what type of referendum they might support. She later continued, "The board wants to know if the community is supportive of moving forward, supportive

of doing it in some sort of a sequential time frame, or would they support a big referendum or a smaller referendum."

School Board member Karl Sonneman said in an interview that it could be difficult to determine how to craft and organize questions, while noting that a more clear question would be asking community members whether they would vote for

see **REFERENDUM** page 9a

'Washington,' loaned paintings leaving MMAM



by CHRIS ROGERS

So long, George. One of two surviving versions of the iconic painting "Washington Crossing the Delaware" left Winona's Minnesota Marine Art Museum (MMAM) last month and is now up for auction. Christie's auction house estimates it may go for \$15-20 million. MMAM has its own permanent

collection as well as traveling exhibits, but "Washington" was one of numerous paintings on loan to the museum from collectors Bob Kierlin and Mary Burrichter. Kierlin and Burrichter said they are pulling all of their loaned paintings from MMAM with plans to move some to

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File photo

A Minnesota Marine Art Museum docent talks with a class of elementary students about "Washington Crossing the Delaware." The famous piece is one of numerous paintings that were on loan at the museum and are now set to be relocated or sold.

Winona eyes future bonds

by CESAR SALAZAR

The Winona City Council could be looking into issuing a bond in 2023 to help fund the proposed joint police-fire station project.

Financial consultants from Baker Tilly held a presentation for the City Council on April 18. Consultants Terri Heaton and Chris Hogan presented a series of slides showing how the tax levy, operating cost, future debt (bond) issuance, and even the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) could impact the city's budget. "This is our first step for the 2023 budget process," City Manager Chad Ubl said in an interview.

Bonds are loans that the city requests and are repaid with property taxes. In the example given in Baker Tilly's presentation, for a home valued at \$200,000, a \$10 million bond would see the property tax raised by \$53 in a year; for a \$20 million bond, an extra \$110; and for a \$30 million bond, an extra \$164.

Ubl said that while the presentation did explore bond issuance, the dollar amounts given were just examples and that if the city were to issue a bond, it would be a more specific number. He also said the city is not planning on issuing one this year and that bonds are considered every year.

Ubl did explain that if the city decides

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When Winona bought up land for fire station

by CESAR SALAZAR

With the Winona City Council considering building a joint police-fire station in the future, the question remains as to what the city will do with the current Winona Fire Department (WFD) property and land.

For the past 15 years, the city had planned to renovate the current Central Fire Station, as it had exceeded its service years and required an update to meet the city's current needs, according to WFD Fire Chief Curt Bittle. Over a decade ago, the city purchased three residential properties surrounding the fire station as part of a project to renovate the station. The plans to renovate have yet to come to fruition, and the three properties have been solely used as a gravel parking lot for over a decade.

"The typical life expectancy of a fire station is about 50 years, and we're well into that with this being constructed in 1957," Bittle said in an interview. "The way this station was designed back in the

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WSHS band preps for big show



Photo by Alexandra Retter

From left, WSHS Symphonic Band students Thomas Modjeski, Marcus Winter and Chloey Klink rehearse for an upcoming concert.

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

On a warm Thursday in April, Winona Senior High School (WSHS) students are keeping track of whether their instruments are in tune, how loudly they are playing and whether they are in time with the conductor and the rest of the band as they rehearse for an upcoming concert.

The concert, the 88th Annual Big 9

Music Festival, rotates between the Big 9 Schools each year, and for 2022, it will be in Austin, Minn., at WSHS Symphonic Band Director Myron Haug's alma mater. "We get to play on the stage I grew up on," he said.

It is one of the few chances the band has had to perform since 2019, Haug said. "I get to be me on the podium," he said. "That's where I'm most at home."

There will also be a preview concert at WSHS on April 27.

Among the students rehearsing are Olivia Stark, Kyra Benson, Lindsey MacLennan, Grace Quinn and Carolyn Maccon, all seniors and drum majors who are in symphonic band.

"I'm looking forward to hearing us

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Paintings

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a proposed new music hall and art gallery in downtown Winona — dubbed Minnesota Masterpiece Hall — while selling others to raise funds for that venue.

It marks a change for both the collectors and the museum. Kierlin and Burrichter said they're changing their focus to Masterpiece Hall with hopes to draw many new visitors to Winona, while MMAM Executive Director Scott Pollock said the museum is looking to broaden the types of artwork it shares and the audiences it appeals to.

Since it came to Winona in 2015, "Washington Crossing the Delaware" has been one of the most famous and recognizable paintings at MMAM. "We enjoyed exhibiting this iconic, historic, and popular painting," Pollock said in a statement. "It paired well with many other artists we have and have had on display, including historical works of art by Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Claude Monet, Georgia O'Keefe, Mary Cassatt, John James Audubon, and James Hope."

