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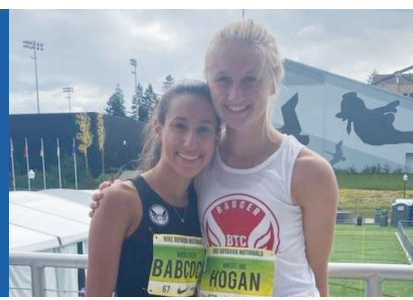
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MONONA

Diversity report: Improve housing, hiring, engagement

Workgroup produces 26 recommendations for city, community in wake of racial strife

By Tyler Dedrick

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Monona's lack of racial diversity presents some significant challenges in its efforts to improve inclusiveness,

according to a report issued by the city's Ad Hoc Workgroup on Diversity and Equity Issues.

The eight-person committee produced the 41-page report after a year of meetings. It highlights 26 recommendations focused on three areas: making housing and transportation more equitable, making Monona city government operations more inclusive and empowering community members.

In its presentation to the Monona Common Council on June 6, workgroup chair Jayson

Chung noted that Monona's growth in populations of color was one of the lowest among Madison-area municipalities, higher only than Fitchburg and Madison, which already have relatively large populations of people of color.

"Monona is not growing in diversity as rapidly as most other municipalities," Chung said. "Monona is a particularly white community in this area."

The city council created the work group in May 2021, following a summer of race-related

Read the report

Find the full report on Diversity and Equity on the city's website, mymonona.com. Under the Government tab, look under Boards, Commissions and Committees.

protests and riots across the country. The purpose of the group is to "determine a plan to ensure that Monona makes a long-term commitment to racial

and social justice and equity both at city hall and in the community at large," according to the City of Monona website.

Chung told the council the group was created to "address deeply embedded issues of racism" in the community.

Those include incidents of violence and alleged discrimination in recent years, such as the June 2020 detention at gunpoint of Keonte Furdge, who is mentioned in the report.

See REPORT, Page A6

DEERFIELD

Deer-Grove EMS continues to weigh funding model

By Madeline Westberg

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The Deer-Grove EMS Commission is continuing to weigh its funding model between the municipalities, following suggestions from an organizational study done last year.

The three communities with voting rights in the commission, the villages of Deerfield and Cottage Grove and the town of Cottage Grove, are beginning to renegotiate an intergovernmental agreement that sets down the governance and funding structures of the commission. This agreement is periodically updated.

The Deer-Grove EMS Commission began weighing its funding formula and process for big-ticket expenditure decision making in May, and continued the conversation at a recent commission meeting last week.

Officials from the villages of Cottage Grove and Deerfield, along with the town of Deerfield, which contracts with the commission for service, have expressed support for changing the funding model to based on call volume to that community and its population.

The current intergovernmental agreement says that the percentage of the EMS budget that each municipality pays is based on the equalized property value of that municipality.

The town of Cottage Grove, has expressed opposition to the change, saying equalized value should continue to be the model.

Town Chair Kris Hampton said at the recent meeting that a call volume and population average doesn't account for the EMS service required for area businesses, which may have commuting employees that don't live in the area and wouldn't be taken into consideration.

See FUNDING, Page A2

'Qualify to the dollar'

School nutrition support program's complicated requirements often leave families out

By Lauren Henning

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For the past two years, every student in participating schools had free meals, equalizing the lunchroom experience.

The end of the pandemic-related measure means families once again have to rely on the federal free and reduced lunch program.

Established under the National School Lunch Act in 1946, the program provides low-cost or free meals to low-income students. But strict income requirements and stigmas associated with social welfare programs often keep families from participating.

Students from families that qualify for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families automatically qualify for the program, but the program has specific and complicated income requirements for families applying for the program independently.

This, said Deerfield Community School District business manager Doreen



File photo

Cambridge Elementary School students clean their lunch trays in this photo from 2017.

Treuden, can lead to confusion for potential participating families. Should families fill out their application incorrectly and be randomly selected for verification, Treuden added, they lose their eligibility.

"You have to qualify to the dollar," Treuden said of the income brackets for the program.

For the 2022-23 school year, a household of four has to make \$51,338 or less a year to qualify for reduced meal prices. The same family has to make less than \$36,075 a year to qualify for their student to receive free meals. For a family household of three, the annual income has to be \$33,874 or less for reduced school meals and \$29,939 or

less to qualify for free meals. This number is further broken down for each income bracket by the frequency of pay. So eligibility can change for the same family depending on whether income is salaried and whether paychecks come monthly, twice per month, every two weeks or weekly.

