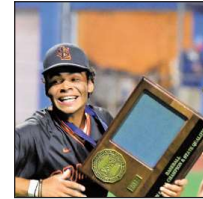
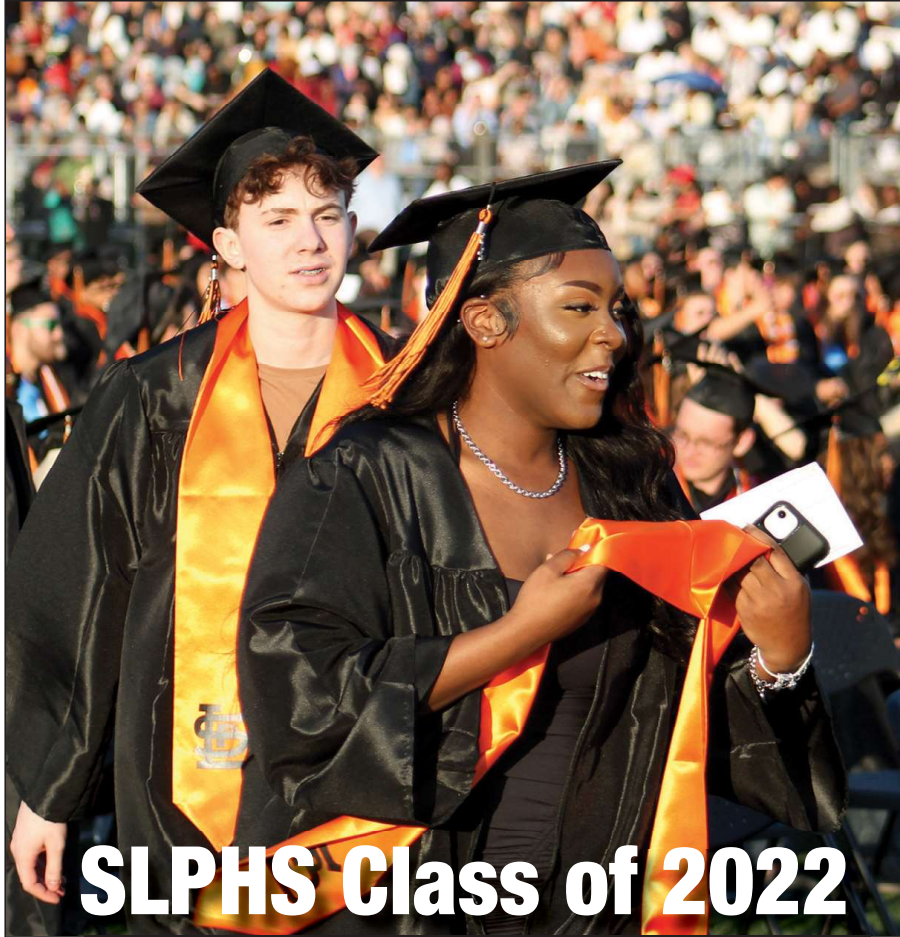


**Happy 100th**  
 A very special celebration for lifelong Hopkins resident Ruth Hazuka  
**Page 3**



**Worth the wait**  
 The Orioles baseball team will head to state for the first time in 70 years  
**Page 25**

Thursday, June 16, 2022



## SLPHS Class of 2022

(SUN PHOTO BY SETH ROWE)

St. Louis Park High School held its commencement ceremony June 7 at Oriole Stadium. Graduating seniors celebrate completing their final assignment on the field. For more photos, turn to **Page 24**.

## Up to \$4M in reimbursement for damage from water main breaks

City of St. Louis Park plans to use federal funds for much of the cost

By **SETH ROWE**  
 seth.rowe@apgecm.com

After two water main breaks, Texas-Tonka Neighborhood residents grilled St. Louis Park leaders for hours, eventually leading the St. Louis Park City Council to approve up to \$4 million to address damage.

Residents demanded answers from city staff members and a consultant about how a second break could have emerged June 3 after the initial break May 21. Some residents returned to the lectern at a June 6 council meeting repeatedly to engage in lengthy back-and-forth debates and to express their anger and disappointment. The topic took up the bulk of a city gathering that lasted more than five hours.

In the end, the council scrapped a loan program that had been proposed for residents, replacing it with more direct reimbursement.

So far, the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust has offered up to \$40,000 per building to address damage from the May 21 water main break, with a total of \$2 million available for the incident. City officials said June 6 they did not know how the trust would address the second water main break yet.

Beyond funds from the trust through the city's insurance coverage, the council offered up to \$60,000 in

See **Breaks**, Page 9

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## Breaks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

reimbursement for each residential property affected by the first water main break. Properties affected by both breaks will be eligible for up to \$80,000 each.

That means each affected property could be eligible for up to \$100,000 in total reimbursement, or \$120,000 per property affected by each episode, with the total insurance amount yet to be determined. Although city officials had indicated initially that reimbursement funds could only go toward cleanup and not toward restoration, they changed the guidance and said the money could be used for either purpose.

Councilmember Nadia Mohamed cast the only vote against the funding. While she indicated sympathy for affected homeowners, she also expressed concern about the increased tax burden on other residents in the city that would result in the move.

Minnetonka Boulevard, which took on water in both breaks, reopened to traffic June 9, with additional work for curbing and the sidewalk on the south side of the road planned the week of June 13.

