

**“THE MUD IS READY!”  
THE AMBASSADOR OF MUD AND GOOD CHEER**

By Paula Chesley



Steve Vasseur poses in 2023 after receiving an award from the Kenwood Neighborhood Organization recognizing his 30 years of service to the community. (Image: Courtney Cushing Kiernat)

*For three decades, Steve Vasseur kept the mud pit at Hidden Beach ready and made a generation feel welcome. As the Mud Man enters hospice, neighbors reflect on a legacy of playfulness and community.*

If you’ve been to Hidden Beach (officially Cedar Lake East Beach) this year, perhaps you’ve noticed that a formerly constant presence has been missing.

Steve Vasseur, also known as the Mud Man, is in hospice.

In May 2026, the Hill & Lake Press interviewed Steve and others about his legacy at the beach.

What emerges is an ode to playfulness, to community as family and to the beach as a place to come together.

Steve, who has always experienced the world in his own singular way and keeps his personal life private, gave consent for the material in this article.

Steve was born Stephen Olson in 1953. He went into foster care at age 4 after a visit from Child Protective Services. After that, he did not see much of his three sisters.

He stayed with the Vasseur family and, at age 18, was adopted by the family and graduated from Marshall-University High School in Dinkytown.

He then attended Minnesota City College, now Minneapolis College, where he studied business administration, and has held jobs such as rink announcer.

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**NEIGHBOR IS A VERB HERE, UNLESS WE DISAGREE**

By Molly Mogren Katt



A “Neighbor Is a Verb Here” billboard rises over downtown Minneapolis — the civic motto born of Operation Metro Surge that Katt’s column tests against a heated Lyndale Avenue South reconstruction meeting. (Image: Molly Mogren Katt)

*The Twin Cities just earned a Profile in Courage Award for standing up for immigrant neighbors. One night at a Lyndale Avenue construction meeting left me wondering whether that neighborliness comes with conditions.*

On Sunday, May 31, the JFK Library Foundation presented the people of the Twin Cities with

the Profile in Courage Award.

Typically given to an elected official, this prestigious honor acknowledged how our community defended immigrant neighbors and constitutional rights during Operation Metro Surge.

The efforts put forth in the Twin Cities were, in a word, astounding.

And yet if you’d been at the Lyndale Avenue construction

meeting at the Uptown VFW this past month, you might be surprised to learn you’re in Minneapolis — that same place heralded for its kindness toward neighbors.

**“Are only some neighbors worthy of neighboring?”**

**So long as you think exactly like me...**

Here’s the situation: Hennepin County needs to update the infrastructure under one of the city’s main thoroughfares, Lyndale Avenue.

This is not up for debate. The stuff underground hasn’t been fully updated since, I dunno, the Coolidge era.

The proposed new design allows for a single lane of north-south traffic with a raised concrete median in between, designated bus lanes, 25% less street parking, a wide north-south bike path on the east side of the street, plus a sidewalk on both sides.

Construction is slated to begin in 2028, will span about a mile and is supposed to last three years.

I’ve lived on or near Lyndale Avenue since 2008. While some improvements have made it less dangerous for pedestrians (the city installed flashing crosswalks at two uncontrolled intersections and it made a huge difference!), crossing the street in some areas is scary as hell.

I shepherd my kids across twice a day when we walk to school, my head on a swivel like Regan in “The Exorcist,” scanning for cars, buses, bikers and sometimes pedestrians in the midst of a mental health crisis.

The current design is inadequate. The proposed redesign is polarizing.

The VFW meeting, organized primarily by business owners, highlighted reasons. First, the duration. THREE YEARS is a long time to navigate a construction project that demolishes everything, right up to the front door of your shop.

One summer is an inconvenience. Three summers leads to people lose enthusiasm for supporting small business, changing their habits and slowly giving up on places where they were once regulars.

Another aspect stoking debate: the plan’s ambition. It wedges a lot into a fairly nar-

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# 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY 1976-2026

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## letters TO THE editor

*Our goal is to offer readers diverse perspectives on newsworthy events or issues of broad public concern to the Hill & Lake community. Our copy limit is 300 words (750 words for a commentary or as space permits), and we reserve the right to edit for clarity and length. We do not publish submissions from anonymous sources; all contributor identities must be verified.*

### Are We Having Fun Yet?

Peter York, British journalist and management consultant once said: "One should never learn from one's mistakes. Making the same mistakes, over and over again, is a source of unremitting pleasure."

By Mr. York's rubric, Hennepin County and the Met Council must be positively swimming in pleasure.

I recently reviewed the minutes of the Southwest LRT Executive Change Control Board, the seven-member body charged with approving changes to the original plan. Our own county commissioner, Marion Greene, has been a member since 2014.

*Guess what? Same old same old.*

Divers are still being sent into the Kenilworth tunnel to repair leaks. Specialized equipment needed for the project is no longer manufactured. Additional insurance is required because of the risks associated with the co-location design residents warned about years ago. Taxpayers are also paying more than \$400,000 to correct track curves that shifted because engineers failed to adequately account for stabilization and temperature fluctuations.

Even commissioners themselves questioned why some of these issues had not been anticipated.

*Feeling the pleasure yet?*

Now comes news that the proposed Blue Line Extension from Minneapolis to Brooklyn Park has climbed another \$336 million, bringing the estimated cost to \$3.58 billion — nearly four times the original estimate and surpassing Southwest LRT as the most expensive public works project in Minnesota history. Meanwhile, a Met Council study found that bus rapid transit could provide service for about \$120 million, a small fraction of the cost of light rail.

Metro transit ridership, particularly on light rail, remains well below pre-pandemic levels. Yet Hennepin County and the Met Council continue to insist

that more rail is the answer, even as costs rise, remote work reduces commuting, and public confidence erodes.

Southwest LRT should have been a once-in-a-generation lesson. Instead, it has become a template: the same consultants, the same excuses, the same promises from politicians — and the same taxpayers left holding the bag.

Where are the consequences for repeated mismanagement? Who is accountable? Why do our officials refuse to learn from their mistakes? At what point will reality prevail over institutional arrogance?

As a member of Minnesota's 2024 Metropolitan Governance Task Force — whose recommendations were effectively sidelined in 2025 by those content with maintaining the status quo — I continue to ask those questions.

*Mary Pattock  
Cedar-Isles-Dean*

### Save Lyndale's Trees Before They're Gone

As Hennepin County advances plans to reconstruct Lyndale Avenue, we urge decision-makers at the county and city of Minneapolis to prioritize the corridor's mature street trees and redesign the project to save as many as possible.

Current plans call for removing dozens of mature street trees. While infrastructure improvements are important, losing established tree canopy has far-reaching consequences. Newly planted trees take decades to provide the same environmental and community benefits as mature trees.

Urban trees are essential infrastructure. According to the Arbor Day Foundation, a single mature tree absorbs approximately 48 pounds of carbon dioxide annually. Using the i-Tree Planting Calculator, a mature urban tree also captures about 5.5 cubic meters of precipitation, reduces cooling electricity use by 173 kilowatt-hours, reduces heating natural gas use by 2,407 kBtu and captures 0.33 pounds of particulate air pollution annually. Multiply that by the dozens of mature trees at risk under the current Lyndale plan, and the long-term environmental cost becomes clear.

The benefits of mature trees extend further. Urban tree canopy supports wildlife habitat, enhances property values, encourages pedestrian activity that sustains local businesses and has been associated with reduced street crime and slower driving speeds. These benefits should inform any evaluation of street design and safety. As climate change brings more extreme heat and precipitation to Minneapolis, preserving and expanding our urban tree canopy is not optional. It is essential to maintaining a livable city.

We commend Minneapolis for revising the Hennepin Avenue reconstruction project late in the approval process to preserve more trees, and we urge Hennepin County to do the same on Lyndale. Where removal is unavoidable, the county should commit to a canopy-based replacement strategy in partnership with the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board that not only restores lost canopy but increases it as part of this once-in-a-generation project. For data sources referenced in this letter, visit the "Learn" page at [GreenCitiesAccord.org](http://GreenCitiesAccord.org).

*Michaela Neu  
Green Cities Accord*

### Enough With Fixing What Isn't Broken

I feel very strongly that we should not turn Lyndale Avenue into another Hennepin and cut down so many trees in the process. We do not need to narrow and concrete everything and slow traffic. If drivers are going too fast, the answer is police writing tickets. Drivers will take heed.

I also can't believe the plan to redesign the Mall. If something isn't broken, why spend millions of taxpayer dollars to fix it? We don't need to "parkify" a piece of land that people travel through but don't sit around in. For me, the Mall helps me get over to Excelsior Boulevard. And all the apartment dwellers in the area will be pressed for parking. That's unfair.

At 77, I do not want to be forced to walk everywhere. I didn't own a car until I was 34. Until then, I walked, biked and took the bus. But I have been hit twice by bikes riding on the sidewalk, once after a heavy, wet snow, which broke my wrist. I've also been startled by the rudeness of a cyclist cutting me off when I never saw him coming. And now we have motorized bikes, too. At this stage of my life, forcing me to walk feels like discrimination against seniors.

I had a friend, now deceased, who was hit by a cyclist on Nicollet Mall. The cyclist kept right on going. My friend told me that after multiple operations, his arm was never the same. Cyclists do not want to lose their momentum, and too many do not care enough even to call out, "Passing on your left." Thank you for the chance to be heard.

*Linda Huhn  
East Isles*

### Common Sense Over Politics

I want to commend you on an excellent and enjoyable article about the many well-placed economic concerns currently affecting Minneapolis.

# PAWS FOR GOOD

Images by Courtney Cushing Kiernat and submitted photos



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You never once brought politics into the discussion or demonized individuals who may hold opposing views. Instead, you thoughtfully identified the key issues and logically offered practical solutions.

If we are ever going to move this city forward, we first need to build consensus and then implement common-sense, practical solutions that enhance the experiences of everyone who calls our city home. Thanks again for the insightful and thought-provoking article.

*Kevin Kramer  
 Cedar-Isles-Dean*

### A Footbridge on Lake of the Isles

A footbridge over the southern end of the north bay of Lake of the Isles would improve access to the park and surrounding neighborhoods. It would save

three-fourths of a mile each way for those who walk or bike from the east side to The Kenwood Restaurant, Lake of the Isles Lutheran Church, the bookstore, veterinary clinic, Kenwood Community School, the future Southwest LRT station and other destinations in Kenwood. Folks who live on the west side of the lagoon would save more than a mile round trip walking or biking to businesses and bus stops on Lake Street and Hennepin Avenue. It would also provide more access to street parking for lake walkers and ice skaters.

Some people cannot walk the nearly 3 miles around the lake, including children, older adults and people with physical limitations such as arthritis. The footbridge would save them about three-fourths of a mile when walking around the south section of the lake. The footbridge would allow them to walk around just the north lagoon, a distance of less than a mile in

about 20 minutes. According to Google, a 250-foot steel footbridge would cost less than \$300,000.

*David Andersen  
 East Isles*

### No, Workers Shouldn't Return to the Office to Boost Landlords Profits

I found "Minneapolis Economy is Struggling" to be an out-of-touch defense of landlords rather than working residents. The suggestion that public employees should return to the office to boost landlords' profits ignores the reality of rising costs for workers. Minneapolis' challenges stem from many factors, including COVID and public safety concerns. Rather than asking thousands to absorb new expenses, landlords should adapt to changing market conditions, lower rents where necessary and perhaps reconsider renting

to THC shops, bath houses or other businesses that do not fit their vision of Minneapolis..

*Igor Shults  
 Bryn Mawr*

### Correction

A June 2026 article, "Summer Means Party Season," by Molly Mogren Katt, incorrectly stated that customers who order online from Isles Bun & Coffee can skip the line and pick up their order at the bakery side door.

Side-door pickup is not available through online ordering. Customers who need this option must arrange and confirm it by phone, speaking with staff in person, so that the bakery can review the limitations of this type of pickup.

The Hill & Lake Press regrets the error and thanks Isles Bun & Coffee for the clarification.

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Biking or walking to the event will be easiest. Bus routes and parking info are available at – [uptownminneapolis.com](http://uptownminneapolis.com).



**NEIGHBOR IS A VERB HERE, UNLESS WE DISAGREE** continued from front page

row space. Many people think the bike lane could be moved two blocks west to Bryant Avenue, where a lot of current bike infrastructure (and bikers!) already exist.

Alternatively, many business owners have stated they could live with a shared bike-and-pedestrian path part of a previous plan.

**The night at the VFW, the bike coalition was not having it.**

The owner of Knox Jewelers, highlighting the length of the project, the change to the flow of car traffic and the possibility of losing street parking, said he worried his family's business of 42 years would close.

Some bike advocates cheered. Saed Wadi of World Street Kitchen & Milkjam Creamery raised concerns that emergency vehicles might struggle to reach people who've called 911. (A police officer sitting next to me said this is a valid concern.)

