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# Candidates discuss goals for WAPS

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

Two at-large Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Board seats are up for election, and with five candidates running, there will be a primary on August 9. The candidates spoke about their goals and backgrounds in interviews with the Winona Post.

Over the past few years, Anthony Alwan has spent some time in the schools as a mental health professional. Now, he would like to advocate for staff and students, based on seeing that more resources are needed, including mental health support.

Maurella Cunningham said she has 27 years of experience as an educator, includ-

ing experience in teachers' unions. She has a master's degree and doctorate degree in the education field. She also has worked with student groups and organizations in diverse communities throughout the U.S., such as Residents Organizing Against Racism in Winona. "I feel very comfortable and very confident about my abilities to ...

interact with people coming from all different communities," she said.

Incumbent School Board Chair Nancy Denzer said her 34 years in the education field and ties to the community as someone from here would support the board's work.

Torry Moore grew up in Winona and

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# New spot for Winona community garden?



by CESAR SALAZAR

Since its establishment in 2017, the community gardens located at Winona's East Rec Center (ERC) has welcomed hundreds of Winona gardeners to grow tons of produce for themselves and their neighbors. The gardens also serve as a social hub for many of its users, with many festivals and events happening throughout the year. It's clear that the garden cultivates more than just fruits and vegetables: It helps grow the community. Currently, the city hopes to establish a new community garden elsewhere in the city or, due to the current ERC project proposal,

relocate the gardens.

The community gardens are open to all Winonans, space permitting of course. The garden houses 53 plots in total that are rented out on yearly basis, with the smallest plot being \$10 and the largest being \$45. The garden also provides the tools and water that gardeners might need.

One community gardener, Carrie Putzier, has been using the gardens for two years. Putzier's current living arrangement doesn't allow her to grow more than some flowers and small plants

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Photo by Cesar Salazar

Community garden user Carrie Putzier admires her garden plot after tending to it on July 20, 2022, at the East Rec Center community garden.

# County Board hopefuls make pitch to voters

by CHRIS ROGERS

The makeup of the Winona County Board will change this fall for the first time since 2015. At a League of Women Voters forum last week, the three candidates vying to replace Commissioner Marie Kovecsi as the representative for District Two (far western Winona and Goodview) staked out differing visions for the county. The August 9 primary election will narrow the field to two candidates for the general election in November.

The three candidates are Todd Frahm, an IT manager with Plasticomp; Jerry Obieglo, the county's former veterans service officer and longtime former jail program director; and Dwayne Voegeli, a County Board member from 2003-2010 and a longtime Winona Senior High School teacher.

Describing his vision for the county, Voegeli said, "The county staff, I believe, is understaffed and we need more support, and we need to listen to ... the county staff. As a high school teacher, I have experience with administrators and others, who sometimes are very effective and other cases not so much. My vision is where we focus on listening and seeking out people with different points of view, both within the county

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# E-scooters coming to Winona

by CESAR SALAZAR

Winonans could soon be roo'tin', tootin', and scootin' around town in August, after the City Council approved an agreement with Bird Rides, Winona's first license with an e-scooter company. Bird's electric scooters will soon be rentable and roaming the streets, but what does that mean for Winonans?

The license agreement approved during the July 18 City Council meeting and existing city code established some rules and guidelines for the deployment and riding of the scooters within the city limits.

"Bird looks forward to bringing our eco-friendly e-scooters to Winona in August," a Bird spokesperson said via email. "Winona will join more than a dozen other cities in Minnesota where Bird is operating. As the city establishes its new Natural Resources and Sustainability Plan, Winona was a natural fit for our shared e-scooter program."

Last year, city officials approved an ordinance that requires approval from the city

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# 4-H teams up with Key Kids



Photo by Alexandra Retter

WAPS Key Kids student Chase Miller uses a catapult he built to launch a mini marshmallow. Students learned about force in this activity put on by Winona County 4-H as part of programming with Key Kids.