### Council debate

Councilmember Sue Budd said the city consultant enlightened the City Council as to the risk of further water main breaks given the city's aging infrastructure.

She added, "What I have felt is also hugely at risk here is having our community break, having people not feel trust, not feel safe – and that's a bigger deal."

The city does not have endless funding but does have extra funding available from the American Rescue Plan Act that can go toward reimbursement, Budd said, while calling for the city to approve a larger amount of reimbursement beyond the \$30,000 city staff had recommended and the amount from the city's insurance policy.

However, Councilmember Tim Brausen instead made a motion to approve the staff recommendation for \$30,000 beyond the policy for people affected by the first break or up to \$50,000 beyond the policy for people affected by the second break, plus the possibility of a zero-interest loan. That proposal would have provided \$1 million in federal funds and another \$1 million in general fund dollars. The final amount the council approved included \$3 million in federal funds and \$1 million in general fund dollars.

Both Brausen's motion and the larger amount the council eventually signed off on replaced the initial \$300,000 the council provided for an emergency fund program.

Budd countered Brausen's motion with her proposal to increase reimbursement funds from \$30,000 to \$60,000 per residential property



(SUBMITTED PHOTOS BY JOHN BUNGERT)

Minnetonka Boulevard is closed near Texas Avenue South June 4 following a second water main break in the area the previous day. The road reopened June 9.

for the first break and from \$50,000 to \$80,000 for properties affected by both breaks.

Mohamed opposed the idea, saying that she had to think of all 50,000 residents of the city and that she is concerned that people will be taxed out of living in St. Louis Park.

Of the staff proposal, she said, "I believe that this is the best that the city can afford to do."

She added that addressing water pipes throughout the city in the future will cost much more money, further affecting taxpayers.

"I do apologize if this is a disappointment to you," she said to Texa-Tonka residents in the audience. "But understand that this is the best way that I feel I can be responsible to everybody."

In supporting Budd's proposal, though, Councilmember Margaret Rog noted that some homeowners had considerably less damage than others, meaning that not every owner will receive funds up to the per-property limit.

Councilmember Lynette Dumalag added that the city should not wait for all estimates to come in before approving reimbursement at the level Budd proposed.

Brausen's original motion to approve the lower staff recommendation failed on a voice vote. Budd then formally made a motion for her recommendation.

She recommended that the program include reimbursement for sewer backup systems and high utility bills residents could face. Her motion also referenced an existing loan program that provides up to \$75,000 for each affected commercial property with interest set at 2%.

For homeowners whose bills would still exceed the amount of reimbursement the city will provide, Rog said she wants to leave the door open for the council to consider approving more funding in the future if leftover money exists after claims come in.

Rog also had words for the companies who insured homeowners affected by the water main breaks but denied claims.

"Really, the people we should be grilling here are the insurance companies, the folks that you all have paid on policies for years to protect your homes," Rog said. "I certainly have heard frustration expressed by residents as well who are completely caught off guard that their trusted insurance companies weren't stepping up to help restore your home through your homeowners policy."

She recommended that property owners in the city review their policies carefully to ensure they cover flooding and sewer backups.

"Insurance companies don't seem to always be looking out for their policyholders' best interests," Rog remarked to applause from some audience members.

After the vote in which six council members went along with Budd's motion, Mohamed remarked of the city's increased commitment and her opposing vote, "I'm totally in favor of assisting anybody who's in need, but \$4 million is a lot to me. And it's a tough decision to be on this side, of nay. It's terrible. But I'm glad people are getting the help that they need."

## POLICE REPORT

### Hopkins Police reports

Included in the department's reports May 31 through June 6 were these incidents:

**May 31** - Adult male arrested for multiple charges on the 1200 block of Wagon Wheel Road.

**June 1** - Theft on the 8600 block of Excelsior Boulevard.

- Theft report on the 500 block of Blake Road North.

**June 3** - Damage to property report on the 1200 block of Landmark Trail South.

**June 4** - Theft from a vehicle on the 900 block of Westbrooke Way.

- Burglary on the 700 block of Cambridge Street.

- Theft on the 000 block of Blake Road.

**June 5** - Graffiti on the 000 block of Shady Oak Road.

- Theft on the 200 block of 21st Avenue North.

**June 6** - Damage to property on the 1200 block of Trailwood North.

- Theft of a tea cup chihuahua on the 1300 block of Landmark Trail North.

- Criminal damage to property on the 900 block of 9th Avenue South.

- Firearms threat and physical assault on the 500 block of Blake Road North.

- Damage to property with a vehicle damaged on the 1300 block of Lake Street Northeast.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

### St. Louis Park Police plan to appear at community activities

The St. Louis Park Police Department plans to connect with the community at several summer events.

Fishing with a Cop is set 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Wednesdays, June 22, July 27, and Aug. 24, at Wolfe Park, 3700 Monterey Drive, in St. Louis Park.

Skateapalooza is planned 5-8 p.m. Wednesday, July 13, with a rain date the same time period Wednesday, July 27, at Carpenter Park, 4900 Hwy. 7 in St. Louis Park.

Basketball Night in the Park is scheduled 6-8 p.m. Thursdays, June 16 through Aug. 25, at Ainsworth Park, 7700 W. 28th St. in St. Louis Park.

Finally, police will appear at National Night Out parties citywide 5-9 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 2.

For more information, contact the department's community outreach officer at 952-924-2661.

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