He worried that planners hadn't fully thought through snow removal (it seems they haven't). He said those parked on the street might not be able to safely open a car door without getting hit by an oncoming bus on the left or a bike on the right (not great for cyclists, either!).

The next morning, he woke up to a barrage of one-star reviews. The discourse even infiltrated my digital life. I exited my neighborhood Signal group, the one I relied on for information during Metro Surge, due to talk of boycotting small businesses that had the audacity to question a construction project that will affect their livelihood.

And just generally — when older or disabled residents (or people with little kids like me!) have mentioned they sometimes rely on parking due to their specific needs, they're often met with this kind and empathetic suggestion: Well, maybe you should move.

**Does any of this sound very neighborly to you?**

This debate isn't really about a bike lane.

What I heard from business owners is not that they hate bikes or would really love to make the street super dangerous, but a plea for help

I heard sadness, frustration and fear of losing everything.

These folks have weathered six years of struggle, now knowing the next six will be just as hard. Currently, there is no plan from the city, county or state to support them financially.

It's worth noting that we've all seen the long-term effects of essentially the exact same project a dozen blocks west on Hennepin Avenue — which has lost the majority of its small businesses over the past six years, in large part due to the construction and its aftermath. A three-year construction plan that hasn't even bothered to consider how it will affect local commerce, simply put, sucks.

It's also about some activists believing that the only plausible future is a car-free one, and any step toward that is a win, no matter who it hurts or how you get there. If it were simply about a safe and pleasant way to bike, they'd be advocating for better infrastructure on Bryant Avenue, where you're riding down a quiet, leafy street and not choking on exhaust from city buses and a pileup of cars, stopping at traffic lights at every other intersection.

The bike coalition's position seems to be to make it hard to drive, and maybe, just maybe, people will stop driving entirely. I understand the thought, and in a perfect world, sure. It is also a very narrow, exclusive and ableist position.

The thing is, a car-free future depends on local business. I live in this neighborhood specifically because I can walk to the grocery store, school, dentist, hardware store, you name it, and when I can, I do! It's one of the things I value most in where I live. Every time a business or service I need closes, I'm either getting in my car or lining the already-stuffed pockets of Jeff Bezos and his stupid face.

I personally have lost steam for chiming in on the street design itself. I'm just a mom with a journalism degree, WTF do I know? So do whatever you're gonna do, Hennepin County, and do it as quickly as possible.

The thing I cannot get over is the total lack of empathy for how this plan will affect members of our community. The urge to dismiss or even celebrate when another person expresses pain disgusts me, especially because we know that when we work to-

gether, we can accomplish amazing things. Why kick business owners when they're down when we could lift them up? We got Donald Trump to regret sending 3,000 ICE agents to this city. Together, we can do anything.

But the second folks in this town disagree, ope! People deserve to lose their jobs, their businesses, their everything.

Is a small business only worth championing if their goods and services are of value to you, personally?

Are Palestinians only worth fighting for while getting horrifically slaughtered in Gaza, but not in trying to keep their restaurant running?

Do Black Lives Matter, but only sometimes, in certain situations, and not during business hours?

We'll fight to the death to keep ICE away from immigrants. But we'll also tell them your family's income doesn't matter if you dare speak up against something I believe in.

Are only some neighbors worthy of neighboring?

*Molly Mogren Katt writes for the Hill & Lake Press and also publishes the "Hey Eleanor!" column on Substack. She lives in the Wedge.*



VFW Hall. (Images: Terry White).



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# DEMYSTIFYING HENNEPIN COUNTY: WHAT COMMISSIONERS ACTUALLY DO

By Craig Wilson



(Image: Hennepin County)

*Commissioner seats are on the ballot this fall. Here is how Hennepin County's \$3.15 billion government works, and why it so often pays for things it cannot control.*

When something goes wrong in Minneapolis — a stalled road project, an encampment that won't go away, a program that falls short — residents tend to aim their frustration at the City Council. Often, though, the responsible party sits a level up and largely out of view, at Hennepin County. This November, much of the action many residents care about runs through an institution most of them would struggle to describe.

With county commissioner seats on the ballot this fall, readers have told the Hill & Lake Press they find the county baffling. What does a commissioner do all day? What is the county actually responsible for? Where does its money come from?

To make sense of it, the paper spoke at length with Hennepin County staff who agreed to talk on background and asked not to be named, citing the sensitivity of speaking during an election year.

What follows is their picture of a government that touches nearly every resident's life while remaining, as one put it, shrouded in mystery.

## A Creature of the State

Start with what the county is not. Unlike the city of Minneapolis or the state of Minnesota, Hennepin County has no constitution and no charter to define the

scope of its powers.

It is a political subdivision of the state, essentially an arm of state government, and 86 of Minnesota's 87 counties are organized the same way. (Ramsey County, which adopted a charter in the 1980s, is the lone exception.) For its authority Hennepin looks to state statute, and in particular to Chapter 383B, the chapter written specifically for Hennepin County's powers and functions.

That distinction matters, county staff said, because it explains why commissioners so often cannot simply do what constituents ask. Much of what the county does is dictated, and constrained, by the state and federal governments above it.

## Bigger Districts Than You Might Think

The county is governed by a board of seven commissioners, each elected from a district. Those districts are large. Each commissioner now represents roughly 180,000 to 185,000 people, more than two state senate districts and better than four Minneapolis City Council wards.

A city council member represents just under 40,000 residents; a state senator about 85,000. Each commissioner has two full-time staff, with an additional staffer in the clerk's office added in recent years to support the board chair.

## The Day-to-Day

A commissioner's week is mostly meetings, staff said. Some are external, with neighborhood

groups, labor unions, developers and the range of people who have business before the county. Some are internal, including one or two standing meetings a week with the county administrator, who brings most measures before the board.

And many flow from the dozens of outside boards commis-

Most measures (packaged as a board action resolution, or BAR) pass through three meetings: introduced at the board, referred to committee, debated and advanced, then approved back at the board.

As a result an item is typically in front of the public for 21 to 35 days. The Tuesday board meetings run anywhere from 90 minutes to three hours and require, staff stressed, considerable preparation and follow-up. The board also holds 15 to 18 deeper-dive briefings a year, usually on a Thursday.

## Why Commissioners Barely Talk to Each Other

One surprise, staff said, is how little the seven commissioners speak to one another about official business.

Minnesota's open meeting law bars a quorum from discussing county business outside a noticed meeting, and on a seven-member board a quorum is just four.

The law also counts serial and proxy conversations as violations: if two commissioners discuss an issue, then each takes it to a third and a fourth, they have serially broken the law, and their staffs can do the same by proxy.

Only two positions inside the county, the county administrator and the county attorney's liaison to the board, are shielded from those disclosure rules.

The Legislature, staff noted with some irony, exempts itself from the open meeting law it imposes on nearly everyone else.

## What the County Actually Does

The county board adopted a 2026 budget of about \$3.15 billion. Roughly 60 percent of that comes from the state and federal governments, with about 40 percent raised through local property and sales taxes.

Add the public hospital, whose board the county made public again last year, and direct oversight climbs toward \$5 billion, with another \$1 billion to

**“When something goes wrong in Minneapolis — a stalled road project, an encampment that won't go away, a program that falls short — residents tend to aim their frustration at the City Council... Often, though, the responsible party is largely out of view, at Hennepin County.”**

sioners are appointed to by virtue of the office, from the Metropolitan Council and the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District to the St. Anthony Falls Heritage Board. By one staffer's count there are 30 to 40 such bodies, divided among the seven members.

The formal work runs on a two-week cycle. The board meets one week, its committees the next, and because the board operates as committees of the whole, the same seven people do both jobs.

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\$2 billion of indirect influence through the various authorities commissioners sit on.

By far the largest function is human services: food assistance, medical assistance and Medicaid, housing assistance, child protective services and a range of programs for eligible residents.

As one staffer put it, if a human-services program is funded by the state or the feds, it is probably administered at the county level.

The county also handles public works, including some 2,200 lane miles of county roads; housing and economic development through the Housing and Redevelopment Authority; energy and environment work, from operating the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center to administering local cleanup dollars; the back-office operations that keep the county running; and the 41-branch library system, which ranges from the cavernous downtown Central Library to the one-room library in St. Bonifacius.

### Paying the Bill Without Calling the Shots

Here is where public understanding most often goes wrong, staff said. In public safety especially, the county pays for a great deal that it does not control.

State statute requires the county to fund the courts, the public defender, the county attorney, the sheriff and community supervision, but the policies are set elsewhere.

The chief judge of the Fourth Judicial District runs the courts; the chief public defender runs public defense; the county attorney and the sheriff run their own offices; and probation and parole largely follow state handbooks. The county supplies the courtroom, in other words, but does not decide what happens in it.

The sheriff's budget is the sharpest example. The statute says the county board shall review and approve the sheriff's budget each year, but it is not legally clear that the board may reject it.

The one time the question was tested, in a Ramsey County dispute that reached the Minneso-

ta Supreme Court, the court declined to resolve it cleanly, and the gray area persists.

That leaves commissioners reluctant to force a standoff, and inclined instead to use ordinances, reporting requirements and conditions to steer spending.

The tension is live: Sheriff Dawanna Witt's roughly \$170 million office is running an estimated \$15 million to \$20 million over budget this year, both over-staffed relative to its approved positions and heavy on overtime, and the budget has nearly doubled since 2015.

The board, staff said, is still trying to understand how an office can be over on staffing and over on overtime at the same time.

### Why the County Pays for Trains It Doesn't Run

The same pattern of paying for what someone else mostly controls runs through the county's role in light rail.

While the seven commissioners play a major role in advocating, planning and funding light rail transit in the region, the Metropolitan Council actually implements projects like the Green Line Extension, the Southwest light rail line.

Hennepin County is the main local funder of the Green Line Extension, using money that comes from a sales tax that Hennepin County commissioners imposed in 2017 which now generates more than \$170 million a year.

Hennepin County holds seats on two key Met Council oversight committees, the Corridor Management Committee and the Executive Change Control Board.

Both committees have been apprised of the Met Council's construction activities and have approved the many revisions to the original plan — changes driven, critics would argue, by inadequate preliminary engineering and political expediency.

The current Green Line Extension budget of \$2.86 billion is more than twice the \$1.25 billion first approved, and the line is in its eighth year of construction. Commissioners Marion Greene,

Debbie Goettel and Heather Edelson are the county's representatives on these committees.

### Why Lyndale is So Complicated

Few issues capture the county's tangled authority better than the reconstruction of Lyndale Avenue

Lyndale is a county road, so the county controls its design, construction and maintenance, but state statute dictates the priorities.

Because Lyndale is a county state aid highway and an arterial, the design must accommodate freight and a state-mandated minimum traffic volume.

Nothing in statute requires the county to weigh the interests of business owners in the corridor, or even to provide bike lanes or sidewalks; most of the county's 2,200 lane miles have none.

Beyond those baseline requirements, staff said, the biggest factor is the wishes of the local commissioner, who historically drives how a county road is configured in his or her district.

For Lyndale that is Commissioner Marion Greene of District 3, with board chair Irene Fernando and public works committee chair Kevin Anderson the next most likely to weigh in.

Then comes the city. Before construction begins the county and city must sign a general operating agreement governing work in a roadway that also carries city utilities; without it, the county cannot so much as patch a city water main it accidentally strikes.

Those agreements were once routine, staff said, but in recent years city negotiators have taken a harder line, withholding agreement until the city's own priorities are met, a posture first seen on Hennepin Avenue in Northeast and now shadowing Lyndale.

There is one more wrinkle that cuts in the county's favor. When the city rebuilds a road, it levies a special assessment on adjacent property owners, a bill that can run from a few hundred to a few thousand dollars for a small business already absorbing the disruption of construction.

The county does not levy such assessments for road recon-

struction. Neither government, staff acknowledged, maintains a fund to help businesses weather the construction itself, a gap they conceded is probably worth addressing.

### The Bottom Line

County commissioners, staff said, are the connective tissue among layers of government that rarely line up neatly.

They oversee billions of dollars and a sprawling set of services, yet much of what they manage is steered from St. Paul or Washington, and some of what residents blame them for is not theirs to fix.

As voters weigh their choices this fall, that may be the most useful thing to keep in mind: knowing what the office can and cannot do is the first step to judging the people who hold it.

*Craig Wilson is the editor of the Hill & Lake Press. He lives in Lowry Hill.*



# BEAT THE HEAT WITH A SWEET TREAT

LINDEN HILLS 4321 UPTON AVE SO. MINNEAPOLIS, MN LOWRY HILL 1007 W FRANKLIN AVE SO. MINNEAPOLIS, MN  
KINGFIELD 4301 NICOLLET AVE SO. MINNEAPOLIS, MN



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# THE MILFOIL RETURNS. SO DO THE QUESTIONS.