"Needless to say, it broke our heart," Pollock said of "Washington" leaving the museum. Still, he said in an interview, it's a normal part of museum work: collectors loan pieces, and someday they want them back. Even with traveling exhibits, it's sad to see them go, he added.

"We were so grateful and honored to display this great work of art," MMAM Communications Manager Caitlin Crouchet said. She added, "We think the addition of Minnesota Masterpiece Hall will be great for the arts ecosystem in Winona."

Burrichter and Kierlin were founders of the MMAM. Kierlin is also one of the founders of Fastenal, and the planned site of Masterpiece Hall is adjacent to his recent Main Square Community building on Main Street downtown.

Asked why he was selling "Washington," Kierlin said in an interview, "What we came to appreciate is that we had a significant investment in our art collection, which was done to foster economic development for Winona, with hoping that [the paintings] being on exhibit here in Winona it would attract tourism here to the Winona area. And as it turned out, the number of visitors to the MMAM, where our col-

lection is held, has been about 30,000 a year, rather than our hoped for 80-100,000 visitors a year, which says the investment that we have could be better used in other areas here in Winona for economic development. And that led to the inauguration of the plans for Minnesota Masterpiece Hall, which will combine some of our art which will remain, as well as a concert hall that we think will attract many tourists."

"30,000 visitors a year is pretty significant for any museum located 2-3 hours outside a metro market," Pollock said. He said the museum has done a wonderful job to date of fulfilling its mission — connecting people to great art inspired by water — and is excited to grow its audience, as well.

Kierlin and Burrichter said their goal is for Masterpiece Hall to feature world-class classical musicians and draw people from across North America. "Our goal with the MMAM was to bring in people internationally and nationally, and the museum is going more towards attracting regional people ... even the Winona people with the dollar Saturdays," Burrichter said.

MMAM has featured work by national and international figures, and Pollock said it plans to bring in more national artwork. Museum staff members are also proud of their work to collaborate with regional and local organizations and expand access to the museum with \$1 admissions, live music, and activities on its Seasonal Saturdays. The last event in March drew 775 people in one day, Pollock said. The next one is May 14.

Kierlin and Burrichter said they own roughly 200 paintings that were or still are on loan to the MMAM and have donated another 130 pieces to the museum's collection, as well as contributing to an MMAM endowment fund. They said they would sell most of the American art in their collection — with the exception of Winslow Homer pieces — while retaining some of their European artwork for display at Masterpiece Hall. Burrichter said that they began recalling loaned pieces from the museum in January, a process that will continue in the coming weeks and months.

The sales will help fund Masterpiece Hall, Kierlin and Burrichter said, adding that that was part of the reason for selling the pieces now. "To pay for the Minnesota Masterpiece Hall and some other development ideas we have in Winona, in terms of education and other functions, we are going to be selling most of our American

collection," Kierlin said. Burrichter added, "Instead of having it in art, that money is really going to be transferred to the new project." Construction is expected to cost up to \$35 million.

"It's bittersweet with deaccessioning," Burrichter said. "Each one of these [paintings] I've had an emotional attachment to ... I've had to put my emotion on the new project and treat this as a business because it is part of the business of the new project."

A major part of what makes Winona's economy strong, Kierlin said, is that "we have so much that brings outside dollars into the community." His goal with Masterpiece Hall is to build on that by bringing in more visitors and commerce.

While some fan favorites are leaving, there's still plenty to see at MMAM, the founding collectors and museum staff said. The museum walls are still full of art, and if someone wasn't familiar with the paintings, they probably wouldn't notice anything was missing, Burrichter said.

On May 18, MMAM will announce further plans for its future, including steps "to diversify the museum's collecting strategies and expand its exhibiting partners." That will include work to display more artwork from other institutions' collections, Pollock said, noting, "Ninety-five percent of museum art collections are sitting in basements."

MMAM also wants to broaden its audience. Right now, the museum appeals primarily to art history aficionados and lovers of maritime heritage, Pollock said. But there are many more audiences the museum could serve, as well, he explained. The "Cloth as Community: Hmong Textiles in America" exhibit that runs through May 22 brought in an entirely different crowd, for example. "We are just starting to peel back ... and understand, what are the other red carpets we want to roll out," Pollock said.

"There is always a constant story to be told about great art inspired by water," Pollock said. "It's never dominated by one particular piece or artist or narrative." He continued, "We are so grateful to have had works like this, and we are so grateful to have had great investors in the organization ... They and the other contributors who created this space have created a great foundation for [the museum's] existence beyond the paintings on loan."