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

First thing on a Monday morning, students in Winona Area Public Schools' (WAPS) Key Kids program are wide awake. Their giggles reverberate through the gym at Goodview Elementary Schools while they answer questions about the force needed to catapult mini marshmallows, then proceed to actually

catapult the marshmallows.

The students are learning about force by making catapults in a program put on by Winona County 4-H. Key Kids and 4-H have partnered for this hands-on learning for about a year and a half. Students learn about a different topic during each session held by 4-H.

To make the catapults at this particular session, students used popsicle sticks,

rubber bands and plastic spoons. Next, after making their catapults, they lined up by a chart to see how far they could launch their mini marshmallows.

"My favorite part is just seeing how much they learn," Winona County 4-H Extension Educator Mika Miller said. "They're using their hands. They're

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# Learning for the fun of it at Winona State

by ALEXANDRA RETTER

In the 1960s, Tim Hatfield witnessed the Beatles perform not once, but twice. He saw them perform in Cincinnati, Ohio, when he was in college. “They could really play, and they were very creative and inventive,” he said. “They sang great harmony. They wrote about interesting topics and people. And they did a lot of word play, because they were really smart, too.” They also kept growing and pushing the envelope as musicians, he continued.

Hatfield has been a fan of the Beatles his entire adult life. Since seeing them perform, he has taken a Winona State University (WSU) class about the band and published pieces on the group — including an essay about his favorite work of theirs, a medley from “Abbey Road” — and a book. This fall, the former counselor education professor will teach a course about the band as part of WSU’s Senior University program. All adult community members can take courses through this program. Other courses this fall include “The Science of Climate Change,” “Fossils of the Driftless Area” and “Philosophy of Religion.”

“And it’s open not just to Winona State University people, but to anybody in the community who wants to come. Nothing would please me more than having a big crowd of people sing along to Beatles songs,” Hatfield said.

The courses are not for credit and take

place over several weeks each.

Hatfield’s class, titled “The Beatles and Us,” will be the first one Hatfield teaches for Senior University. “I love teaching, and since 2010, I’ve not been in front of a classroom, so I’ve missed that,” he said. He added that he is excited to have discussions with class members who he feels may not be hesitant to participate and ask questions. He also feels teaching the course is a way to give back.

Jim Bromeland, who taught American politics at WSU, will teach a course titled “Election 2022.” Bromeland has taught a course about elections every election cycle since 2008. Class members always arrive with lots of interest and willingness to have discussions, Bromeland said.

The theme of Bromeland’s course is how democracy can continue, given that a number of Americans do not trust election results, Bromeland said. The course will cover subjects including key House and Senate races, local races, how elections impact who controls legislative bodies and policies, and campaign financing. Bromeland strives to make the course for people who genuinely are interested in politics, but at the same time, community members do not need to have a background in the field of political science, he said.

The instructors’ work and interests helped them develop the courses. When the pandemic hit, Hatfield’s appreciation for the Beatles inspired him. To try to raise peo-

ple’s spirits, and drawing from his background in stress management, Hatfield started sending some family members and friends daily messages in March 2020 with Beatles songs and information about the songs’ backstories. The messages ended with uplifting words to help people make it through the day. After getting positive feedback, Hatfield continued sending the messages until he ran out of songs. Along the way, people encouraged him to turn the notes into a book. He edited the messages so they would not center as much on the pandemic, but relate to challenging situations in general, then had an e-book published.

Now, based on all that prior work, Hatfield’s course will cover topics such as the Beatles’ influences and musical growth, as well as their performance at the Ed Sullivan Theater and end of their career together. Hatfield plans for the course to be participatory, with opportunities to sing along for those who wish. He also plans to poll class members on their favorite Beatles songs so they can listen to them together.

Another course “Abolitionists, Underground Railroad, Freedmen’s Bureau: the Winona Connection,” will be taught by former WSU professor Carol Jefferson. The course will cover the connections of some of those in the area in the 19th century to the Underground Railroad. “They risked everything for what was morally right,” Jefferson said. She continued, “What I’m

trying to do with this course is bring this history alive.”

