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Hope Lutheran opens new school – 3B

Daley Farm appeal denied – 5B

Caledonia beats out Winhawks volleyball – 6B



WSU sets plan for Children's Center – 4B

All options on table for future of WAPS bldgs.

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Facing about \$63 million in deferred maintenance and declining enrollment, Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) is preparing to make big decisions about

the future of its school buildings. Some School Board members said substantial changes — such building a new school or reorganizing schools — are not off the table. School Board members voted on August

19 to create an updated master facility plan. WAPS will also be developing a task force of board, community and staff members to gauge community sentiment on the future of the district's facilities. The

question of whether WAPS will pursue a referendum to borrow money for building projects remains open, as well, though board members set November 2022 as the

see **WAPS** page 5a

Winona revokes mayor's mask mandate



Winona city budget: 5% tax hike, staffing cuts

by CHRIS ROGERS

The city of Winona's draft budget for next year proposes a 5-percent tax hike, staffing cuts, reduced funding for road repair, and plans to spend some of the city's reserves. It would mark the largest reduction in city staff since the Great Recession and a bit of austerity for a city that has become more fiscally ambitious in recent years. At the same time, the 5-percent tax hike is in the middle of the pack when compared to property tax levy increases over the past five years.

The draft budget included \$470,000 for repairing neighborhood city streets, down from the normal \$800,000 or more. The City Council reduced that figure to \$365,000 on Monday after voting not to use city reserve funds on street repair.

The budget includes a placeholder for the \$6.3-million dollar community center project — which would relocate the city's senior center to the East Recreation Center — to be paid for with state or federal funds, but no such funding exists. City staff also proposed spending \$1.8 million in COVID relief funds to add air conditioning to the Masonic Temple, which the city plans to use as an arts center in the future.

"I would not vote for the budget as presented," City Council member Michelle

see **TAX HIKE** page 5a

County Board plans its own mask mandate

by CHRIS ROGERS

In a flurry of activity last week, a mayoral mask mandate was in place in the city of Winona for less than 36 hours before the Winona City Council voted 4-3 to rescind it. Meanwhile, the Winona County Board voted 3-2 to pursue a countywide mask mandate, with a public hearing on the proposal expected later this month. The order made Winona

one of the first local governments in Minnesota to require masks since a state mask order expired earlier this summer.

With the goal of curtailing a surge in local COVID infections, Winona Mayor Scott Sherman issued an emergency order requiring face masks in all indoor, public settings citywide last Wednesday. The city announced the order at about 5 p.m., and it took effect at midnight the same night. On Friday morning, the City Council put an immediate end to the mask mandate, with council members Michelle Alexander, George Borzyskowski,

see **MASK MANDATE** page 8a

Photo by Chris Rogers

Winona County Board members Greg Olson (right) and Marcia Ward (left) debated a possible countywide mask mandate last Tuesday night.

Hospitals stretched by COVID surge

by CHRIS ROGERS

Area hospitals are feeling the impact from this summer's COVID surge. Winona Health and Gundersen Health System doctors said their and other regional hospitals are operating near maximum capacity, the delta variant is making some relatively young people gravely ill, and the strain of the pandemic is wearing on health care workers.

Locally and across Minnesota and Wisconsin, COVID infections shot up in August as the more infectious delta variant took hold. Hospitalizations also rose. In Wisconsin, the number of people actively hospitalized for COVID went from 93 patients on July 15 to 804 on August 24, according to the latest Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) data. Eighty-nine percent of hospital beds in Wisconsin are currently in use, and 92 percent of intensive care unit (ICU) beds. In Minnesota, the seven-day average for new hospitalizations rose from 20 patients on July 15 to 74 on August 26. According to the Minnesota Department of Health, 93.7 percent of hospital beds in Southeast Minnesota are full.

"We are being inundated with patients, and we are struggling to keep up," Gundersen Health System Regional Manager Lindsey

see **SURGE** page 5a

WSHS principal makes an impression



Photo by Alexandra Retter

Heather Fitzloff, Winona Senior High School's new principal, wants to be accessible and approachable for students, families, staff and community members.