See MEALS, Page A2

MONONA GROVE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Landfill to affect district, community group says

By Lauren Henning

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The proposed Dane County landfill at the Yahara Hills Golf Course continues to face opposition from McFarland residents, with a community group presenting concerns to the school board during a June 20 meeting.

Mike Pfohl and Dan

Neighbors for a Better landfill cite health, environmental concerns

Parks, members of Neighbors for a Better Landfill, a community coalition opposing the project, spoke to the school board about the possible impacts of the development on the community, specifically the school district.

"Since it is about 2,000 feet away from McFarland School District land," Paul said. "This will affect this board and this community quite a bit."

While smell has been a topic of discussion, Parks said he has more

concerns about possible health and environmental impacts resulting from pollution exposure.

Parks referenced data saying health risks are heightened for those who live within 5 kilometers, or about 3 miles, of landfill sites, according to a report published by the International

Journal of Epidemiology. The research showed a strong association between pollutants emitted from landfills and deaths caused by lung cancer, Park said, as well as deaths and hospitalizations for other respiratory diseases, with results being prominent in children.

See LANDFILL, Page A2



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Funding

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The recommendation to change the funding model came from a consultant hired to do a staffing and operations study in 2021, Public Administration Associates of Whitewater.

Deer-Grove EMS Director Eric Lang told the Deerfield Village Board last month that the two different formulas, percentage of equalized value and a formula based on call volume and population, yield fairly comparable results.

Changing the formula wouldn't drastically change the financial contributions of each municipality, Lang said, but it would slightly increase the contribution of the villages of Deerfield and Cottage Grove, and decrease the contribution of the town of Cottage Grove.

PAA also recommended that two municipalities that contract with Deer-Grove EMS for services, the town of Pleasant Springs and the town of Deerfield, start following a similar funding model.

Lang shared that in order to avoid massive fee jumps that could force those two townships to look elsewhere for EMS services, the commission could consider a gradual fee increase, working up to fully using the funding model.

Dick Green and Randy Belke from the town of pleasant springs and the town of Deerfield respectively seemed supportive of this phased approach to increasing the rate.

Belke also asked about the possibility of the township rejoining the commission. Both Hampton and village president Greg Frutiger replied that the town would need to buy back into its commission membership.

Lang said he would return to the commission's next meeting with more information about what funding models other area services use.

Meals

Continued from Page A1

Beyond the specificity of the income eligibility, many area school officials described the thresholds for qualifying for the Free and Reduced lunch program low, including Monona Grove School District business manager Jerrud Rossing.

"The free and reduced application, which is set forth by the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture), they have that family income level, which to be honest, is very low," Rossing said. "Even families that probably should qualify are not qualifying because of that level of being so low."

With inflation at a record high, district and family budgets are not going as far as usual. The Consumer Price Index, which measures the average change in prices paid by consumers over time, recorded an 8.6% rise in prices between May 2021 and May 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Energy and food costs rose the most, at 34.6% and 10.1% respectively.

The food index, the BLS reported, is the first increase of 10% or more since March 1981, leaving more families struggling to grocery shop amid continued supply-chain issues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

With an estimated one in seven children facing chronic hunger in Wisconsin, the gaps in the free and reduced program are left to be filled by school districts and the communities. In the past, districts would use funds from the nutrition fund to fill in the gaps for students who had negative lunch balances, but that is no longer allowed, according to Rossing, after a policy change by the USDA.

There are efforts to make all school lunches free, regardless of family income, such as in the Universal School Meals Program Act.

Rep. Gwen Moore (D- Milwaukee), one of the bill's sponsors, said the measure would provide every child with three meals a day throughout the school year, "which would be a great equalizer for children and all families."

"No child should go hungry in America," Moore wrote in an email. "There are too many kids in Milwaukee and across the country who don't know when they will receive their next meal and that worries me day and night."

Opponents of the bill have expressed concern over its price tag, according to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. The USDA



File photo

Lori Hughes greets a family during the first day of lunch pickup during remote learning in this 2020 file photo.

