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## Walz: State will continue boosting law enforcement in the Cities

BY ALEX DEROSIER  
Post Bulletin

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota's state public safety agency will maintain an increased presence in the Twin Cities metropolitan area as it continues to help local agencies tackle an increase in crime. But Gov. Tim Walz said the increased costs will not be sustainable without eventual action from the state Legislature.

Joined by Public Safety Commissioner John Harrington and other law officials in downtown Minneapolis, Gov. Tim Walz on Thursday, Aug. 11, told reporters the State Patrol will continue its boosted presence in the Twin Cities. State resources, he said, have led to hundreds of arrests, warrants and illegal guns off the streets. "Our response that has now been ongoing throughout this year especially, is totally unprecedented — the number of folks who are involved in this, the number of missions that we're partaking in, and the results that they're getting," the governor said.

See CITIES, Page A3

## Housing development plan approved Decision affects heron nest site in Rochester Township

BY JOHN MOLSEED  
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — The Rochester Township Board has approved a preliminary plan for a housing development at the site of a great blue heron nest colony.

The 3-to-2 decision Thursday was the second time the board has voted in opposition to the township's planning and zoning commission's recommendation regarding the proposed development.

International Properties LLC is proposing a 10-home development southwest of Rochester.

Company owner Aderonke Mordi sank to her knees and pumped her fist in the air as the board voted to approve the plan.

The 30-acre site was home to a great blue heron nest colony known as a rookery. The nests, when occupied, are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Great blue herons, a migratory wading bird, aren't endangered and when their nests are empty, the nesting area has no special legal protections.

Environmental groups and neighboring property owners say the upland nest colony, not near a major body of water, is a unique natural resource that should be preserved. Legal action brought by neighbors and the group Save the Rookery has taken legal action that has delayed the development.

See DEVELOPMENT, Page A3



John Molseed / Post Bulletin

Aderonke Mordi, right, owner of International Properties LLC, reacts as the Rochester Township Board approves a development plan at the site of a great blue heron nest colony on land she purchased from Steve Connelly.



Eddie Swartzentruber outside his home on Aug. 5 in Rochester.

Traci Westcott / Post Bulletin

## An unlikely change

### Harmony man goes from Amish life to TikTok videos

BY MATTHEW STOLLE  
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER

Eddie Swartzentruber of Rochester was 17 when he slipped a note under

his pillow, quietly crept to the farmhouse door and fled.

It was a terribly cold January night, and his flimsy Amish clothes offered little protection against the sub-zero temperature.

Swartzentruber ran fast enough down the road to make progress and keep warm. He felt scared and guilty but determined to leave behind a lifestyle that offered him no prospect of happiness.

"I was pretty scared, but I knew somehow I would figure it out," Swartzentruber said, recalling his flight eight years ago from his community.

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WEEKEND



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# Olmsted County sees COVID rate drop

## Decline not enough to lower transmission status

BY RANDY PETERSEN  
Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — Olmsted County reported a 7.9% drop in new COVID cases during the past week, but it wasn't enough to escape being labeled a continued area with high community transmission.

With 213.53 new confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, the county would need to see another 7% decrease to be lower to an area of medium transmission under Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention guidelines.

The rest of Southeast Minnesota currently sits in the medium status, with each county reporting less than 200 new confirmed cases per 100,000 residents but maintaining COVID-related hospitalization rates of more than 10 for the same population size.

The majority of the region reported 12.8 new COVID-related hospitalizations per 100,000 residents during a seven-day period, down from 13.4 a week earlier.