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Heather Fitzloff let teachers know she may stop by their classrooms, just to interact with students and watch them learn. Winona Senior High School's (WSHS) new principal wants to be approachable, visible and accessible for students, families, staff and community members. "I don't want kids to not know who their principal is," Fitzloff said. "I

want them to know I'm here to help and listen, and I want families to feel that, as well."

Social studies teacher Linda Pfeilsticker said Fitzloff listens, asks good questions and treats staff and students in a caring, positive way. "She sees them as a person, as a human being first," Pfeilsticker said.

"And I think that feeling that your teachers truly care

about you and look out for you, believe in you, inspire you, that role is so instrumental to all kids," Fitzloff said.

Superintendent Annette Freiheit agreed with Pfeilsticker. "[Fitzloff] has just a great sense of empathy and understanding and commitment to students, and their student voice, along with staff and their staff voice," Freiheit said.

see **PRINCIPAL** page 8a

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Mask mandate

continued from page 1a

Aaron Repinski, and Steve Young voting to revoke the order. Council members Eileen Moeller, Pam Eyden, and Mayor Sherman dissented.

"Masks and vaccines should remain a personal choice," Young said in an interview. "We should not be mandating that. Government should not be mandating that. If you're concerned about the virus, get vaccinated and wear a mask. If you're not concerned, you shouldn't have to submit to government."

"I think that's what the majority of Winona wants," Repinski agreed. He also acknowledged that things could change. "At this time, I feel it was the correct decision," Repinski said. "Now, in the future, who knows."

"I'm disappointed," Sherman told the Post after the vote. "I do feel it's a public health issue. One of our jobs as elected officials is to protect our community." Pointing to a rapid rise in cases and hospitalizations, he added, "This could potentially cost lives, and I am worried about that, but I know I made the right decision." Recalling his support for the Broadway road diet, Sherman said at the meeting, "Inconvenience will never outweigh a human life in my mind."

Young said he heard from numerous small business owners concerned about the mandate. He recalled one conversation, "A restaurant owner in particular said, 'I lost a lot of money last year. I can't survive another year with masks. I can't survive with masks. People go right across the river to Fountain City, La Crosse and Holmen.'"

Asked if he thought masks help reduce COVID transmission, Young responded, "If high-quality masks are worn correctly by all people all the time, it helps. Yet here's the proof on a society basis that it doesn't help ... Last winter Wisconsin didn't wear masks and Minnesota was under a mask mandate and serious restrictions on how we could gather, and the cases were about the same."

Wisconsin did have a mask mandate last winter.

"There's evidence pointing both ways,"

Repinski said of whether masks help reduce the spread of COVID.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control, MDH, Winona County Public Health, and Winona Health say masks are an effective strategy that should be used in combination with others to reduce the spread of the virus.

In an interview after the vote, Moeller said of masks, "I think it's one tool that helps slow the spread," adding that she was worried for the health and safety of citizens. She expressed some disappointment with the City Council's decision, saying, "I think that we have to go based on the advice of health care professionals and scientists, and the information that was presented — [masking] was the recommendation."

Leading up to the vote, the City Council heard from local health officials about what they described as a fourth surge of the pandemic.

Winona Health CEO Rachele Schultz said masking is an effective and important strategy to reduce the risk of COVID transmission. Like others, she stressed the importance of vaccinations. "We are not out of the pandemic yet and our respective actions matter," Schultz said.

"We are in a surge right now," Winona County Health and Human Services Director Karen Sanness said, noting that vaccination is a key tool to stop the spread of the virus, along with hand washing, social distancing, and masking. Trying to prevent transmission — "This is everybody's responsibility," she said.

Asked what future options remain for trying to mitigate the spread of COVID, Sherman responded, "We need to look to the County Board and the county to look at implementing mitigation measures. And it could turn into the governor has to do it."

Sherman faces criticism over timing

While some Winonans celebrated the mayor's order, others criticized it — both the mandate itself and the way Sherman rolled it out.

"I'm extremely disappointed, and in full opposition to being the only city in the state of Minnesota, in the Midwest to have a mask

mandate," Winona Area Chamber of Commerce President Christie Ransom said. "This is not business friendly."

Ransom said local businesses have lost customers to neighboring Wisconsin over mask mandates in the past, and many struggled to survive the past 18 months. "They have been kicked when they are down ... and the last thing they need is one more government mandate," she stated.