School District	Student population participating in Free/Reduced Lunch
Cambridge	19.41%
Deerfield	26.08%
Lake Mills	27.99%
Marshall	41.44%
McFarland	15.87%
Monona Grove	19.10%
Lodi	19.25%
Waterloo	44.70%

2019 Participation and Funding Data for Food and Nutrition Programs Operating in Wisconsin Schools and Institutions, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

reported the current lunch program costs \$14 billion a year to serve 29 million children.

In the meantime, districts and families are left to worry about their students being fed.

Families that fall in the "gray" area, or the ones that don't qualify for federal assistance but struggle to make ends meet, as Deerfield Community School District superintendent Michelle Jensen described, were reported as a concern for several local districts.

Negative lunch account balances have caught national attention in the past, with reports of students' lunches being taken or thrown away. Some districts have

even reportedly used "I need lunch money" stamps on children's arms.

Most area districts, however, have emphasized not penalizing students for insufficient funds in their lunch account, but instead working directly with families to offer support.

Some districts have their own programs in place, in collaboration with the community, to help those families. For Deerfield, it's the DEAR Fund and the DCC food pantry. In Lake Mills, there's the Family Connections Fund. For Cambridge students, the Everybody Eats program funds lunches for students who fall through the cracks of the free and reduced

lunch program.

"We are fortunate enough in this community that our students will not have to worry about it, because no child goes unfed," Cambridge nutrition director Janice Murray said. "It doesn't matter what their income level is, or if they have money in their account, whatever the circumstances are, every child gets fed in our school district."

In Monona and Cottage Grove, there are snack pack programs that send food home over weekends and Monona Munchies, which offers brown paper bag lunches to families, no questions asked during the summer months. Several of the districts also reported community donations earmarked specifically for clearing students' negative lunch account balances.

"If someone doesn't qualify, and there's a need, we do receive anonymous donations," McFarland business manager Jeff Mahoney said. "Funding, a lot of times, comes from donors that want us to use money to help take care of negative balance families."

But while SSO was in place as a pandemic measure, district officials said, every student had the same experience. Students seen in the hot lunch line, said MGSD nutrition director Maggie Sanna and Murray, had previously been seen as the students who "needed to be there."

"When we went to universal free meals, it took that stigma away, everybody got fed," Murray said. "That's the way it should be, in my opinion."

Landfill

Continued from Page A1

Pointing to this research, Parks emphasized the proximity the landfill would have to McFarland schools.

"All of our schools are within a three mile radius (of the planned site)," Parks said. "Not to mention the thousands of residents in the area."

The site, Parks said, would also be surrounded by wetlands, with some wetlands on the property itself, posing possible consequences for watershed runoff.

"This thing will basically get

into our streams, wetlands, that essentially gets back into our lakes and just the fact that our Wisconsin lakes are already contaminated - it's kind of scary that they're even proposing this to us to be quite honest with you," Parks said.

Pfohl and Parks encouraged residents to get involved in the process by reaching out to county board members as well as speaking at future meetings.

Municipalities within 1,500 feet of the proposed site are typically invited into the discussions. Those municipalities are the city of Madison, the town of Blooming Grove and the town of Cottage Grove. While the village

of McFarland is not within that boundary, Village President Carolyn Clow said the village has requested to join the local negotiating agreement process.

At an April 21 listening session held in the village of McFarland by local neighborhood associations, John Welch, the director of Dane County Department of Waste and Renewables, encouraged local residents to stay involved in the siting and approval process.

"We are not trying to hide anything. The more people we can get here and get feedback (from), we want that," Welch said.

Welch said the site has seen

minimal impacts from pests in the area, except the inconvenience of seagulls present. Welch also said traffic through local neighborhoods at a potential new landfill is unlikely, and that the county has an extensive private well monitoring program to protect local water.

The development would take up 230 acres and has hopes to include both a landfill and a "Sustainability Campus," a suite of recycling facilities and sustainable businesses to reduce the volume of waste entering the landfill.

The land sale agreement for the 230 acres, coming in at around \$5.5 million, was

approved by the City of Madison's Finance Committee while changes to the Yahara Hills Neighborhood Development Plan passed through the city's plan commission on April 25. But, the process is still in its early stages, as the earliest ground could be broken at the site is in 2028.

Discussions about a future landfill, Welch said, are beginning now because the current Dane County landfill, Rodefild Landfill at 7102 U.S. Highway 12-18, will be full in less than ten years. Planning for a new landfill typically takes ten years and landfills require new approvals every 15 years, Welch said.



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