By Steve Kotvis



Crews work to remove invasive Eurasian watermilfoil from Lake of the Isles. While harvesting improves recreation and appearance, park officials note that long-term water quality challenges stem from broader watershed and nutrient issues. (Image: Steve Kotvis)

*The milfoil is thick. Algae collects along the shoreline. Boaters, paddlers, anglers and trail users wonder why the problem on Lake of the Isles never seems to go away. Some members of the Hill and Lake Press community have been seeking solutions from Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board for more than 17 years.*

Lake of the Isles keeps growing milfoil and algae. Every summer, the complaints return. Yet perhaps the question is not why milfoil and algae come back each year, but why so many environmental problems seem to follow the same pattern.

Lake of the Isles provides a useful example. The ecological impacts of invasive aquatic species and excessive algae are well documented. Recreational opportunities can be diminished when waterways become difficult to navigate. Just as importantly, the appearance of our lakes influences how residents and visitors experience one of Minneapolis' defining assets. Whether viewed through an ecological, recreational or aesthetic lens, few people would argue that these conditions represent the desired future for our Chain of Lakes.

## “Lake of the Isles keeps growing milfoil and algae.”

Through extensive planning, studies, inventories and assessments, we know the problem exists. We understand many of the impacts. We know at least some of the available treatments. Efforts are made. Resources are spent. Yet year after year, the conversation returns.

The challenge is that the visible symptoms are often easier to discuss than the underlying causes.

In correspondence with residents, Josh Poole, the Park Board's aquatic invasive species program coordinator, acknowledged concerns about algae and nuisance vegetation while also pointing out that harvesting plants and skimming algae primarily address access and appearance rather than the nutrient dynamics, watershed conditions and historical alterations that contribute to the problem. In other words, some actions may improve some conditions without solving the underlying causes.

The same pattern appears elsewhere in our park system.

Buckthorn invades our woodlands. Biodiversity declines. Natural areas become degraded. Erosion persists. Water quality concerns continue. The symptoms differ, but the questions often sound remarkably similar.

In preparing this article, I submitted a series of questions to both Park Board staff and commissioners. The questions were less about milfoil itself and more about the systems that shape outcomes. How are ecological priorities established? What role do adopted plans play in budgets and staffing decisions? What ecological metrics are regularly reviewed? How does ecological expertise influence decision-making? How can the public determine whether adopted plans are actually shaping actions on the ground?

The responses, if received in time, will likely be the subject of a future article. The

**“The challenge is that the visible symptoms are often easier to discuss than the underlying causes.”**

purpose of those questions is not to assign blame, but to better understand where meaningful change can occur within a complex system involving staff, commissioners, state regulators, watershed management, funding and public expectations.

It is also important to recognize that this conversation is not occurring in the absence of citizen involvement. Across the Chain of Lakes and throughout the park system, volunteers contribute thousands of hours annually to stewardship, restoration, cleanup efforts, monitoring, board and committee service, fundraising, advocacy, and public education. Residents have not simply identified problems; many have spent years improving parks and encouraging elected officials and staff to prioritize long-term ecological health.

Those efforts matter. They demonstrate a community willing to invest its own time, expertise and energy in protecting public assets. At the same time, volunteer commitment has limits. Volunteers can identify problems, contribute labor and advocate for solutions, but they cannot establish budgets,

allocate staff, secure permits or set organizational priorities. Those responsibilities rest elsewhere.

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, like many public agencies, has invested substantial effort into plans, inventories, assessments, monitoring programs and management strategies. Those efforts generate valuable information. But they also raise an important question: How do those plans and assessments translate into priorities, budgets, staffing decisions and measurable outcomes?

More specifically, what responsibility do elected commissioners have to ensure that years of recommendations and adopted plans meaningfully influence future decisions? And what level of accountability should the public reasonably expect when the same concerns continue to be raised year after year?

Likewise, when citizens are already contributing thousands of hours toward stewardship, to what extent should they reasonably expect their elected and professional leaders to identify solutions, secure resources and advance implementation rather than relying on volunteers to continue carrying the issue forward year after year?

The public often sees the symptoms. What is less visible is the chain of decisions that ultimately determines whether conditions improve, remain stable or continue to deteriorate.

Perhaps that is where the conversation should focus.

Not simply on whether Lake of the Isles has too much algae or whether milfoil remains a nuisance. Those facts are already widely recognized, and the public's continued reminders remain important.

The more important question may be whether leadership can identify the actions, resources and priorities most likely to produce meaningful improvement.

If not, we may find ourselves having the same conversation next summer, and the summer after that, discussing familiar symptoms while still searching for the changes needed to address the underlying causes.

*Steve Kotvis writes for the Hill & Lake Press. He lives in Bryn Mawr.*



# LEASHED, NOT BANISHED: INSIDE THE VOTE TO END OFF-LEASH PLAY ON A SACRED SITE

By Craig Wilson



Pictured are District 6 Commissioner Kathy Abene and District 4 Commissioner Jason Garcia, both of whom represent portions of the Hill & Lake Press coverage area, listening to public testimony on the proposed policy change that would end off-leash dog access. (Images: Taylor Dahlin)



*The Park Board is ending a three-decade-old off-leash dog park on land sacred to the Dakota. Dogs are still welcome on a leash, and the two commissioners who represent Hill & Lake readers split over how it was done.*

The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board has voted 8-1 to end off-leash use at the Minnehaha Off-Leash Dog Park, a six-acre stretch of Mississippi River bottom-land that has drawn dogs and their owners since 1992.

Lost in much of the social-media reaction is the most basic fact of the decision: the dogs are not being banished. They are still welcome on the land.

They will simply have to be on a leash, under the same rules that apply across the rest of the park system, by the end of the year.

And while the park lies well southeast of the Hill & Lake neighborhoods, down along the river near Minnehaha, the decision is in large part a local story.

**“Really, all we’re asking people to do is not have dogs there off-leash. We’re not saying we’re closing the area to dogs completely, or that we’re not allowing people who aren’t from the Dakota nations to go.”**

— Jason Garcia,  
District 4 Commissioner

The two commissioners whose districts cover this paper’s readers sat at the center of it, on opposite sides: District 4’s Jason Garcia wrote the resolution and led the effort to pass it, while District 6’s Cathy Abene cast the lone vote against.

## A Sacred Site

The site sits beside Mni Owe Sni, or Coldwater Spring, a place the Dakota have held sacred for thousands of years.

The land was once part of the National Park Service holdings nearby and was handed to the Park Board in the 1990s, when, as District 4 Commissioner Jason Garcia put it,

Community members from both sides of the issue attend the meeting with Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board commissioners. (Image at left: Taylor Dahlin)



“it became a dog park without any real research done into that area.”

Coldwater Spring was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2023, and an archaeological study the board commissioned found the area likely holds significant remains below the surface, with ruins already visible above it.

**“The board’s decision is too hasty and too top down. That’s not how we historically have done things.”**

— Cathy Abene,  
District 6 Commissioner

Garcia, who wrote the resolution and is widely credited with leading the effort, said the concern is far older than last year’s headlines. “The area has been sacred for thousands of years,” Garcia said. They traced the current push to an earlier dispute over fencing, when the National Park Service worried about dogs crossing into its savanna. “Even going back before Highway 55 was run through that area, Dakota people were speaking out about how it was inappropriate to be developing there, because it is a sacred site.” As the board studied the question, Garcia said, it heard from Dakota and Ojibwe elder Juanita Espinosa, from Maggie Lorenz, who spent years at the Minnesota Historical Society, and from Samantha Odegard, the Upper Sioux Community’s tribal historic preservation officer. “In receiving all of that information, the vast majority of us on the board decided it was necessary to prevent ongoing harm to Dakota people to initiate this process,” Garcia said.

## A Compromise

Garcia cast the leash rule as a deliberate middle path. The opposition, Garcia said, is “around process. People are saying we’re moving too fast with this,” and asking whether dogs might still be allowed in some form. Garcia said they looked to how other Indigenous sites are managed.

“None of them allow off-leash dogs, or some don’t allow dogs at all, but some like Pipestone down in southwestern Minnesota allow dogs if they’re on leashes. So that felt like the best compromise,” Garcia said.

“Really, all we’re asking people to do is not have dogs there off-leash. We’re not saying we’re closing the area to dogs completely, or that we’re not allowing people who aren’t from the Dakota nations to go.”

## A Concern About Process

The lone vote against came from District 6 Commissioner Cathy Abene. Abene was at pains to say her objection was not to the outcome but to the way the board arrived at it.

“I don’t have an outcome in my mind,” she said, adding that she had no bone to pick. What troubled her was speed. “The board’s decision is too hasty and too top down,” she said. “That’s not how we historically have done things.”

Abene tried to amend the resolution and, when that failed, could not support it. “Whether or not I agree with the ultimate decision, I don’t even feel informed enough to make that type of determination. I don’t have any information to go on,” she said. “That’s why I couldn’t vote for this resolution.”

Her larger worry was about whose voices the rushed timeline rewarded. “The dog park people mobilized pretty well,” Abene said, while “the indigenous community has not typically mobilized in the same way to address the park board.” She said she trusts the board’s Native American advisory council and wished it had been given room to work.

Continued on page 13

# A NEW GENERATION REVISITS SOCIALISM

By Ameila Bush



(Image: Christopher Bohnet)

*From rising rents to widening wealth gaps, younger Minnesotans are reconsidering old ideas, while older generations and moderate liberals question whether socialism's promises can withstand history.*

As a student at Emory University in Atlanta and managing editor of the student newspaper there, I have been interested in a question that many young Americans are asking and many older Americans are revisiting: Why does socialism seem to be attracting renewed interest?

For those who grew up during the Cold War, socialism often carried associations with the Soviet Union, authoritarian governments and ideological rivalry.

Younger generations came of age in a different world. Rising housing costs, student debt, concerns over healthcare and widening wealth inequality have shaped their experiences.

For some, socialism represents an alternative vision centered on community, economic fairness and what supporters describe as putting “people over profit.”

That renewed interest has become increasingly visible nationwide and in Minnesota.

## The Rise of the DSA

The Democratic Socialists of America, or DSA, is the largest socialist organization in the United States. Political activist Michael Harrington founded the organization in 1982 through the merger of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee and the New American Movement.

Membership remained relatively steady at roughly 6,500 members through 2014. By election day in 2016, that number had climbed to 8,500.

In the months following the election, another 13,000 people joined, many of them between the ages of 18 and 35, according to the organization. Today, DSA claims roughly 100,000 members and chapters in all 50 states. The Twin Cities chapter became officially registered in 2017.

The growth of socialist organizing has been reflected in Min-

nesota politics. State Sen. Omar Fateh, a member of the Twin Cities Democratic Socialists of America, mounted a strong mayoral campaign against incumbent Jacob Frey. Minneapolis City Council Members Robin Wonsley and Aisha Chughtai have received support from the Democratic Socialists of America, reflecting the growing influence of the organization in local politics.

At the council’s organizational meeting earlier this year, members elected Wonsley as minority leader and Chughtai as majority leader. Wonsley said she intends to serve as a voice for the four council members who identify as democratic socialists — herself, Jason Chavez, Chughtai and newly elected member Soren Stevenson.

During the meeting, however, the city attorney noted that the positions of majority and minority leader are officially nonpartisan and are intended to serve the entire council rather than any ideological caucus.

While DSA endorses candidates, it is not officially a political party but describes itself as a political and activist organization.

On its website, the Twin Cities chapter outlines seven broad demands, ranging from universal healthcare and publicly funded elections to prison abolition, the elimination of armed police and returning land to Indigenous nations. The central theme is reducing economic inequality and increasing democratic control over institutions.

“We are Socialists because we reject an economic order based on private profit, alienated labor, gross inequalities of wealth and power, discrimination based on race, sex or any other factor, and brutality and violence in defense of the status quo,” the national DSA states on its website.

## Not everyone who embraces socialist ideas belongs to DSA

Emiliana Cofell, who lives in South Minneapolis, is not affiliated with the organization but often follows its endorsements. She has participated in Democratic-Farmer-Labor caucuses and conventions and says she is motivated by what she calls “people over profit” values.

Although she grew up in Minnesota as a Democrat, it was during her undergraduate studies at Scripps College in California and graduate work at the University of Illinois that her political views evolved. Over time, she became disillusioned with both major parties and found herself drawn toward socialism.

After returning to Minnesota, she became more involved in community organizations and local activism.

“It was exciting for me to realize and feel empowered that I could look out for local community activism to get involved in,” Cofell said. “My ideology made me really motivated to want to help my community, because I see socialism as people over profit.”

Thomas Regnier, a member of Generation Z (1997-2012) who describes himself as progressive, believes some of socialism’s appeal stems from frustrations that transcend traditional partisan divides. He points to widening wealth disparities and growing dissatisfaction with institutions.

“The extreme upper echelons of wealth are basically acting in a way that is very conspicuous,” Regnier said. “It just shows the distance from everyday working people, and that’s contributing to a lot of discontent in our society that does need to be meaningfully addressed, regardless of what one’s politics really are.”