"I think the timing of it was all very unfortunate," City Council member Michelle Alexander said in an interview last Wednesday. "I think we could have been given a heads up." She added, "I'm a little unhappy this is the route that the mayor and staff decided to take."

Asked why he did not give people more time to prepare, Sherman responded, "I think the urgency is there in terms of the case rates ... The communication I was getting from our trusted health officials was that it probably should have been [done] two weeks ago." Describing some of the logistical challenges to preparing and issuing the order on short notice, he added, "I wish circumstances were different, that we would have had plenty of time to make this convenient for everybody. But basically what we had to do was move quickly based on the information we were receiving."

County Board votes to pursue mask mandate

Earlier in the week, on Tuesday night, the County Board voted to pursue its own countywide mask mandate. Commissioners Marie Kovcesi, Chris Meyer, and Greg Olson voted to pursue the mandate; commissioners Steve Jacob and Marcia Ward voted against it.

"I do think this is a public safety issue," Meyer said. "When we are still at a time when kids under 12 cannot be vaccinated, we are putting them at risk," she added.

Ward said of wearing masks, "Do we highly recommend it? Of course we do, but, again, that's an individual decision."

Jacob argued, "They could [mandate masks] at the federal level. They could do it at the state level. If the city of Winona wants to do it, they can ... For us to come up with a

one-size fits all solution for the entire county, I can't support that."

Jacob questioned the effectiveness of masks and suggested masking may have health risks. State and federal health agencies have refuted claims that masking poses any health risk for most people.

Olson said that the county needed to show leadership in addressing the pandemic. "If we do nothing, then nothing changes," he said. Asked why he voted to pursue a mask mandate, Olson responded, "I think public health and everyone is asking us for it." He continued, "I also had a call from the mayor [of Winona] asking us to do it, thinking that a countywide mask mandate would be better." Olson added, "All of the entities are recommending that we do it."

Sherman also described local health officials as strongly recommending a mask mandate, though the public comments of health officials were somewhat softer. Winona County Public Health Supervisor Melanie Tatge proposed a countywide mask mandate as one possible course of action, along with options to require masks just in county-owned buildings or do nothing. "I just wanted to present this to you for possible actions we could take today," she said. Schultz said she strongly supported Sherman's mask mandate, while describing city officials as initiating the conversation. "My response was, if the city chooses to move forward with that, we absolutely support it," she said. "[Masking] is a great line of defense particularly given the lower level we're at with our vaccination rate in our area."

According to Winona County Attorney Karin Sonneman, the county does not currently have the power to issue a mask mandate. She recommended the county adopt a public health emergency ordinance that would empower the county to take a variety of steps in response to a health emergency, including a mask order. Under state law, the county must hold a public hearing before approving a new ordinance. The County Board plans to set a date for a public hearing on the proposed ordinance at its September 14 meeting, County Administrator Ken Fritz said. Keep reading the Winona Post for more information.

Chris@winonapost.com

Principal

continued from page 1a

Fitzloff also has "great energy and great enthusiasm," Pfeilsticker said. In light of the pandemic, "To have somebody who is coming in who is optimistic and positive and has great energy is really important for us," Pfeilsticker continued.

Fitzloff had some very influential teachers, coaches and advisors at her small hometown high school in Southwest Wisconsin. North Crawford High School, who helped inspire her to pursue a career in education. After she sadly lost her mother at a young age, educators and community members

were the people who gave her and her extended family support.

When it came time to attend college, Fitzloff decided to earn a degree in K-12 physical education so she could give back to students. "I have a real passion for just helping kids and families that maybe have some barriers," she said. She then taught in a Chicago, Ill., suburb and in Minneapolis, Minn., and a Minneapolis suburb before earning her master's in education through Saint Mary's University of Minnesota and her administrative degree. Once an administrative position opened up at her suburban Minneapolis school, she knew she was ready to take the next step in her education career, and she accepted the job. Fitzloff then worked in her home area of Southwest

Wisconsin prior to serving as an assistant principal in the Twin Cities region for nine years. Next, she joined WSHS.