The course will also provide an opportunity to reflect on Jim Crow segregation, Black Lives Matter, and racism overall.

Jefferson’s research began when she started as the archivist at a local church. Ultimately, she uncovered connections between some Winonans and the Underground Railroad.

The instructors wish for the courses to be enjoyable and enlightening. “I’m looking forward to having a discussion on this overall topic about the future of democracy,” Bromeland said. “I tie that to the future of the Republican party.”

“I hope they share my concern for how dangerous this time is for democracy and resolve to become active, to do something about it,” Bromeland added.

Hatfield hopes everyone has a fun time taking the course and learns more about who the Beatles were, their music, how it changed over time and how it affected society. “They’re 50 years gone as a group ... and McCartney’s still touring as an 80-year-old and packing baseball stadiums. That’s crazy. It’s pretty unprecedented,” he said.

Course registration is available at [www.winona.edu/retiree/senioruni.asp](http://www.winona.edu/retiree/senioruni.asp).

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## Hopefuls

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and outside the county.”

Asked about his vision for serving on the County Board, Obieglo said he had earned the trust and respect of county staff and department heads. “They know my track record. They know when I come into a job, I’m going to do it right and I’m going to make sure it gets done. I don’t like excuses ... and I always try to avoid having to give an excuse. So I’m not going to accept any excuses. I’m going to make sure we communicate and make sure we serve Winona County in the best way for the least amount of money.”

Frahm joined last Tuesday’s candidate forum late and was not present to respond to this and some other questions.

## Budget priorities and social services

Asked about how he would approach balancing the budget and deciding between tax hikes and cuts to services, Voegeli said it was important to balance both keeping taxes low with providing high quality services. “If at all possible, the county property tax should be the last tax that’s used,” he said, adding that he was disappointed the legislature did not pass a bill that would have allowed a referendum on using local sales taxes — instead of property taxes — to pay for the new jail.

Obieglo said, “Services are number one with me, having worked in law enforcement and in social services as a veterans service officer, I would hate to see any of those programs cut. You just expand the problems for those who are most in need.” He added that when big companies propose major expansions in Winona, he’d like to see them invest in low-income housing, as well.

On a question about the rising costs for human services, Obieglo said that working in the jail highlighted the importance of proactive action to address mental health problems. “Tackling that is — basically you’ve got to identify the problems and the

issues with the children growing up to try to cap that,” he said. He added, “It has to start at the beginning. You’ve got to pay. I’m sorry to say we’ve got a lot of people locked up in our jail that should have been in a mental institution, but there was nowhere to go so they wound up there.”

Voegeli pointed to unfunded mandates as the primary culprit of rising costs. The county needs to talk to state and federal lawmakers about increasing funding and funding proactive interventions, he said. “We shouldn’t be cutting programs. We should be investing more in social services,” he added.

On a question about how to ensure people with disabilities receive the services they need while maintaining a balanced budget, Frahm said, the county has “fantastic resources” but more could be done. He continued, “I think the people that are in jeopardy need to be a higher priority as far as our commitment to finding money and resources for them ... As far as a budget and keeping it a balanced budget, it’s all about priorities — the seniors and those dealing with disabilities of any kind have to be kept in our hearts and make sure that we find money for them.”

Asked about the county’s consolidation of office buildings, Voegeli said, “I fear we’ve moved beyond making the county lean and mean to, unfortunately, a point where we’re now underfunded, and perhaps pennywise, pound foolish. This goes for staff, this goes for buildings ... We may have shrunk too much.” He continued, “I think there’s things we can do to make both the County Office Building and the license center more user friendly.”

Responding to the same question, Obieglo said, “As far as consolidating, I think a lot of people have gotten used to, staff-wise, working from home, which has freed up office space, and as long as they’re performing to high standard, I don’t see much problem with that.”

## Land use and the environment

Asked how the county can support property rights while protecting the environment, Voegeli said, “When I left the County Board that was a very hot topic and

still is: the balance between future generations and the rights of current individuals, the balance between considering your grandchildren and what they’re going to experience and short-term profits for real estate developers. I think what we did in the past was a good process. We had lots of hearings ... People offered very strong views. The County Board needs to listen and weigh both the current desires with the future ...”

“I’m very concerned about the environment and water quality,” Obieglo said. “Nobody should have to drink bottled water whether they’re on a farm or in town. So I’m not against anybody expanding as long as we can prove ... that any kind of expansion is going to be safe for the environment. That’s what I see. If someone is going to expand, we need to make sure their expansion is not going to affect anything in the future for drinking water or land conservation.”

Asked if he would support changing the county’s animal unit cap — which limits feedlots to 1,500 animal units — Voegeli said no. “Part of the reason is that on the books we have some good rules, some good protections, but the simple fact is we don’t have the staff at the [Minnesota Pollution Control Agency] or the [Minnesota Department of Agriculture] to enforce those rules.” He added, “Until we can get a better handle on the source of water problems, we need to be careful about making the problem worse.”

Echoing his earlier statement, Obieglo simply said, “I can support [a change to the animal unit cap] if I can be assured that it’s safe and it won’t affect the environment or drinking water.”

“I’m willing to listen as with all issues,” Frahm said. “I tend to believe that it can be safe, but again, I want to look at previous history and find out.” He added, “Maybe we can find alternatives,” such as farms purchasing surety bonds to pay for environmental cleanup in case of any problems.

Asked if they would vote to overturn the county’s ban on frac sand mining, Obieglo and Frahm said they would be open to it if it could be proved that the proposed mining was safe. Voegeli said he supports the ban, adding, “There is not a safe way

to do it.”

## Elections

A moderator asked each of the candidates, “How would you address citizens’ concerns about election integrity?”

Frahm said, “As with any discussion or debate, [the goal] is to understand where they’re coming from and not to try to convince them that my side or your side is correct ... but to convince them that their side has been acknowledged and that we can share some of the facts and some of the things that have happened so that they can come to a conclusion rather than us telling them or trying to convince [them.]”

Voegeli said the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on January 6 is part of what motivated him to run. Earlier in the night he had said that attack “should be a wakeup call to all Americans who value democracy and freedom.” He added, “It’s important for an elected official to answer a few questions ... Do you believe that Joe Biden won the election? And do you believe the events of January 6 were wrong?” He continued, “If people cannot give you a straight answer to that question, then they don’t belong in public office.”

Obieglo said, “I vote every year it comes up, hoping my vote is counted. I guess anybody who has ever had a Facebook account hacked or had their credit card number taken always has some kind of, ‘Geez, I wonder if that’s working also.’ The only way we’re going to solve that is allow people to be involved in the election process. If there’s two parties, three parties that want to be involved, that’s the best way to legitimize it — to see the process from the start.”

Ballot counting machines in Winona County are not connected to the internet, making them virtually impossible to hack from a distance, and all votes are cast on paper ballots, allowing electronic tallies to be checked against a paper trail. In 2020 and this May, the County Board allowed partisan election judges to be part of the absentee balloting process after local Republicans spoke out against plans that would have excluded them.

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## Comm. garden

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on her balcony. The garden has served as a way for her to grow bigger plants such as watermelons, squash, and cucumbers, that she might not have been able to, otherwise.

“I didn’t have vegetable plants,” Putzier said. “I might’ve had a few flowers here and there, but not like this.” She continued, saying she’s never previously used a community garden, “I thought, ‘Well, I’m retiring, this would be something fun to do, and it doesn’t cost a lot.’ My daughter seemed eager and said let’s do that.”

Her garden plot, like many others around it, was green and dense with plants, fruit, vegetables, and foliage covering every inch. Even the cinder blocks that housed the raised bed had flowers of every color and size planted within their holes.

The community gardens also serve as a way for the community to share their harvest. During the pandemic, the gardeners gave out food to the community. Gardeners also share their seeds with the city’s seed library, allowing others to come in, pick some seeds, and grow a plant, according to Recreation Director of Services Laura Hoberg.

Having community gardens was the perfect fit for the community in Winona, Hoberg believes. “The nice thing is a lot of people are aware of the benefits of gardens and that type of programming,” Hoberg said.

The community garden is such a popular

amenity that the city staff has taken notice. City staff have been looking to expand the community gardens to different locations, and Mayor Scott Sherman established a Community Garden Task Force to work with the Citizens Environmental Quality Committee (CEQC) to bring new options for gardens to the table.

The city originally intended to build a new community garden alongside the existing ERC gardens, prior to the proposal to build a police-fire-community center at the ERC. Under the current proposal for the police-fire station, the community gardens would be removed.

“The CEQC was given a number of locations to consider from the city about a year and a half ago, and all of them were essentially city-owned land that they might be willing to seed for community garden use,” CEQC and Community Garden Task Force member Niki Ciulla said.

One location that city staff believes may be the best overall option is in West Lake Park, specifically near the Dakota Street entrance, according to Natural Resources Sustainability Coordinator John Howard.

City staff believe the site is ideal, as it addresses three concerns: The site has readily available water for the garden, the site has plenty of space to house the garden, and, perhaps the biggest concern for Winonans, the site is easily accessible to gardeners. “The reason why the West Lake location is coming to the forefront right now is because the city is showing a lot of support for that location,” Ciulla said.

A major concern for the site is that it is

in a floodplain, Ciulla and Howard said. The site has slowly sunk over the years and would require fill to raise up the location to meet the city’s plans for the garden. City staff plan to use the same ERC garden model — raised garden beds — at the West Lake Park site, so using food-safe fill material wouldn’t be an issue, Howard said.

Howard said that the city has some options available to raise the site by about a foot but they might not be feasible. The city could try to use some leftover fill material from the Mankato Avenue roundabout project, dredged sand from the Mississippi River, or move material from a berm that’s located nearby the site, he said. Howard also said he doesn’t anticipate the site sinking any further if fill were to be added.

Currently, there is no exact timeline for when the new garden could be open. The city still needs to gather input from the neighborhood around West Lake Park in regard to the new garden, confirm whether it will be able to fill and level the area, and ensure that the project doesn’t conflict with other park uses, Howard said. Once staff has gathered the necessary information, the task force plans to present its proposal to the City Council for approval.

However, Howard said in regard to building the new garden, “So as long as the time is right, we’re able to start early enough in spring ... We should be able to get another [garden] up and running. It’s a matter of, yet, picking the right site.”

The Community Gardens Task Force is continuing to consider and review other locations, as well as even the possibility of

micro gardens throughout the city’s parks, according to Ciulla. “We wanted more specific feedback from community members who had that interest about what type of garden they would use or they felt the community needed, or would benefit from, because there are a lot of different community garden models,” she said.

With the current proposal by city officials to build a police-fire-community center at the ERC site, picking a new community garden location is something city staff will have to focus on even more to ensure that the community continues to have a gardening space.

During the July 5 City Council hearing on the ERC, many citizens, among them Bruno Borsari, Vivian Rider, and Anna Kemp, noted that the gardens are a vital part of the community.

Kemp, who runs the Winona Gardening and Winter Sowing group on Facebook, stated that her group is over 700 people strong. “That shows that there’s a trend towards gardening, not just because of the pandemic,” she said. “People are still doing this in order to help their budgets, to feed their families good food, and one of my major reasons why I oppose the ERC being taken away is because of the community gardens.”

In the future, city staff are planning to continue the community garden, one way or another, due to its popularity. “I think the biggest thing is that the gardens, we know, they can’t just cease to exist,” Hoberg said.

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