David Tinjum, publisher of the Minneapolis Times and a self-described moderate liberal who has studied the DSA and its ideology, agrees that younger Americans face real economic pressures. But he cautions against viewing those challenges as unique.

## Generational Hardship

“Every generation tends to think it has it harder than the generations that came before it,” Tinjum said. “The reality is that every generation faces its own challenges, and ours was no exception.”

Tinjum said Baby Boomers came of age amid the Vietnam War, political assassinations and social upheaval. Generation X entered adulthood during the Gulf War and economic uncertainty, while millennials faced the housing collapse and Great Recession.

“One reason older generations appear wealthier is not because they had an easy path, but because they have simply had more time to build careers, accumulate assets and establish themselves in the middle class,” he said.

An article in *The Economist* recently distinguished “Gen Z socialism” from the millennial ver-

“There is a really big generational gap,” she said.

To Cofell, socialism became associated with authoritarian governments during the Cold War in ways that she believes have led many Americans to misunderstand what Democratic Socialists advocate.

“Sometimes people are like, ‘We’ll take away all the money,’ or ‘take away all our houses and everything,’” she said. “People just have this view that isn’t necessarily what is actually promoted.”

## A Moderate Vantage Point

Tinjum sees the issue differently.

“I view Democratic Socialism more as a belief system or set of values, like a religion, than as an economic model grounded in historical experience,” he said.

“In my view, every country that has attempted socialism has either failed outright or moved away from it over time.”

He argues that countries often cited by Democratic Socialists are fundamentally capitalist economies with robust social welfare systems.

“People often point to Scandinavia as socialist, but I would argue those countries are fundamentally market economies that have retained some social welfare programs while relying heavily on capitalism,” Tinjum said.

“The simple truth, in my opinion, is that well regulated capitalism works. It is the engine that generates the wealth that ultimately pays for roads, police, Social Security and other public services.”

He added that he does not consider public infrastructure or social insurance programs themselves to be socialism.

“My concern is that socialist policies, when taken too far, can produce economic stagnation, poverty and social dysfunction,” he said. “History provides many examples that should serve as warnings.”

## The Future

Whether socialism’s renewed popularity represents a lasting political shift or simply another chapter in America’s recurring debates over capitalism and inequality remains uncertain.

For supporters such as Cofell, Democratic Socialism offers answers to questions of affordability, opportunity and economic fairness. Critics such as Tinjum argue that history demonstrates the resilience of market economies and the dangers of pushing socialist ideas too far.

What is clear is that a generation with no memory of the Cold War is asking questions about economics, inequality and the role of government that previous generations thought had largely been settled.

*Amelia Bush is the managing editor of The Emory Wheel at Emory University in Atlanta and is interned at the Hill & Lake Press. She grew up in Kenwood.*

**“What is clear is that a generation with no memory of the Cold War is asking questions about economics, inequality and the role of government that previous generations thought had largely been settled.”**

sion that preceded it, suggesting younger socialists are often motivated by affordability and economic security.

Cofell agrees that the divide seems to run through generations. In her view, it separates those who lived through the Cold War from those who did not.

# THE BIKE I'M TOO AFRAID TO PARK

By Quinton Courts



(Image: Quinton Courts)

*An East Isles resident found the perfect city bike — then let fear of theft keep it parked. He's not the only Minneapolis rider whose enthusiasm for cycling has been chilled.*

I own what might be the perfect city bike: a sage green, Amsterdam-style cruiser I researched for months before buying. In two years, I've ridden it three times. The reason? I'm scared of having it stolen.

I'm not alone. The fear of losing a bike — to say nothing of actually losing one — quietly undercuts the very thing that drew my partner and me to Minneapolis: its bikeability.

## Choosing Minneapolis Due to its Bikeability

Before moving to Minneapolis, my partner and I would very frequently hitch up our bicycles and drive the 20-some minutes from a southwest suburb into the city to ride the trails around the Chain of Lakes or along Minnehaha Creek.

After we realized that it made more sense for us to “live where we play” rather than making these weekly trips for restaurants and leisure biking, we finally made the move to our East Isles home.

We didn't consider our lifestyle as that of bikers, but the bikeability of Minneapolis was certainly alluring.

After venturing beyond the bike trails of parks in South Minneapolis, we discovered that urban bike lanes, both protected and shared on-road, gave us access to explore the less parky parts of the city.

An hour-long bike ride would allow us to explore 10 to 12 miles through unique Minneapolis neighborhoods. Our hybrid bikes were soon upgraded to electric bikes, giving us even more freedom to wander without going beyond our not-so-avid biking limits.

I then bought a clip-on basket sold as an accessory for my specific electric bike, as I considered expanding its use to short errands rather than just fun.

And, truthfully, that's about as far as this idealized version of using my bike for transportation has gone.

## The City of Bikes

We live in a very dense section of the city, and I do observe people who are clearly using their bikes as a primary means to transport goods in saddlebags or milk crates bolted to their frames.

There are even kids riding to and fro in bucket bikes. But where are these riders keeping their

bikes safe so that they're still there when they get back?

**“Why don't you just buy a cheap ‘bar bike’? That way, if something happens to it, it's not like you've lost something that's going to be really expensive to replace.”**

The more I came to terms with my hesitation, the more I asked around: Am I the only one a little paranoid about this potential loss?

The answer, not surprisingly, was no.

Before we chalk this up to a guy who's just not comfortable with city life, let's rewind. I was raised in the inner city, my adolescence spent in multiple duplexes in neighborhoods where, unfortunately, theft was common.

In fact, after I realized my early '90s BMX kid bike had gone missing, my single mother went with a neighbor to retrieve it from the strangers three blocks away who had taken it.

If those strangers got even half the look my mom could give, I understand why she got it back without a confrontation.

While not particularly scarring, I still vividly remember the feeling of walking outside and realizing my eyes weren't playing tricks on me — my bike was gone.

## The Kmart Chop Shop

Maybe it traces back to our first few rides through the Midtown Greenway after moving to Minneapolis in 2021.

For those who remember, the backside of the former Kmart was a legit bicycle chop shop. In 2022, the Star Tribune ran a commentary in which a resident recounted retrieving her bike — intact — from the person who had it, alongside piles of bikes and bike parts.

I saw those piles from the trail below and thought, “I sure hope my bike doesn't end up gone, but if it does, this is the place to find it.” Thankfully, the Kmart and the chop shop are a thing of the past.

My partner, who brags about his 10-minute commute to work downtown on his electric bike, said, “Why don't you just buy a cheap ‘bar bike’? That way, if something happens to it, it's not like you've lost something that's going to be really expensive to replace.” He had a point. So I hunted for said bar bike.

That hunt soon morphed into researching the perfect, Amsterdam-style upright bicycle for my new urban lifestyle. I finally landed one with a hunter green frame, complete with a hand-stitched, camel leatherette seat and grips.

I even bought a retro detachable chrome basket because, of course, I was going to have so much to carry around. I may have strayed a little from the cheap bar bike, but I have no regrets. As I said, I've ridden it three times in two years.

I just can't bear the thought of losing it.

## Am I paranoid?

Determined to prove I'm not just unreasonably worried about bike theft, I searched the Minneapolis Crime Dashboard. Not to my surprise, bicycle thefts aren't categorized on their own.

They're labeled as general property crimes, so isolating the data requires requesting it internally.

The most recent figure published in local media came in May 2025, when KSTP reported that the Minneapolis Police Department logged 1,462 stolen-bicycle cases in 2024 — a six-year high. [Editor's note: updated MPD figures pending.] It wasn't comforting, but I needed to hear solutions.

As part of Minneapolis's Transportation Action Plan, a proposal to pilot safe bicycle storage locations around the city was presented in 2024, with the sites supposedly active that fall. As of last June, the city was still holding webinars about the coming storage locations. To date, there are no signs of city-sponsored safe bicycle storage. Is Hennepin County holding bike thieves accountable? I don't know.

Until there are solutions that give riders a little more confidence, I've registered all of our household bicycles with the city.

In 2025, we were asked to re-register our bikes with Bike Index, a national bicycle registry that the police department's Property and Evidence Unit uses to connect missing bikes to their riders. We also invested in U-locks as a deterrent. Some neighbors say they just bring their bikes inside stores; my partner and other clients bring theirs into the gym.

Still, the worries — mine and my neighbors' — persist. At a meeting in May at the VFW in LynLake about the coming Lyndale Avenue redesign and reconstruction, someone who works at the CC Club said “The people that come by bikes... they are all stolen. They come out and there's tires laying around, bikes chopped up.”

In my search for fear-of-cycling validation, one Reddit user, Beneficial\_Giraffe21, summed it up: “I'm also not OK with bike theft, which has such a chilling effect on public safety and people's willingness to embrace cycling as transportation.”

For me, it's baby steps — er, training wheels — toward the point where I can bike to run errands and support local businesses.

Just don't expect me to do it in January. It's going to take quite a few more years as a newer Minnesotan for me to build up that level of commitment.

*Quinton Courts writes for the Hill & Lake Press. He lives in East Isles.*



# COMPASSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY CAN BRING UPTOWN BACK

By Andrea Corbin



Andrea Corbin, owner of Flower Bar on Lyndale Avenue and president of the Uptown Association, is pictured. (Image courtesy of Flower Bar)

*The president of the Uptown Association argues the commercial district's comeback lies in filling its storefronts — pairing compassion with accountability — not in fining the owners fighting hardest to bring it back.*

I recently attended a community gathering billed as the Uptown People's Assembly, and I left thinking about how much I share with the people in that room.

We all love Uptown. We all want it to be safe, vibrant and welcoming. We are all troubled by empty storefronts and by neighbors living on the street. Where we part ways is on what will actually fix it.

The way to revive Uptown is to fill it — pairing compassion with accountability, not punishing the owners working hardest to bring it back.

Much of the evening centered on two ideas: that the way to address our vacant buildings is to

report property owners and fine them, and that the way to address homelessness is to keep it visible and leave it be.

I understand the impulse behind both. When you see a boarded-up window, or someone suffering in the cold, you want to do something right now. That instinct comes from a good place. But good intentions and good outcomes are not the same thing.

As president of the Uptown Association, I know many of our building owners personally, and the notion that they are sitting on empty spaces for a tax write-off is simply not true.

They are desperate to fill those spaces. Many are practically giving them away and still cannot find tenants. Fining them for a problem they fight every single day would punish the very people working hardest to bring Uptown back.

The honest question is not why owners won't lease their buildings. It is why businesses

hesitate to come here at all, when they sign leases without a second thought in Edina or St. Louis Park.

Here is the encouraging part, and the reason I remain optimistic: the solution is within reach, and it is the opposite of chaos. The way to revive Uptown is to fill it.

When storefronts are occupied and sidewalks are busy, the whole neighborhood feels different. It is safer, friendlier and alive. Crime falls not because we wished it away, but because there are people, lights, commerce and community on every block.

That is exactly what the Uptown Association exists to do. We want to be an incubator for small businesses. If you have ever dreamed of opening a shop, a cafe or a studio, come see me.

There are county programs for downpayment assistance. I can connect you with lenders, with resources and with people who have done it before. Honestly, there has rarely been a better time to put down roots in Uptown. Rents are low, opportunity is high, and the neighborhood is ready for builders.

On homelessness, I will say plainly that compassion and accountability belong together. I have leaned on public help myself. I am a single mother of four. Food stamps and housing assistance carried my family through a hard stretch, and I will always be grateful those programs were there.

But telling people that they have no choice, that living and using drugs on the sidewalk is simply who they are, is not kindness. It writes human beings off.

Real compassion means meeting someone where they are and then helping them to get somewhere better, into treatment, into housing, into stability, humanely and with respect. A neighbor-

hood can hold a high standard and a soft heart at the same time.

I also want to be candid about the larger philosophy I heard that night. The belief that we should undermine the businesses and institutions around us in order to clear the way for something better has been tried in many places and many forms, and time and again it has left people poorer and less free, not more secure.

I do not doubt the sincerity of the people who hold it. I simply do not believe Uptown should be the next experiment. We have a far more reliable path in front of us: small businesses, good jobs, safe streets and neighbors who look out for one another.

So let's get to work, together. I would love to host a community conversation with our building and business owners about what they are truly up against and how we can help more entrepreneurs say yes to Uptown. If you want to be part of building something real here, my door is open.

*Andrea Corbin is president of the Uptown Association.*



Off-leash dogs are pictured along the Mississippi River at a site sacred to the Dakota people. Under the proposed policy, dogs would still be welcome to visit the site, provided they remain on leash. (Images: Courtney Cushing Kiernat)

## LEASHED, NOT BANISHED continued from page 9

"If they would be given the time to work on this, the staff could actually report out recommendations," she said. "Because this process was rushed, we heard from a more well-coordinated group, but we haven't heard the full picture, and that's part of the problem."

### Shifting Districts

That two commissioners representing the same readers could land on opposite sides is partly a quirk of geography.

Most of the Hill & Lake Press coverage area sits in Garcia's District 4, but the last census redrew the map.

Cedar-Isles-Dean and West Bde Maka Ska shifted into Abene's District 6, while District 4 reached across the Mississippi to pick up part of northeast Minneapolis.

The effect has been to give District 4 a more downtown, riverfront character, while District 6 stays anchored in the southwest.

On some blocks, readers are now represented by the commissioner who wrote the resolution; a short walk away, by the one who voted no.

For now the practical change is narrow. The land stays open, dogs included, and the board has said it will look for a new off-leash site elsewhere in the city.

"People are still allowed to go there, and it's not like it closed today," Garcia said. "It will be closed as an off-leash dog park by the end of the year," after which dogs "will be expected to use the same regulations as our regular parks in the area."

*Craig Wilson is the editor of the Hill & Lake Press. He lives in Lowry Hill.*

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3:30 - 6:30 pm



**August 8th**  
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3:30 - 6:30 pm







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# AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN?

By Jeanette Colby



Summer activity has returned to the Kenilworth Trail after seven years of Green Line Extension construction, but some residents say the reconfigured intersection at Cedar Lake Parkway and Burnham Road presents new safety challenges for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists. (Image: Courtney Cushing Kiernat)

## Reopened trail and changing travel patterns raise questions about traffic controls near Cedar Lake South Beach

The lakes and trails are alive with joyful summer activity in Minneapolis, and nowhere is that more evident than on the newly reopened Kenilworth Trail, which returned to public use this year after seven years of Green Line Extension construction.

But some users say changes to the intersection at Cedar Lake Parkway, Burnham Road and the converging Kenilworth and Cedar Lake trails have created potential safety concerns in this busy recreational corridor.

Since the trail was last open, traffic patterns have evolved and urban trails like those that converge near Cedar South Beach have become more multi-modal. In addition to traditional bicycles,

the area now sees electric bicycles, scooters and other micromobility devices. Pedestrians, many with dogs, share the space with beachgoers and kayakers heading to Cedar Lake South Beach. Freight trains occasionally pass through the corridor, temporarily backing up vehicle traffic on Cedar Lake Parkway.

Burnham Road provides the only direct vehicle access from the west to portions of the Hill & Lake Press area without adding several miles of travel. Residents say some trail users are unaware that eastbound motorists must turn left onto Burnham when there is a break in oncoming traffic. Drivers heading west on Cedar Lake Parkway can also have difficulty seeing cyclists approaching from the Kenilworth Trail when turning right onto Burnham.

Before the reconstruction, stop signs encouraged trail users crossing Burnham Road to slow down and remain alert. Those signs have not been replaced. Concerns about the configuration were raised with the Metropolitan Council's Green Line Extension office and the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board as early as December 2025.

When contacted recently, Minneapolis City Council Member Elizabeth Shaffer responded

promptly and acknowledged concerns about safety at the intersection. She referred the matter to Minneapolis Public Works and noted that the multiple jurisdictions involved add complexity to any changes.

As summer activity peaks, residents hope officials will take a fresh look at the intersection before a serious crash occurs.

Keeping pedestrians, cyclists, motorists and other trail users moving safely would help ensure that this popular destination continues to be known for all kinds of summer fun.

*Jeanette Colby writes for the Hill & Lake Press. She lives in Kenwood.*

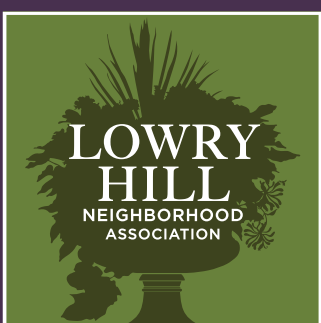


## Lowry Hill Update

**Uptown Farmers Market is in full swing!** Still 4–8 PM Thursdays, but the location moved north to Lagoon & Girard Plaza, due to construction. Learn more at [uptownmarket.org](http://uptownmarket.org).

**It's been heartening seeing the community respond to this moment. Rent relief remains a priority**—some residents still can't leave their homes. Whether you need resources or are looking for ways to help, visit [lowryhillneighborhood.org/ice](http://lowryhillneighborhood.org/ice).

**Did you know storm drain street trash pollutes lakes and rivers?** Debris breaks down in the elements, then drains into our waters. But adopting a drain is free, and takes only a few occasional minutes to maintain: [mn.adopt-a-drain.org](http://mn.adopt-a-drain.org)



### Lowry Hill Board Meetings

**July 7 • Sept. 1** 1<sup>st</sup> Tues. 6:30 – 8 PM  
Kenwood Community Center: 2101 W Franklin Ave  
Join us for neighborhood updates! To join the agenda, please email [lhna@lowryhillneighborhood.org](mailto:lhna@lowryhillneighborhood.org).

### Lowry Hill Service Saturdays

**July 18 • Aug. 15** 3<sup>rd</sup> Sat. 10 – 11:30 AM  
Start + end at Sebastian Joe's: 1007 W Franklin Ave  
Join us for friendly walks around Lowry Hill! Get outside, meet neighbors, pick up litter, and build community.

### Lowry Hill Ice Cream Social

**July 19** Sun. 2 – 4 PM  
Kenwood Community Center: 2101 W Franklin Ave  
Enjoy free Sebastian Joe's ice cream and dwarf goats! Stop by or hang out for a while. Meet neighbors and LHNA board members. All Lowry Hill residents welcome!

### Fishing in the Parks

**Aug. 22** Sat. 10 AM – 12 PM  
SW Cedar Lake: 2630 Cedar Lake Pkwy  
Free poles, bait, and instruction, courtesy of MN DNR! All ages and skill levels welcome, no license required.

### Neighborhood Super Sale

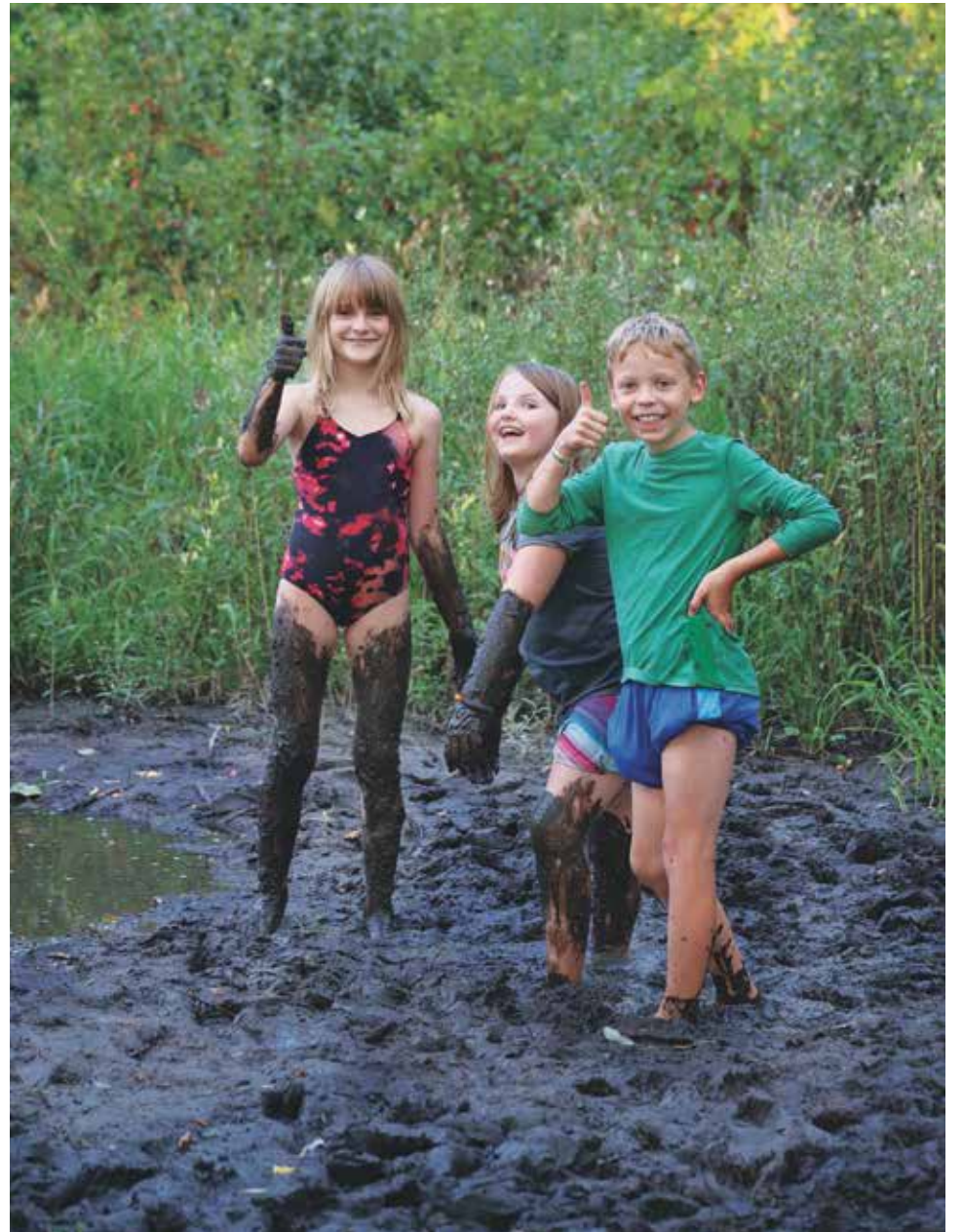
**Sept. 19** Sat. 9 AM – 3 PM • 6 local neighborhoods  
\* Sale registration opens online July/Aug  
Find new treasures and keep stuff out of landfills! A wave of 100+ yard sales will sweep the area.

[lowryhillneighborhood.org](http://lowryhillneighborhood.org)  
for full details, newsletter sign-up and more

THE MUD IS READY! Front page



(Image: Will Stensrud)



(Image: Courtney Cushing Kiernat)

er for hockey games at the Victory Memorial Ice Arena in North Minneapolis.

His Catholic faith and community at St. Lawrence Newman Center, also in Dinkytown, have been a cornerstone in his life.

Steve started coming to Hidden Beach in 1978, when he found the place “more or less by accident” on a hot day.

Back then, it looked and felt very different from today. Layers of buckthorn and mulberry hid the lake, and only a small footpath led in from Upton Avenue. It was secluded and edgy — and at times a hotspot for crime.

With the support of Kenwood neighbors, the beach got a new design — buckthorn removal increased visibility. Park police presence increased (a City Pages

article from 2008 documents the polarized reactions to these changes).

More recently, the neighborhood organization has sponsored events such as yoga, acoustic music, and special events and festivals. But regardless of the look, the mud pit, and Steve, remained constant presences.

Steve has been the Mud Man since 1994, when the original Mud Man, Andrew Foss, “asked [him] to take things over.” Steve says Foss “got the mud pit going in the 1980s,” and over the years, the two formed a friendship. Foss died in 2009 but was still active picking up trash in Kenwood into at least 2000.

**The Figures Behind the Mud**

Steve has been proud to have

the title of Mud Man. His self-appointed duties were cleaning the mud, making sure it was free of debris and twigs; attracting people to the mud pit; making sure folks felt safe and welcome once there; counting the visitors; and of course, compiling the Annual Reports, which highlighted how seriously he took his accountant training and his love of numbers.

The Annual Report (image on page 19) consisted of five sections (all quotes are Steve’s): (1) information about the season, including its length; (2) the overall attendance of the mud pit; (3) a more detailed “attendance analysis,” including categories like “Largest ‘Momentary Load’ (customers ‘served’ at one time)” — in 2024, this was 15, which occurred on the afternoon of Sept. 2; (4) “Special

Orders,” which included categories such as “medical cases” (“for treatment of sunburns or other ‘skin disorders’”) and press coverage; and (5) a yearly attendance summary starting in 1994.

Steve also compiled general information for mud pit visitors. Thanks to his fastidious record-keeping, we know about the type of soil in the mud pit (80% “White Clay,” 20% “Black Humus”).

He documented the species of animals in the mud pit, the physical and psychological benefits of mud use — one such example reads “Primitive Playtime for adults with ‘High-Tech Overdose’” — and other categories.

When Tim McManus, a retired math teacher who befriended and appreciated Steve, saw Steve’s An-

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nual Reports, he realized that it was great data. His students used regression models to predict how many visitors there would be to the mud pit based on the weather. “I think Steve got a kick out of that,” Tim chuckled.

At Steve’s bedside, most mementos were from neighbors who knew him from the beach. A poster with Steve’s famous quotes (“Good afternoon!” and “The mud is ready!”) hung next to his bed.

Jars of mud from the pit were on his dresser, and books about World War II history, one of his favorite topics out-

**“From Hennepin and Franklin, Steve would wheel a large backpack with him every day. It held his wetsuit, flippers, sunscreen, beverages, a towel, a clicker counter, a spade and hand saw (for mud pit maintenance), and sometimes the day’s food.”**

ANDREW J. FOSS MEMORIAL MUDHOLE  
REPORT ON OPERATIONS - 2014 SEASON  
Site Address - 2080 Washburn Av. So, Minneapolis MN  
(NPRB Cedar Lake "Hidden Beach" Park)

- RUN OF SEASON** - Opened: May 23 . . . . .  
Closed: Sep 20 . . . . .  
Potential Total Days: 121  
Days Lost to Bad Weather or Other Commitments: 43  
Actual Days Service: 78
- OVERALL ATTENDANCE** -  
May (23-31): 77                      Avg / Day 8  
June: 175                              6  
July: 171                                6  
August: 244                            8  
September (1-20): 29                1  
SEASON TOTAL: 696                      6
- ATTENDANCE ANALYSIS** -  
Busiest Month.....August (244)  
Busiest Week.....20-26 Jul (89)  
Busiest Single Day.....20 Jul (33)  
Largest "Momentary Load" (Customers "served" at one time).....afternoon, 20 Jul (10)  
"Regular Account Customers" (10 or more Visits each this Season).....3 (est.)  
"Family Bookings" (parents and children in together).....10 (est.)
- "SPECIAL ORDERS"** -  
Visitors come to Hidden Beach "specifically to use Mudhole".....25 (est.)  
"Special-Order" Family Photo Sessions.....2  
"Medical Cases" (in for treatment of sunburns or other "skin disorders").....10 (est.)  
Canoist Visits.....5 (est.)  
Tadpole/Turtle Hunt Dates.....7  
MEDIA EVENTS  
"Still-Photo" Sessions.....24  
Amateur Video Sessions.....2

ATTENDANCE SUMMARY - 1994-2014

1994 Season.....1,350	2005 Season.....2,152
1995 Season.....2,762	2006 Season.....2,330
1996 Season.....3,211	2007 Season.....2,575
1997 Season.....2,085	2008 Season.....4,507
1998 Season.....3,535	2008 Season.....4,578
1999 Season.....2,625	2010 Season.....4,912
2000 Season.....2,803	2011 Season.....3,607
2001 Season.....2,440	2012 Season.....4,338
2002 Season.....740	2013 Season.....1,895
2003 Season.....1,179	2014 Season.....696
2004 Season.....1,054	
GRAND 21-SEASON TOTAL.....54,823	

(Image: Steve’s 2014 Annual Mud Pit Report)

side the mud pit (in addition to trains), were given to him by Tim and his partner Sally Dargis, neighbors who befriended and appreciated Steve.

**A Rainbow After the Storm**

On Aug. 11, 2023, Minneapolis suffered a massive hailstorm. Tim and Sally saw Steve running away from the beach and invited him into their home for safety.

Sally stayed with Steve, watching the storm, while Tim went to open the garage for other beachgoers to take shelter. The hail was so big that the house windows started to break. “I think we’d better get to the middle of the house,” Steve said, his eyes huge.

The journey to the beach for Steve was quite the effort. At the end of the 2023 season, Steve was presented with an award from the Kenwood Neighborhood Organization for his 30 years of service, filmed by local volunteers.

In his acceptance speech, he said, “I live over in Northeast Minneapolis. The closest walk in for me is from Hennepin and Franklin, but hopefully that will be fixed up when they finally get the [Green Line] light rail going. That would bring me right to the 21st Street Station.”

Sadly, it appears the Green Line extension will not be completed in Steve’s lifetime.

From Hennepin and Franklin, Steve would wheel a large backpack with him every day. It held his wetsuit, flippers, sunscreen, beverages, a towel, a clicker counter, a spade and hand saw (for mud pit maintenance), and sometimes the day’s food

Other times, however, beachgoers would give him food from their

barbecues. Sometimes, neighbors would bring him a snack or bag lunch.

He wasn’t at the beach for just an hour or two — for his counts to be valid, he needed to stay the whole day. During the season, Steve would go every day to the beach, “weather and schedule permitting.”

**Community Gratitude**

Will Stensrud, who runs beach activities for the neighborhood organization and helped give Steve his award in 2023, has known Steve for years.

He noted, “In the last few years, Steve took up snorkeling in the lake and would need someone to zip up his wetsuit. You would know he trusted you if he turned around in front of you, silently, and wait for you to zip it up.”

A visit to Steve’s neighborhood in Northeast confirms Steve’s playfulness and love of trains.

“He loved Halloween and walking to watch the trains,” Troy Sullivan, Steve’s neighbor, commented. Asked what Steve enjoys about Halloween, Sullivan replied, “He loved giving out candy to kids.”

On a calm visit to the beach one evening in June, the Hill & Lake Press interviewed beachgoers about Steve. “He would always wear the same outfit,” said Chris Hughes of Lowry Hill. “You’d always hear him say, ‘The mud is ready!’ or some other fun line.”

Anthony Art used to live in Uptown and would frequently go to Hidden Beach. “Living in Plymouth, I come here less now, but I still love it,” he remarked. “The mud pit was such a happening spot for so many years thanks to Steve.

I’ve really appreciated how

much his childlike spirit would incentivize kids and adults alike to go get in the mud. There’s a whole generation of kids that learned that getting dirty was okay thanks to him.”

“I think Steve is probably disappointed that he doesn’t have a successor,” Tim remarked. If any Hill & Lake Press readers are interested in the position of Mud Man, it is open. The pay isn’t great, but the memories will last

**“At Steve’s bedside, most mementos were from neighbors who knew him from the beach. A poster with Steve’s famous quotes (“Good afternoon!” and “The mud is ready!”) hung next to his bed. Jars of mud from the pit were on his dresser....”**

forever. And the commute should get better soon.

*The author would like to thank Sally Dargis, Tim McManus and Will Stensrud for their help on this article.*

*Paula Chesley writes for the Hill & Lake Press. She lives in East Isles.*



# Hill & Lake Press

The Hill & Lake Press is a nonprofit newspaper funded and supported by its advertisers and neighborhood associations:



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East Isles Neighborhood Association (EINA)



Kenwood Neighborhood Organization (KNO)



Lowry Hill Neighborhood Association (LHNA)

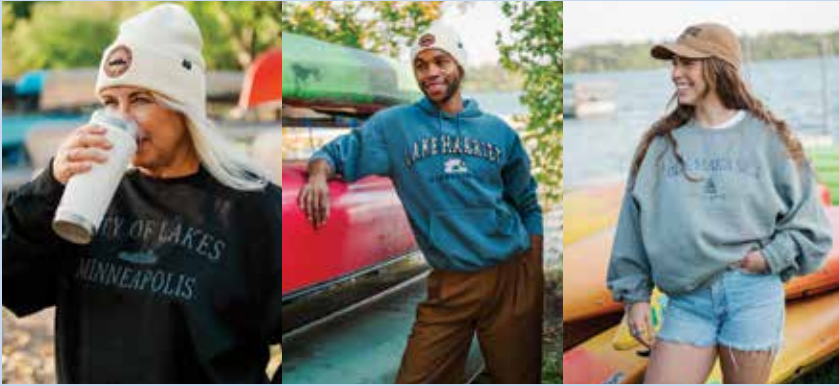


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**Sale registration opens Monday, Aug. 3**  
Details + registration: [eastisles.org/sale](http://eastisles.org/sale)



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"Path to the Rose Garden," by Plein Air Artist Bob Upton

# CAN THIS MARRIAGE BE SAVED? CITY HALL SURE HOPES SO..

By Susan Lenfestey



(Image: Stock photo - Vecteesy.com)

*Minneapolis is paying a consulting firm \$1.4 million to coach a feuding mayor and City Council toward civility. It's a galling sum — but if the therapy takes, it may be money well spent.*

## **“Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and the City Council have entered couples counseling.”**

The headline in the Star Tribune got everyone's attention: “Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and the City Council have entered couples counseling.”

It's a great headline, even though the article took it down a notch, explaining that the city had hired a consulting firm “to focus on establishing strategy, norms and collaboration for council members and the mayor's administration.”

In other words, to help the council and mayor learn how to work out their differences and address the critical issues facing our city. The firm, Darcy Luoma Coaching and Consulting, will be paid \$1,386,000 for a three-year contract.

## **“The firm, Darcy Luoma Coaching and Consulting, will be paid \$1,386,000 for a three-year contract.”**

On the one hand, it's an outrageous amount of public dollars to spend on helping our elected officials learn civility and good governance. Aren't these skills they should have learned before they were elected?

On the other hand, corporations and non-profit organizations frequently hire consultants to help them achieve their goals. Why

shouldn't the city?

### **And on the third hand: what if it works?**

Anyone paying attention to city politics knows that there's a standoff between the council members on the far left who routinely oppose the mayor and the moderate members who generally align with him.

Democratic Socialists of America, known commonly as DSA, council members and those who align with them supported DSA member Omar Fateh for mayor in the last election, and they make no bones about their dislike of Mayor Frey.

This has resulted in a trickle-down dislike of the moderates who supported him, and in what can euphemistically be called a lack of decorum at City Council meetings, where insults are lobbed like water balloons and hissy fits and tears are not uncommon. And it's said to be worse behind the scenes.

Contrary to what many people say about political bad behavior, both sides do not do it. Extremists and ideologues do.

At a time when our city is facing projected financial shortfalls and other serious problems, including housing and public safety, we need a city government that can find common ground and focus on the often mundane issues at hand.

Enter Minneapolis City Clerk Casey Carl, whose job description includes “helping the city council with decision making.” No small task. Last September, Mr. Carl initiated the idea of a contract with Ms. Luoma's firm. The then-council approved it unanimously.

### **Knowing you need help is the first step in recovery.**

The first meetings were scheduled for January, when the new council convened. Due to the murder of Renee Good by ICE agents on the second day of the meetings, they were postponed until June. And here we are.

Council President Elliott Payne said the council and mayor came away from recent sessions with a “shared commitment” to “basic principles that you wouldn't think you'd

need a workshop to get to.” Props to Mr. Payne for stating the obvious.

Council Members Robin Wonsley and Aisha Chughtai, who identify as DSA members, did not attend the workshop.

### **Therapy can work.**

Jim and I didn't make it to 60 years of marriage without some couples therapy along the way, and we didn't raise four children without some “outside consultants” — children who weren't always eager to participate.

True, it didn't cost \$1.4 million, and we didn't pay for it with public money, unless you factor in the services provided along the way by the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Also true: you can't pick your family members, but you can pick your City Council members and hold them to a higher standard than your adolescent kids.

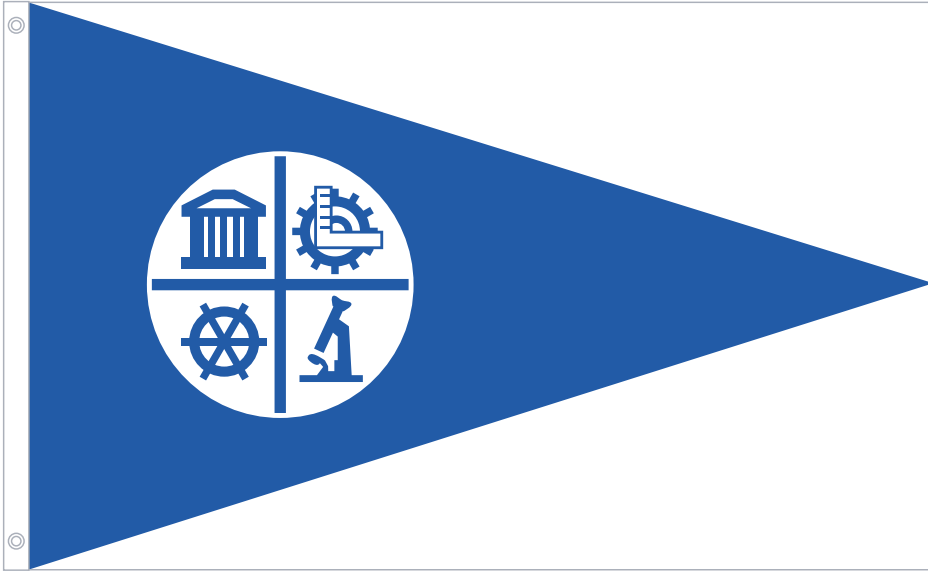
And while \$1.4 million is a staggering sum that sticks in the communal craw, it's roughly 0.07% of the city's annual budget. Would I rather see it spent on aid to those most in need, or on the businesses struggling to survive the ICE occupation? Of course.

But if it puts an end to the animosity currently crippling the City Council and bears the hoped-for fruit of civility, cooperation and good governance, it just might be money well spent.

*Susan Lenfestey writes for the Hill & Lake Press. She lives in Lowry Hill.*

# A FLAG WORTH GATHERING AROUND?

By Craig Wilson



The Minneapolis Flag (Image: City of Minneapolis)



The Minnesota State Flag (Image: State of Minnesota)

*When I wrote about the Minneapolis flag in March, I figured a few people might chuckle and move on. Instead, my inbox filled up.*

A growing coalition wants to retire Minneapolis' little-known city flag — and the acclaimed new state banner shows how a redesign can succeed.

The most common reaction surprised me most: a lot of you had no idea Minneapolis even has a flag. One reader wrote to the Hill & Lake Press to say she laughed out loud when I compared our city banner to the logo of a community and technical college.

I don't say that to knock the designer, who created it in the 1950s, when the space race and a certain mid-century optimism about science shaped how a city wanted to see itself. That was a different Minneapolis. Times change, and so should the flag we fly over them.

The encouraging part is how many people wrote back not just to laugh, but to ask the same question I keep asking: So what do we do about it? That feedback is exactly why I'm returning to the subject, and why I'm more convinced than ever that this is a movement worth building.

## A Longtime Champion

As it turns out, the movement is already underway. At the center of it is Dennis Fazio, a retired Bryn Mawr neighbor who has been pushing for a new city flag for years.

Fazio is a member of the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), the national organization of flag experts, and a serious enthusiast in his own right; he flies some 75 flags throughout the year.

More to the point, he has the time, the organizational background, and the patience for the unglamorous work of moving an idea through a city. He also has a direct line to the national experts who have guided dozens of cities and states through successful flag redesigns.

## A Coalition Comes Together

For a long time Fazio made the case largely on his own, the lone flag enthusiast turning up at meetings.

That is changing. He has been sitting down with neighborhood associations, arts organizations and city leaders, and the response has grown noticeably warmer.

The Northeast Minneapolis Arts Association has signaled its support, the city's arts and culture leadership has been receptive, and several City Council members have voiced early interest.

Fellow neighborhood newspapers are talking about joining forces, too. What started as one person's idea is beginning to look like a group, and that is exactly the kind of broad, civic coalition that gets a city to act.

## A Proven Model

There is a great local example to follow. The new Minnesota state flag, adopted after a redesign that vexillologists rate among the best in the country, succeeded because the process was smart.

Lawmakers handed the work to a commission, gathered plenty of public input, and then got out of the way. No endless plebiscite, no design-by-bickering.

The result is a flag most people actually want to gather around, the kind that flew above crowds downtown this past winter, when the community needed a symbol to rally behind. Fazio and his allies want to follow that same playbook at the city level.

**“A flag isn't decoration. Its oldest purpose is to give people something to gather around.”**

## Why It Matters

A flag isn't decoration. Its oldest purpose is to give people something to gather around. Right now Minneapolis has a banner almost no one recognizes, while cities like Duluth and Crystal have adopted sharp new flags that put ours to shame.

A redesign done well could bring people together rather than divide them. Unlike the state flag debate, almost no one has a sentimental attachment to a city flag they have never seen.

The main objection is whether a city with serious priorities should spend any time on this at all. The coalition's answer is that a unifying symbol is a real priority and that good design need not be expensive. The state spent roughly \$35,000 on its redesign, much of it offset by volunteers and donated expertise. The same is possible here.

## Get Involved

Fazio's plan is to build steadily through the summer and fall. In August, the Hill & Lake Press kids' issue will bring flag design to local students, teaching them the sim-



Widely considered the best-designed city flag in the US, Chicago, Illinois is a global vexillological masterpiece. It is celebrated for its sheer simplicity, deep civic symbolism, and immense popularity. Vexillologists and the public alike consistently rank Chicago at the top. In a landmark survey conducted by the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), American city flags are judged on strict design principles. Chicago routinely dominates these evaluations due to its brilliant layout and history. (Image: City of Chicago; Wikipedia)



The city flag of Washington, D.C. features an iconic design that frequently tops the design rankings. The flag of the capital features two horizontal red bars and three red stars on a white background. Adopted in 1938, the design is brilliantly simple and beautifully adapted from George Washington's ancestral coat of arms. (Image: City of Washington, D.C.; Wikipedia)

ple rules of a great flag (it should be simple enough for a child to draw from memory) and printing what they create.

By September, the goal is to make the case that a redesign belongs in the city's 2027 budget conversation. Between now and then, the coalition is looking for neighbors, organizations, and anyone who shares the itch to see Minneapolis fly something worthy of it.

If that's you, Fazio and his group want to hear from you. Email [newminneapolisflag@gmail.com](mailto:newminneapolisflag@gmail.com) to get involved, share ideas or just follow along. It is time to give this city a flag worth raising.

*Craig Wilson is the editor of the Hill & Lake Press. He lives in Lowry Hill.*

# UPTOWN GEMOLOGIST LAURIE KOTTKE

By David Piper



(Image: Dylan + Katie Photography)

*Uptown gemologist Laurie Kottke on how the trade has changed, the rise of lab-grown diamonds, and the day Leo Kottke finally walked into her store.*

Meet Laurie Kottke, “gemologist, jewelry expert, lover of lace, sparkle, all things feminine,” and an ardent Uptown business enthusiast.

Laurie Kottke Fine Jewelers is in the Lakeside Center, formerly the Lake Calhoun Center, at the intersection of Excelsior Boulevard and Lake Street in West Bde Maka Ska.

I interviewed Laurie in her store on May 7, 2026. The interview has been edited for clarity.

## How did your interest in jewelry evolve?

Well, it started when Dayton’s department store hired me in high school, and I got to choose which department I wanted to work in. My choices were between women’s lingerie and jewelry.

The only reason I chose jewelry was because women’s lingerie was in the basement. I thought, I’m going to go with jewelry because it’s on the sec-

ond floor and there would be a lot of foot traffic.

The store had a great manager who pushed me along through high school and college and said, “Why don’t you go into jewelry?”

After college, I attended the GIA, the Gemological Institute of America, then located in Santa Monica, California. I graduated with a gemologist certificate, returned to Minneapolis and worked for 20 years with a jeweler in a job in what was then known as Calhoun Square.

## What is the difference between a jeweler and a gemologist?

A gemologist learns how to identify gemstones. A green stone could be a tourmaline, a garnet or an emerald. And there are a lot of synthetics out there.

A jeweler can design, make and sell jewelry and sometimes all the above. People who make jewelry are called either silversmiths or goldsmiths.

## Are there processes to determine what type of mineral it is?

There are processes that do that, starting with magnification and then using gemological instruments to determine if it is a natural gemstone or not.

## Do you make jewelry yourself?

I do not. I help my clients design jewelry, and then my goldsmiths custom-make it.

## What, if any, are the ethical considerations in buying jewelry?

I realize customers may question the authenticity and ethical practices in the sourcing of diamonds and colored gemstones. Increasingly, many of my customers want to know where the gem originated.

Most diamonds and colored gemstones come with a certificate of authenticity from reliable sources such as the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) and the American Gem Trade Association (AGTA). I understand GIA and AGTA can determine where a gem was mined.

Many diamonds and colored gemstones are found in remote areas of the world where mining is one of the few sources of income. I try to ensure that the diamonds and colored gemstones I sell have been mined through dealers who utilize fair trade practices and are transparent in their sourcing.

## How has the jewelry business evolved over the years?

The business climate, like every small business, is evolving. The internet and online buying have changed things. Jewelry is different because it’s very hard to buy online. A lot of people want to see it.

## How do you know the scale of a piece when you’re looking online?

I don’t even know sometimes when I’m buying from jewelers. One thing that has hit the jewelry business has been lab-created diamonds.

Lab-created diamonds are what young people want. They want a lot of bang for their buck. They want a nice diamond, and they are beautiful.

## Are diamonds considered real if they are lab-created?

Lab-created diamonds have the exact same characteristics as a natural diamond, but they’re made in a laboratory versus being found in a mine. Now labs are manufacturing them so rapidly that prices have plummeted, and they are only cutting the best.

Most lab-created diamonds are high quality — with a natural diamond, you are picking out the characteristics that are important to you. But with a lab diamond, you’re just going to get the best cut, color and clarity.

However, I believe there is going to be a change in the business, because people want things that are different and special. Lab-created diamonds are not unique, but they still sparkle and shine.

## Are you related to Leo Kottke?

I have a fun story that just happened about three or four weeks ago.

I was sitting at my desk, and a couple came to the door. “How can I help you?” I asked. And they said, “We just have a question for you. It’s a silly question.” I said, “Ask it.”

He wanted to know if I was related to Augusta Kottke. “That sounds familiar,” I said, and asked why. He said, “Well, yeah, I am related to her.”

Then it hit me. “Wait a minute. What’s your name?” He said, “My name is Leo Kottke.” And I said, “The Leo Kottke? Oh my gosh, this is the moment I’ve been waiting for! I have been asked if I am related to you my entire life.”

I invited them in to sit and chat for a few minutes. We had a nice conversation and I feel like I have a friend now.

I am pursuing my genealogy, and I am so curious to know if we are related. I hope so, because he is so talented, and such a treasure for Minnesota.

*David Piper is a retired judge and regular contributor. He lives in Kenwood.*



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# ANIMALES BARBEQUE CO.

By Jason Suss



(Images: Animales; Exterior shot courtesy of StarTribune)

*Jon Wipfli's Animales pairs serious barbecue and a sharp drink program with an indoor playground — a rare spot that's equally kid-friendly and adult-worthy.*

Well, now that Uptown has a few hours of free parking and a Little Caesars, and Ann Kim served free kimchi hot dogs last month at 31st and Hennepin, Uptown's basically fixed, right? So, let's move to a different area.

Cross that weird bridge northward over the impound lot and next to the light rail station that I still have no idea who will use, and you'll be right in front of this month's featured restaurant — Animales.

"Wow, this is like a really fancy Chuck E. Cheese," is what owner Jon Wipfli has heard more than once. There are no video games, and they don't serve pizza, but this might be one of the most kid-friendly and adult-worthy restaurants in the cities Twin Cities.

I don't know that it was his plan, but it's working. This seemed like a good place to highlight before the August kids' edition comes out.

## Let's start with Jon

He's a serious chef. Prior to launching Animales, he was at the multiple-award-winning restaurant The Bachelor Farmer.

After that, he started Animales as a mobile barbecue truck with a regular presence outside the former ABLE brewery in Northeast.

Ribs, pulled pork, sausage, a killer burger and always a long line...because of demand, not slow service. He's quick.

Jon wanted to open a full brick-and-mortar and finally got the opportunity when the Royal Foundry distillery became available. It's a really big space — more than 15,000 square feet.

Jon is utilizing every inch of it, inside and out. There's a large dining room, a stage for live music, a kids' play area and a fully built outdoor seating area.

The kitchen is massive too. They need to support hundreds of diners a day, plus catering and everything else they do.

## The Food — It's Good

Really good. Jon is a barbecue master. I think the star of the show is the pastrami beef rib.

It's a massive smoked beef rib with pastrami seasoning. More than enough for two

to share. Succulent, tender, just really delicious.

The menu also has the classic barbecue-spot meat-and-sides options, but also ventures into other cuisine styles like piri-piri chopped pork, mushroom birria, green spaghetti (pasta from Dario) and of course, a smash burger.

Save room for dessert. There are about eight different options, all great to share. They also do brunch! The pastrami beef rib is repurposed as a "hash" with a perfectly fried, crispy and creamy potato cake, and there's the obligatory avocado toast, pancakes and more.

## The Drinks

The beverage program is run by my friend Adam Witherspoon. I met Adam about 12 years ago when he was new to the scene, came into La Belle Vie, where I was working, and ordered a "silver gin fizz."

After I googled the recipe, we chatted for a bit, and I learned that he was getting into the bar industry.

Since then, he's worked with Bittercube and helped open several restaurants, includ-

**"Cross that weird bridge over the impound lot and next to the light rail station that I still have no idea who will use, and you'll be right in front of this month's featured restaurant — Animales."**

ing the lovely Cafe Alma. He opened and ran the entire beverage program for the Four Seasons and Mara bar, worked with Paris Dining Club and is now at Animales.

Suffice it to say, he knows what he's doing. The drinks at Animales are tasty and make sense. Cucumber, whiskey, ginger, iced tea and lemon in the John Palmer are the perfect barbecue companions.

Whether you like tall and refreshing, short and spirit-forward, or a well-made classic, they're all available and made properly.

A few of them are also offered by the pitcher, which is perfect for groups.

## Speaking of Groups, Let's Talk About How It Works at Animales

When you arrive, you are brought to a table (possibly after a bit of a wait due to their popularity) and given a menu and shown a — wait for it — dreaded QR code.

Relax, it'll be OK. It's not that hard. And it's really great for groups. Scan the code, the menu pops up and you just choose what you want. The other people you're with choose what they want. It all gets brought to your table.

No waiting for the check, no trying to figure out who is paying for what, just click and pay. Done. Want to order more? No problem, just do it again. This is perfect for groups when one family is running behind or someone's kid is having a meltdown and they need to leave NOW.

Everyone orders when they're ready, and they leave when they're ready. If you need help, no worries, there are plenty of servers around to help you through the process. If you forgot your smartphone just sit at the bar, where it's full service.

## There's an Indoor Playground

Yep, just like the McDonald's PlayPlace or Chuck E. Cheese, you can send the kids off to play while you wait for the food or after you've eaten and the adults want to talk.

But you don't have to suffer through garbage pizza or hyper-processed pink slime "nuggets." You can have real, quality, good food. There's also live Americana-focused music almost every day. Check the website to see who's playing and bring your dancing shoes.

Good food. Good drinks. Live music. Playground to keep the kids busy. Super bike-friendly. Huge outdoor patio. Why wouldn't you go?

*Jason Suss spent 15 years in tech before leaving the corporate world to pursue his passion for cocktails. For the past 12 years, he has worked on both sides of the bar at local restaurants. He now lives in Lowry Hill and owns @AProperPour.*

## → ANIMALES BARBEQUE CO. at a glance

**Location:** 241 Fremont Ave. N., Minneapolis (the former Royal Foundry distillery, in the Harrison neighborhood). A 15,000-plus-square-foot space with a large dining room, live-music stage, kids' play area and a big outdoor patio.

**Chef/owner:** Jon Wipfli, formerly of The Bachelor Farmer, who launched Animales as a Northeast barbecue truck outside the old ABLE brewery.

**Don't miss:** The pastrami beef rib: a massive smoked beef rib with pastrami seasoning, big enough for two to share.

**On the menu:** Classic barbecue and sides plus piri-piri chopped pork, mushroom birria, green spaghetti (pasta from Dario) and a smash burger. About eight shareable desserts, and weekend brunch (rib "hash," avocado toast, pancakes).

**Drinks:** A cocktail program from Adam Witherspoon. Try the John Palmer (cucumber, whiskey, ginger, iced tea, lemon). Several drinks come by the pitcher for groups.

**Good to know:** Order by QR code right from your table (easy for groups) or sit at the bar for full service.

# CONFESSIONS

A monthly column by Dorothy Richmond



(Image: Portrait de Marcel Proust, by Jacques-Emile Blanche. 1892. Musée d'Orsay)

*I recently quit subscribing to Vanity Fair. After nearly 20 years, I'd grown tired of the same old format. Once captivating, the monthly crime story turned tedious (the banality of evil), revealing lurid details of the rich and famous portraying the old trope that money can't buy happiness, ironically interspersed with ads for Cartier and Louis Vuitton showing desperately (or desperate-to-be) happy people.*

Dear Neighbor,

I no longer cared what the magazine deemed to be "Up" or "Down" in the world of trends, finally realizing that's my decision to make. And the political scandals, once shocking, became as commonplace as teenage acne.

During all those years two issues grabbed me personally. One was a cover story on the actor Josh Hartnett — not because I'm a fan of his movies, but because Josh, who grew up in St. Paul, was a student of mine back in the early '90s when I took a part-time gig teaching Spanish at Nativity School. The article did not mention that.

The other issue's cover heralded the story of a prominent New York family's divorce scandal. Oooh! I dated a member of that clan back in the '80s — maybe I know some of the players. I sure did!

The story was all about my old beau, his ex-wife (from a powerhouse D.C. family), their children, their fights, the drugs, the guns, the nannies who took care of way more than the children, the weaponized money, the string of psych wards the beleaguered wife took refuge in, all filed under what I like to call "Billionaires Gone Wild," proving once again that money can't buy happiness. Or sanity.

He was such a nice guy, I recalled through my 20-something, awestruck girl-goggles. As I read the article in my 40s, tucked safely in Minneapolis, I realized I'd dodged a billion bullets.

The years rolled on, the issues rolled in, and the only thing I still looked forward to was "The Proust Questionnaire," found on the final page — a series of provocative questions asked of and answered by somebody famous.

Marcel Proust, the French author, did not invent the eponymous questionnaire. It was a popular parlor game for the Victorian literary crowd (of which Proust was a member) known as "Confessions," designed to reveal a person's true nature — a sort of "Truth or Dare" (hold the Dare).

Vanity Fair took the premise of "Confessions," tacked on Proust's name, I suppose for credence, and ran with it.

Each month celebrities are hit with 35 provocative and rapid-fire questions ranging from "When and where were you happiest?" to "How would you like to die?" The questions vary somewhat from month to month, but several are constants.

My favorite question, because it's actually hard and requires deep thought, is "Which trait do you most admire in others?" It's hard because there are many possible answers. I posed this question to my book club the other night, and the quick answers were "kindness," "compassion," "generosity," and others similar.

Melody, a thoughtful, gracious member, first said "kindness," but struggled, adding that kindness is easy, and the most admired trait should be something more difficult to achieve, like a great sense of humor — a bigger answer, one that would encompass all the answers already tossed out. She's right. Melody is one of the kindest people I've ever known, but she's so much more than kind.

I said that every one of their answers I'd come up with, too, but given the advantage of years of pondering this particular question, I'd had time to think, and whenever I'd hit on one answer, I'd find myself thinking, like Melody, close, but no cigar. Finally, it came

to me — the overarching term that captures compassion, kindness, humility, grit, intelligence — the lot:

## Curiosity

Curiosity is a form of love. You can't love something or someone without wanting to know more (and more, and more). Love begets kindness, compassion, generosity, all good things. Whether the object of curiosity is a person, a pet, an area of study, one keeps going, longing to know and understand more.

This leads to the other side of the "best trait" question: What trait do you most deplore in others? This was an easy one for my book club friends (and for me): Cruelty.

## Cruelty

Snakes who inflict pain on others and don't care how it impacts them comprise a particularly low breed. In the big leagues we have Hitler, Pol Pot, Stalin — these guys are obvious. But cruelty abounds and surrounds us.

Catfish, traffickers, online scammers, shady car dealers and unscrupulous construction companies — anyone who knowingly screws over someone and feels glee in doing so engages willingly in cruelty. On the more intimate scale we find gossips — those catty folks who poke around others' lives, not out of curiosity (love) but to find dirt, vulnerabilities, misfortunes, and spread them around like so much mold, never realizing that their perceived, yet never attained, power is founded in nastiness.

What do you most admire and deplore in others?

— Dorothy

*Dorothy Richmond writes for the Hill & Lake Press. She lives in Cedar-Isles-Dean.*



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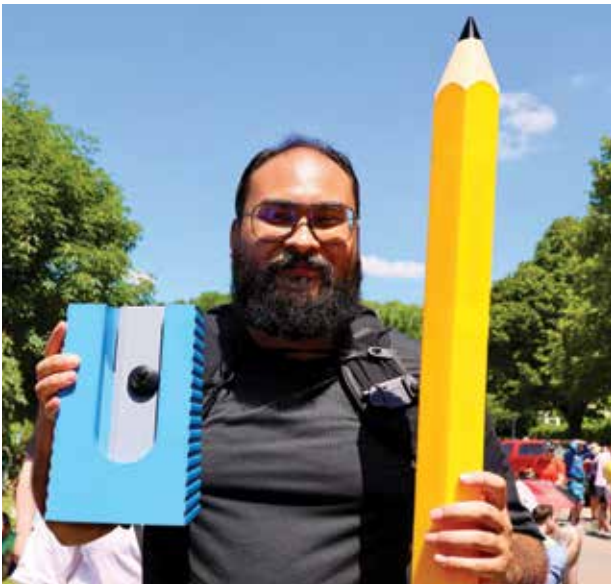
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# MINNEAPOLIS GETS THE POINT:

Images by Courtney Cushing Kiernat



Thousands gathered at Lake of the Isles for the annual sharpening of the iconic giant pencil, proving once again that in Minneapolis, even the quirkiest traditions have a point. Local residents and visitors alike celebrated creativity, community and a beloved landmark with plenty of smiles—and freshly sharpened wit.



# LOTI PENCIL SHARPENING CELEBRATION



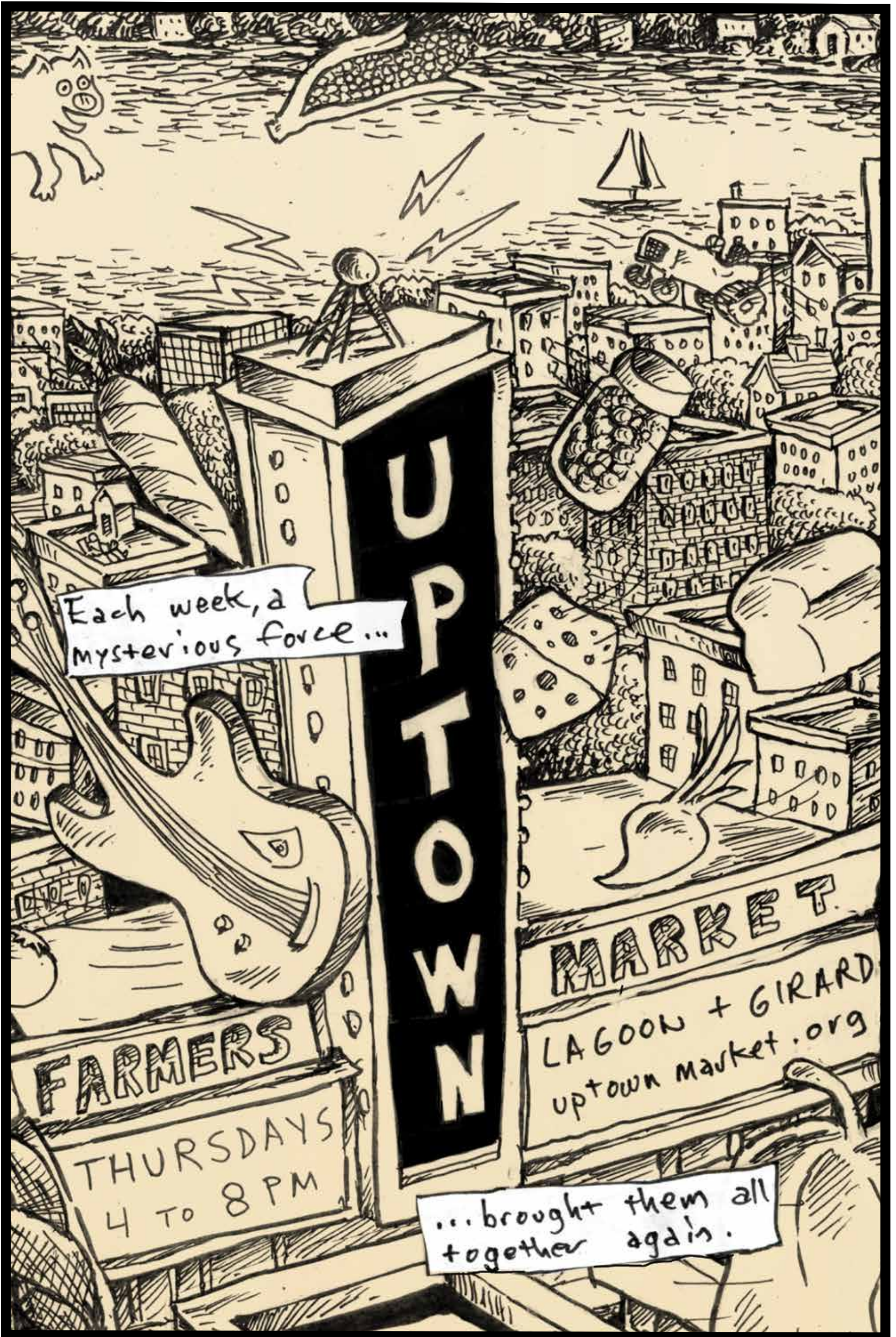
# AND THE POINT GOES ON...

Images by Courtney Cushing Kiernat



## LAKE OF THE ISLES PENCIL DAY

Is an annual event that takes place during the first part of June. For information on next year's sixth annual sharpening, go to – [lotipencil.com](http://lotipencil.com) or follow along at [@lotipencil](https://twitter.com/lotipencil)



# EMBRACING SUMMER

Images by Courtney Cushing Kiernat and Debra Van De Weghe



Summer has arrived and neighbors and neighborhoods are taking advantage of the outdoors including our Minneapolis trails, beaches and parks. The Kenwood neighborhood continues to host free programming at East Cedar Lake Beach- yoga, African drumming, Shakespeare, Qigong and much more. The Out & About Books Bus made a stop in Kenwood and will be around the metro, including the Pride Festival in Loring Park, connecting children and families with LGBTQIA+ and gender affirming stories.

The Uptown Farmers Market kicked off at a new location on Hennepin and Girard and continues every Thursday, 4-8 pm through the summer. Live music and food.

The Uptown Art Fair is back and at a new location on Lake of the Isles and The Mall, August 7-9.

**TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THESE HAPPENINGS, GO TO:**  
Uptown Farmers Market - [uptownmarket.org](http://uptownmarket.org)  
East Bde Maka Ska - [eastbdemakaska.org/events](http://eastbdemakaska.org/events)  
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