Chris@winonapost.com

Ready Set School pours drinks for a good cause

On Friday, April 29, Ready Set School board members Leah Dold and Justin Hanson will be volunteering their time from 4-8 p.m. to bartend at Gabby's Bar & Lounge at 179 East Third Street in Winona. Any tips given to the celebrity bartenders will be donated to Ready Set School.

Ready Set School works to ensure that all Winona County children, grades K-12, have the basic and necessary school supplies and clothing for school. One hundred percent of the money raised by Ready Set School goes directly to the qualifying students in the form of vouchers which can be used at area stores for school supplies and vouchers. Learn more at readysetschoolwinona.org.

Future bonds

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on going forward with the \$23-26 million joint public safety center project, it would need to find a funding source. He added that there are a few options as to how the project could be paid.

In addition to city debt, requesting state funding, also known as bonding, could be a possible option. "We're working with our state representatives to see if a state bond is feasible," Ubl said. He continued that if the city qualified for state bonding, "We would require a match from the city." That match could be funded by a local bond. "State bonding could be ... in conjunction with local bonding and other funding," Ubl said.

The presentation showed the City Council general information for how the bond issuance could work at three cost tiers. "We showed 10, 20, and 30 million [dollar figures]," Ubl said. "We don't have a solid cost on the safety center. If we were serious we would have an odd number."

Ubl noted that once the city gets an estimated cost of building the potential public safety center, the city could possibly issue a bond with a figure closer to the estimated costs.

Ultimately, while the city is not considering a local bond for this year, the city could potentially need one in the future, but it could be alongside a state bond and other funding methods, such as grants and taxes, according to Ubl.

"At this time we don't have anything we would bond for, but there are some projects that the council is potentially considering," Winona Financial Director Jessica Wojahn said. "We thought that [the presentation] might be helpful information for the council in the event that they would choose to investigate the project with it."

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Big show

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play. I feel like that will definitely bring a chill, because it will be one of the last big things of our high school career," MacLennan said.

"And I'm excited to hear other bands ... It will be interesting to hear other people our same age," Benson said.

"I'm interested to see the other conducting styles," Macon said.

The band, choir and orchestra of every school perform throughout the day of the festival, so students have an opportunity to play and listen to other groups, Haug said. While enjoying other groups' performances, students write critiques. Students also receive critiques from clinicians.

After all the groups perform, select top students from throughout the Big 9 will come together to perform that night, conducted by the clinicians who gave critiques previously.

The WSHS symphonic band will perform "Sky is Waiting," "Down a Country Lane" and "Let Us Renew."

The students said one of the pieces is slower and quieter, with a focus on tone and pitch, while another is more up-tempo. The pieces also feature each section of the band, they said.

Haug put careful consideration into selecting the pieces. "After spending this much time with them, you get a feel for where they are at and where their strengths are and what they enjoy doing," Haug said. "And they just like playing. So I really tried to pick the tunes that encapsulate that — their

joy of playing together. They really inspire one another to play at a different level."

The band began rehearsing the pieces months ago, toward the start of this year. Rehearsals include tuning and warming up, to start, then working on dynamics, playing through parts of songs, playing through entire songs and working up to the most difficult piece of the several they will perform.

Throughout this process, Haug enjoyed students discovering what sounds good and what does not while rehearsing the pieces. Haug also appreciated the respect between himself and the students as they worked to interpret the music and brought their sometimes different interpretations together.

Preparing for the concert was far from the only time the students played together. Some have been in band with one another for about eight years.

"I feel like the friendships throughout not only just our section but the whole band have grown, especially these last three years in high school, through COVID," MacLennan said. That included rehearsing as a band over Zoom.

"You get to know the kids in your section really well," Macon said. With those friendships come band humor about cracked reeds, for example.

The students agreed that band brings together different people, as well. "The people I sit next to, I would probably not be friends with outside of band, so it's really cool," Benson said.

Many band members are also athletes, Haug said. "It all works hand-in-hand ... We're just trying to make well-rounded individuals that accept everyone," he said.

Stark agreed. "I think it's really unique that we're not just tied down to one activity,


because a lot of people in band are in a sport or multiple sports, so it's cool we can do band but also do a sport," Stark said. Some musicians who also are on the football team have played in the stands after their game, for instance, she said.

While eagerly awaiting the return of the festival, Haug reflected on band members' perseverance throughout the pandemic.

"I can't say enough about the leadership that they showed throughout the past three years, not just the past year ... And the fact that our students stayed. They didn't drop out. They stuck with us. That speaks a lot for their character," Haug said.

The preview concert will take place at WSHS on Wednesday, April 27, at 7:30 p.m.

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