COVID case rates for counties throughout the region were:

- ▶ Dodge, 143.31 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for a 3.2% decrease.
- ▶ Fillmore, 156.64 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for a 41.1% decrease.
- ▶ Goodhue, 144.58 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for a 5.6% decrease.
- ▶ Houston, 182.8 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for a 9.7% increase.
- ▶ Mower, 134.79 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for

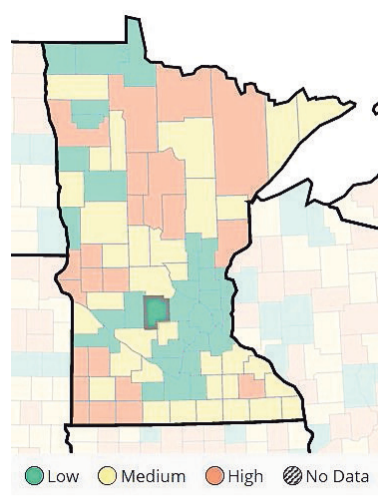
a 63.6% increase.

▶ Wabasha, 120.22 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for a 13% increase.

▶ Winona, 140.64 confirmed cases per 100,000 residents, for a 26% decrease.

By comparison, the statewide rate of new confirmed COVID cases during a seven-day period rose nearly 3.9% with 185.2 reported per 100,000 residents.

Contact local government reporter Randy Petersen at rpetersen@postbulletin.com.



Contributed / Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**Olmsted County remains listed as an area of high community transmission of COVID-19, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

## Development

From page A1

The township planning and zoning commission voted 2-to-1 in June to recommend denying a plan to build 10 houses on the site.

In Thursday's meeting, the Township Board voted to approve an amended plan that includes 10 homes but asks for fewer variances to township development ordinances than the one the planning and zoning commission recommended denying.

Placing and zoning commission member Arthur Handleman attended the meeting and asked the board not to approve a plan that hadn't been reviewed by their planning commission.

He called the plan an "end around" of the commission.

"They've thumbed their nose at the process," he said of the developers and their legal representatives attending the meeting.

Bill Tointon, a senior planner for WSE Engineering Services, Ltd, who is representing Mordi in the development hinted at legal action against the township if they denied the proposal.

"This is going to potentially go beyond this board," he said.



Contributed / John Weiss

**A great blue heron lands at its nest. A rookery, a colony of nests for heron breeding, is facing a 10-home development plan that was approved by the Rochester Township Board on Thursday.**

"We need to be super careful here."

Tointon and Township Board members both noted the board often approves development plans asking for multiple variances to township ordinances.

It's a policy some board

members said may need to be revisited. However, board member Matt Kitzmann said not approving the development would be "changing the rules in the middle of the game."

Board member Brian Zmolek, who voted in favor of the development, expressed

reservations about approving a plan that hadn't been vetted by the planning and zoning commission.

The board voted in November 2021 to approve a general development plan despite the planning and zoning's recommendation

against approving the development plan.

However, Zmolek added putting the property owners into a development agreement was the best way the township would have a say in how the land is used.

"I know there's a great deal of interest in what can or can't be done on that property," he said.

Nathan Clarke, who attended the meeting remotely, said by voting in favor of the development, the board is ignoring the constituents its members are elected to represent.

"How do you reconcile the public outcry?" he asked.

Most of the trees containing nests have already been destroyed and construction for a road in the development has begun.

Tim Parkin, a member of the Save the Rookery group, said the fight to save the land from development isn't over. Arguments in a court case over the board's vote in November to approve the general development plan were heard July 15. Olmsted County District Court Judge Pamela King has 90 days to make a ruling on that case.

Contact John Molseed at jmolseed@postbulletin.com.

## Cities

From page A1

Last month, the public safety department announced more state patrol troopers would patrol the Twin Cities following a chaotic Fourth of July weekend in Minneapolis that left several injured. Violent crime was not the only concern — 20 additional state troopers and air patrols were tasked with tackling street racing in the metro, something Walz said they have successfully curbed.

State public safety officials said they already devoted additional resources to Minneapolis and the surrounding area this spring in response to concerns about violent crime. Minneapolis reported a near-record 96 homicides in 2021, and in early 2021 a rash of carjackings had started to spread to the suburbs. St. Paul also saw a record 38 homicides last year.

Federal and state authorities have already announced they would commit greater resources to combat violent crime and lawlessness in the Twin Cities metro. U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger in April said he was shifting Minnesota federal prosecutors' focus to tackling violent crimes like carjackings, of which Minneapolis saw more than 600 in 2021.

The Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the state's criminal investigative

agency, said it has devoted more resources to the Twin Cities in the spring. The 12 investigators and one analyst will continue to work on gun crimes and homicides in Minneapolis-St. Paul and the surrounding area until at least September, the BCA said last month.

Walz said the "unprecedented" boost in state support for cities is not something that can continue indefinitely. The patrol has diverted troopers typically dedicated to enforcement on state highways and officers are building up overtime hours, told reporters.

"Our message today is that this high presence that you've seen, will continue into the future here. But we need partners, especially with the legislature to make sure they're funding the very issues that we're talking about," he said.

The 2022 Minnesota legislative session ended without any major deals between the Democratic-Farmer-Labor controlled House and Republican-

controlled Senate on how to spend the state's historic \$9.3 billion budget surplus. Public safety spending was a top priority for both parties, but lawmakers could not reach an agreement by the end of the session in May.

Walz, House Speaker Melissa Hortman, DFL-Brooklyn Park, and Senate Majority Leader Jeremy Miller, R-Winona, negotiated for several weeks to return for a special session, but failed to reach an agreement.

Republicans in the Legislature and Walz's GOP challenger in the upcoming election, Scott Jensen, have criticized Walz for not doing enough to address the increase in violent crime over the past two years.

Jensen has said the Legislature should wait to reconvene during its regular session in January, after the general election, before it makes any decisions on how to use the surplus.

Follow Alex Derosier on Twitter @xanderosier or email aderosier@forumcomm.com.



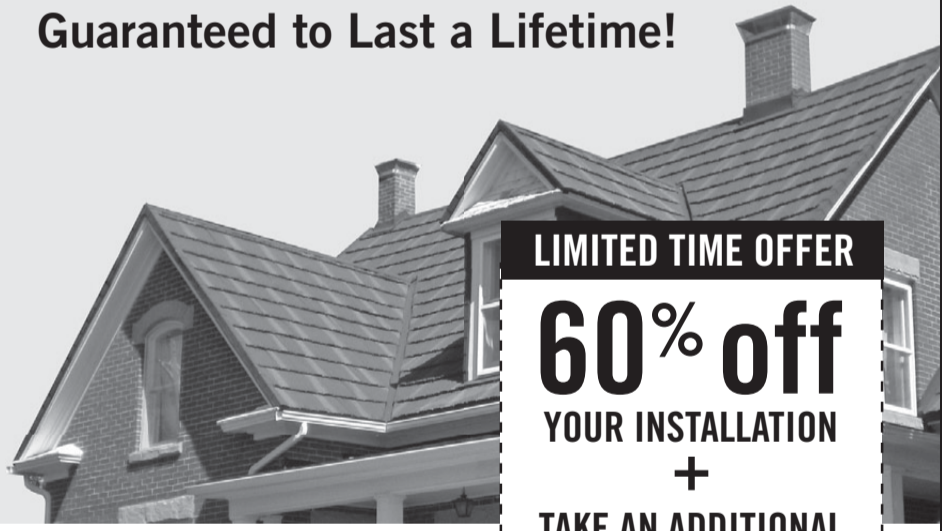
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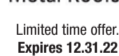
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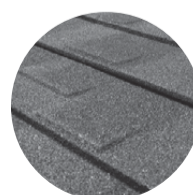
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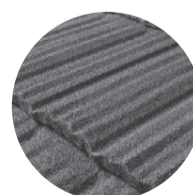
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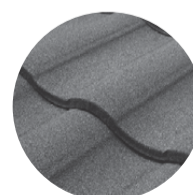
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