The Winona area drew Fitzloff in with its bluffs, and she now appreciates being close to some of her family members.

When she arrived at WSHS about two months ago, Fitzloff gave staff the opportunity to share a little about themselves and meet with her. Many took her up on the offer. She has met with some students, as well, including the School Board student representative and members of Student Council.

Working to foster an inclusive, equitable environment is very important to Fitzloff, she said. "At the end of the day, it's a burning passion of mine, that all students, our students of color, students in the LGBTQ

community, everybody, feels safe, loved, and that they have the opportunity to learn at high levels," she said. For Fitzloff, the work includes listening, learning throughout life about topics like implicit bias and having conversations about equity, as well as reviewing data to see if equitable practices are in place.

Fitzloff said she feels that Winhawk pride, as well as caring, welcoming staff members and mentoring and career exploration programs, are some of the high school's strengths. Looking ahead, she would like to collaborate with the community, help students explore career pathways and start an initiative to engage with families.

Education@winonapost.com

miscellaneous

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garage sale other

HUGE GARAGE SALE Friday, September 3rd, 3PM - 6 PM, Saturday, September 4th, 7 AM - 3 PM & Sunday, September 5th, 10 AM - 3 PM at Homer Civic Center, Homer Minnesota. Watch for signs. Two floors of absolutely everything. Lower level features "The Homer Unique Boutique" which includes all sizes, womens up to 2X, and all gender apparel, hats, boots, coats, shoes, girls Cotter uniforms, jewelry, & prom dresses. Big Men's sizes too. Upper level includes furniture, pet carrier, aquariums, Victorian bird cage, large parrot cages, bicycles, bedding, beautiful framed prints, lots of home decor and a whole lot of just what you've been looking for. All proceeds support Pickwick Fire & Rescue Station II, Gardner Rogers Park and the Homer Civic Center.

Multi-family Garage Sale on Garvin Heights. Saturday September 4th, 8am-4pm. 1375 Summit Dr, Winona. Items include: furniture, small appliances, jewelry, adult/youth clothing, tools/ outdoor items, home decor & holiday decorations.

Quality Rummage Sale - 1305 Skyline Drive. Thurs & Fri (9/2, 9/3) from 8-3. Miscellaneous housewares, girls and womens clothing, outdoor table.

garage sale west

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legals

First Publication Date Wednesday, September 1, 2021 STATE OF MINNESOTA COUNTY OF WINONA DISTRICT COURT THIRD JUDICIAL DISTRICT PROBATE DIVISION Court File No.: 85-PR-21-1243 In Re: Estate of JoAnn Thomas a/k/a JoAnn Thomas, Decedent. NOTICE OF INFORMAL PROBATE OF WILL AND INFORMAL APPOINTMENT OF PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE AND NOTICE TO CREDITORS Notice is given that an Application for Informal Probate of Will and Informal

Appointment of Personal Representative was filed with the Registrar, along with a Will dated October 5, 2018. The Registrar accepted the application and appointed Douglas Nopar, whose address is 29440 County Road 17, Winona, Minnesota 55987, to serve as the personal representative of the decedent's estate. Any heir, devisee or other interested person may be entitled to appointment as personal representative or may object to the appointment of the personal representative. Any objection to the appointment of the personal representative must be filed with the Court, and any properly filed objection will be heard by the Court

after notice is provided to interested persons of the date of hearing on the objection. Unless objections are filed, and unless the Court orders otherwise, the personal representative has the full power to administer the estate, including, after thirty (30) days from the issuance of letters testamentary, the power to sell, encumber, lease, or distribute any interest in real estate owned by the decedent. Notice is further given that, subject to Minn. Stat. § 524.3-801, all creditors having claims against the decedent's estate are required to present the claims to the personal representative or to the Court

within four (4) months after the date of this notice or the claims will be barred. Dated: Aug. 23, 2021, 12:33 p.m. Barb Stevensen, Deputy Probate Registrar Becky Brandt, Court Administrator Cindy K. Telstad (MN# 170227) Streater & Murphy, P.A. 111 Riverfront, Suite 301, P.O. Box 310, Winona, Minnesota, 55987 Telephone: (507) 454-2925 Facsimile: (507) 454-2929 ATTORNEY FOR PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE