

## editor's notes

Chris Rogers, editor, Winona Post

## Go back to drawing board on East Rec

Maybe once or twice in the past 10 years have the council chambers been so packed as they were on July 5, when scores of Winonans told the City Council not to move forward with its plans to demolish the East Rec Center (ERC) to build a new police-fire station and community center. Many more spoke out in an online survey and in interviews and letters to the editor in this paper and others. Winonans have been telling the city for years that they love the ERC and having a safe, free place for kids to play is crucial for the future of our community.

In an article in last week's paper, City Council member Michelle Alexander said those citizens don't represent the full community and are misinformed, saying, "I don't think that a whole group of people really know what we're even talking about." That's not how you inspire confidence that city leaders are really listening.

As a brief recap, the city's current plan is to demolish the ERC, build a new police-fire station taking up that entire block, buy and demolish St. Stan's school, and, in its place, build a new community center that would house both the ERC and the Friendship Center. While the new community center would provide a bigger, brand new indoor space, it would eliminate three-quarters of a block of outdoor park space at the current ERC site, including basketball courts, playgrounds, and a community garden.

This plan ignores existing assets — why demolish the ERC and St. Stan's? Why not take advantage of the land the city owns at the Central Fire Station or the extra space at the county's Law Enforcement Center (LEC)? And it sacrifices too much parkland. Kids need to play outside. The synergy of indoor and outdoor spaces — the chance to play dodgeball in the gym and tag on the playground — is a big part of what makes the ERC so successful today. That would be lost under the current plan.

I guess this is marginally better than one of the studied alternatives: eliminating Sinclair Park. Instead of losing an entire block of parkland, we're just losing three-quarters. But as Little Warriors Drumline leader Andre Bailey told me earlier this year, if the city had the right plan, this wouldn't have to be a winners-and-losers situation, a situation where the needs of children and city departments are pitted against each other. Under the current plan, the ERC would lose. Children of working families that need safe, free places to play would lose. A different plan could be a win-win.

Sometimes the City Council has to make unpopular decisions. But when the city is making one of the biggest investments of

a generation — \$38-42 million — it shouldn't be unpopular because of what the community is losing. The tax impact should be the downside, not the loss of parkland and youth recreation. How ironic is it to spend millions on a community center so many community members oppose?

Our police officers and firefighters do critical and difficult jobs, and they deserve better facilities. But for over 15 years, the council has been content to put off the fire department's requests for renovations to Central Fire Station. The need for more storage at the police station didn't suddenly sneak up on the city. So why rush toward an unpopular solution now? In a matter of months, council members seem to have thrown out their plans for expanding the existing ERC — plans that were years and over \$300,000 in the making — and zeroed in on this new plan as the only answer to the police and fire departments' needs.

Even as they insist that this is not a done deal, I wonder if city leaders can see other possibilities. "I don't want to displace anyone. That might not be an option. We might have to displace someone," Mayor Scott Sherman said in February. Sherman and the council are not backed into a corner on this decision. Getting funding for any project will take years anyway. Let's take time to explore other options.

The city missed an opportunity in not buying Central School, but a half block may still be available there. The city already owns land at Central Fire in a great location for quick response times. If the projects are not combined, the possibilities greatly expand. We've heard that separating all three projects would cost \$9-12 million more, but what if only two were combined? What if the city renovated instead of building new? Saving parkland is worth a few million at least.

Council members, please vote to go back to the drawing board and study alternatives, including an earnest dialogue with Winona County about the LEC, a wide search for other locations, and further consideration of splitting off parts of the project. Make that process transparent and seek public input throughout. Let's find a win-win and not a win-lose. Then, when it comes time to seek funding, our community can speak with one voice.



## letters

## Thankful for Obieglo's service

From: Preston A. Selleck, Veteran's Treatment Court coordinator

I want to publicly thank Jerry Obieglo for his continued service to our community. As many know, Jerry served as a deputy with the Winona County Jail and most recently as veterans service officer for Winona County. This is, of course, on top of his service as an Army veteran.

Jerry was very influential and active in the formation of the Veterans Treatment Court, which serves the chemical and mental health treatment needs of veterans in the justice system. Jerry participated in the planning of the court and in the early staffing sessions as the court started in 2019. Jerry's retirement from the Veterans Service Office hasn't slowed his desire to serve the community. Jerry still does yard work for veterans with physical limitations, referring social services for veterans in need, and serving as a mentor for our Veterans Treatment Court. As a mentor, Jerry has taken two local veterans under his wing and has helped immensely in guiding them through a rough patch in their lives.

Jerry's continued service makes a difference in the lives of those he helps and makes this community all the better. Thank you again, Jerry, for continuing to serve Winona County.

## Vote for Jeff Ettinger on Aug. 9

From: Tim Breza  
Winona

I support and encourage you to vote for Jeff Ettinger on August 9. He is a moderate and is honest too.

## Voegeli is the leader we need

From: Carolyn O'Grady  
Winona

I will vote for Dwayne Voegeli for Winona County Board because he values diverse perspectives and is a committed servant leader of our community. I applaud his prior experience on the board and am confident his knowledge of the county will benefit all its citizens. He wisely attempts to build bridges rather than create more division. This is the kind of public leader we need.

## A lyrical compromise for fossil fuels

From: John Grattan Jr.  
Goodview

You know the song "We Just Disagree" by Dave Mason and the lyrics, "There ain't no good guy / there ain't no bad guy / There's only you and me and we just disagree."

You and I may disagree with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in June of 2022 to limit the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s authority to regulate carbon emissions, a form of planet-warming pollution.

The Supreme Court ruled that the EPA exceeded its authority by mandating the power plants move away from fossil fuels and toward renewable energy.

Furthermore, a divided Congress is not likely to grant that authority to the EPA. So for a clean or renewable future, what path remains for you and me?

Do we "Walk On By," as sung by Dionne Warwick, or do we bear the "Load of Compromising" via Glen Campbell?

If we can compromise on a reasonable carbon extraction fee, a market-based solution, then we will be on the road to remitting funds, or a dividend per se, to all U.S. households and on the path to emissions reduction.

Let us agree on this Citizens Climate Lobby compromise before it's too late to compromise. Or as Timbaland pleads, before "it's too late to apologize."

## letters

## Vote Voegeli for Winona County Board

From: Judy Davis  
Winona

I am endorsing Dwayne Voegeli for a position on the Winona County Board. Dwayne has served on the board in the past and has a prolific resume of service to the entire Winona County with his work in education as well as advocating for the needs of the homeless. He has the unique talent of keeping members informed of the ongoing needs of those he represents. When

Dwayne takes on a task, he is committed and brings others along with his ability to establish the necessary communication which fosters community volunteerism, involvement, and engagement. He is always open to dialogue and values the input and expertise of others.

Please vote yes for Dwayne as a member of the Winona County Board on August 9.

## Primary, but not a primary?

From: Ruth Charles, voter service chair,  
League of Women Voters

At the Tuesday, August 9, primary, you will also have a single vote that is a special election vote. Voters in the First Congressional District will be voting to fill the position left vacant by the untimely passing of Rep. Jim Hagedorn in February 2022.

On the front of the ballot, voters will vote in a primary election and select candidates who will be on ballot in November 8, 2022. You will only be able to vote for one political party whose candidates will be in one column (there will be four columns).

On the back of the ballot, there will be non-partisan votes depending on your address. Yet everyone who lives in Southern Minnesota will be completing a special election vote for our U.S. representative who will begin serving immediately until January 2023, when the winner of the No-

member election will start serving.

Confusing? Yes. Able to do it? Of course, you can!

Consult the League of Women Voters Vote411.org website. After inputting your address, you will be able to see where you vote in person on August 9 as well as your ballot. The League also asked Primary candidates to answer questions regarding their positions. Their answers can be found on Vote411.org. Additional information can be found on the League of Women Voters-Winona Facebook page.

## What 'traditional values' are we talking about?

From: Debbie Sheets  
Winona

I ask Republicans which "traditional values" are you talking about when you say our country should return to traditional

values? Keeping women "in their place"? Homophobia? Destruction of the environment by corporate malfeasance? Political corruption, and flat-out criminal behavior, held unaccountable and encouraged? Gun laws that allow military-style guns to be used on our communities of children at school and people of color who are just shopping for groceries? Continuing white privilege and supremacy? To name only a few of the egregious things your party stands for these days.

These are "traditional values" of the

worst kind! I don't want a return to these traditional values. I want our country to foster values of inclusion, transparency, and honesty in our relationships with one another. Integrity in our homes, our communities, our businesses and our government. Kindness. Civility. We've given lip service to these values in our country's history, but we haven't actually lived by them very often. Let's make those our "traditional values" going forward. Something we can be proud of, instead of continuing to foster hate and fear.

## Tobacco harms health, the environment

From: Helen Bagshaw  
Winona

As a Winona resident and public health advocate working in prevention, I would like to share again with you the harms of tobacco on your health and the environment.

Tobacco and flavored tobacco products will and continue to cause irreparable health problems and environmental damage in this community. Health problems include the increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, cancers, and respiratory illnesses. Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease, disability, and death

in the United States.

What is less often discussed are the detrimental effects tobacco has on the health of our planet. Environmental damage from tobacco use pollutes the air we breathe and leaves residual nicotine and other harmful chemicals on indoor surfaces, which can expose nonsmokers to secondhand and thirdhand smoke toxins. Cigarette butts and vaping devices poison rivers, oceans, and marine life and contaminate beaches, waterways, and our living spaces. E-cigarette-related waste contains metals, electronic circuitry, single-use plastic cartridges, batteries, and toxic chemicals in e-liquids.

What can we do as a community to stop the effects of tobacco on the environment to reduce the unnecessary pressure on our planet's already scarce resources and fragile ecosystems?

Advocate for local tobacco prevention policies.

Protect all people, especially youth, from tobacco use and exposure.

Offer free resources to quit tobacco use.

Warn about the dangers of tobacco on health and the environment.

Enforce restrictions on tobacco advertising, promotion, and sponsorship.

Raise taxes on tobacco.

Safely dispose of all tobacco and e-cigarette waste.

Be educated about the harms of tobacco and vaping from local coalitions, such as the Winona County Alliance for Substance Abuse Prevention: [www.winonacountyasap.org](http://www.winonacountyasap.org).

Let's work together in this election year, locally and statewide, to protect the health of all Minnesotans and stop the environmental damage caused by the tobacco industry.



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