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SPORTS, 6B

# THE POST-CRESCENT

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### OUTAGAMIE COUNTY

## Trans-rights activists protest at board meeting



In the foreground, Timothy Hermes, an Outagamie County Board member, listens as transgender rights activists and citizens disrupt an Outagamie County Board meeting at the Outagamie County Government Center on Tuesday in Appleton. At a May 9 county board meeting, Hermes made transphobic comments regarding transgender people and their use of bathrooms that align with their gender, calling them “disgusting.”

## Session was forced to halt for almost an hour

Sophia Voight

Appleton Post-Crescent  
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

APPLETON - Trans-rights activists packed the Outagamie County Board meeting Tuesday evening causing the meeting to take a recess for almost an hour after the group erupted in “trans rights are human rights” chants.

Activists rallied outside the Outagamie County Government Center before going into the board meeting calling for the resignation of board member Timothy Hermes, who made transphobic comments at the previous board meeting. “We’re not here to ask for an apology,” Appleton Students for a Democratic Society member Adam Fleischer told the crowd of activists and citizens. “We want nothing less than his immediate removal from his position.”

But after county officials told the



Transgender rights activists and citizens protest prior to the start of an Outagamie County Board meeting at the Outagamie County Government Center on Tuesday in Appleton. PHOTOS BY DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

board they would not take disciplinary action against Hermes, activists began shouting, asking officials to let them speak to the board on the issue and pleading for them to take definitive action against Hermes.

The eruption led to one activist being

escorted out of the board room by deputies and an hour-long meeting recess before county officials talked down the boisterous crowd and the meeting continued.

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## Updates on Maplewood school shared with public

### Building to have separate parent, bus traffic loops

AnnMarie Hilton

Appleton Post-Crescent  
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

MENASHA – The public got its first look at the new intermediate school to be built on the Menasha Joint School District’s Maplewood Middle School property.

At a meeting Monday night, representatives from Miron Construction and EUA shared renderings and other design details with the school board. The presentation provided details of the exterior and an interior floor plan.

The school is being rebuilt after voters approved a \$99.7 million referendum last November. Classrooms in the existing Maplewood school are small and many of them don’t have any windows or natural light sources. The building also can’t support flexible learning environments often used in today’s teaching.

Here’s a closer look at the design for the new Maplewood so far.

### Two schools in one building

The new school will house grades five through eight, which is about 1,000 students. The current school houses only grades six through eight.

The north end of the building will be divided into two clusters: one for students in fifth and sixth grades and another for seventh and eighth graders. Students will stay in their grade’s designated “neighborhood.”

The south end of the building will have shared amenities including the gym, fitness center and library.

The gym will have curtains, so it can be divided into three distinct areas for multiple groups to use it at one time. There will be large gathering areas, including flex cafes with equipment to be educational spaces as well as areas to serve lunch.

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Maplewood Middle School 1600 Midway Road on May 26, 2022 in Menasha.

WM. GLASHEEN/USA TODAY NETWORK

## Ong’s Kitchen originally started as a fundraiser

Alexandria Bursiek Kloehn

Appleton Post-Crescent  
USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

APPLETON – Ong Xiong started selling egg rolls 10 years ago to help raise money for her sister’s medical bills.

Now, Xiong and her husband, Lee Pao Xiong, have opened a restaurant serving southeast Asian cuisine, including her egg rolls.

Ong’s Kitchen, LLC, 1835 E. Edgewood Drive, Suite 103, opened in late December but held an official grand opening on April 14.

Ong Xiong said the fundraiser for her sister was so successful that the family began selling egg rolls anytime a family member needed money, whether it was for college, medical bills or anything else. “It got to a point where our followers were getting so big, they were asking for (egg rolls) like multiple times throughout the year,” she said.

Shortly before the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, Lee Pao Xiong suggested they open an egg roll shop but Ong Xiong thought a restaurant would need more food options.

“My kids came up with all these

things that they love from me cooking,” she said. “They’re like ‘Mom, you have to have pho there, you have to have curry noodle. Those are some (of) your signature, homemade stuff.’”

Ong’s Kitchen is a family business, and Xiong said her children, nieces and nephews work at the restaurant. One of her nieces, Nancy Vang, has a culinary degree and is working as the restaurant’s head cook. Xiong said Vang helped her develop the menu and even added some of her own recipes.

See ONG’S KITCHEN, Page 2A



Lee Pao Xiong, left, and his wife Ong Xiong are co-owners of Ong’s Kitchen. They are pictured in the dining area of their restaurant.

DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

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# Protest

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Tuesday's rally was the most recent in a string of protests coming after Hermes likened transgender people to "a man pretending to be a woman" and called trans people's use of bathrooms that align with their gender "disgusting" at a May 9 county board meeting.

Hermes was elected to the board in 2022 to represent District 14, which covers the western half of Little Chute.

## What did Hermes say at the county board meeting?

During the May 9 county board meeting, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Officer Major Cooper gave a presentation to the board on the importance of equity in the workplace and appreciating the diversity of co-workers.

Following the presentation, board members were able to questions, to which Hermes asked Cooper how he can justify "that any man can be a woman," claiming without evidence that men are dressing up as women so they can go into bathrooms or changing rooms with young girls.

Hermes' comments about trans people came unprompted as the EDI officer did not talk about transgender individuals or their bathroom use during his presentation. Hermes' claim that faux trans people are using bathrooms to watch children is unfounded. The National Center for Transgender Equality, the Human Rights Campaign and the American Civil Liberties Union all say there is no statistical evidence that people are dressing as the opposite gender to sneak into bathrooms.

The last board meeting wasn't the first time Hermes has expressed anti-gender and transphobic ideas at a board meeting.

At a Feb. 28 meeting, Hermes said he was against appointing a diversity and inclusion consultant for the Appleton Public Library because he worried the person would push for pronoun use and gender equity. He also told the board he doesn't believe there are multiple genders.

The Post-Crescent is not printing full quotes from Hermes, as sharing transphobic comments proliferates anti-trans rhetoric during a time of unparalleled anti-LGBTQ legislation introduction across the nation.

## What are activists looking for?

Activists from Freedom Road Socialist Organization, ESTHER, Appleton SDS, as well as LGBTQ citizens, came to the county board meeting both to call for Hermes' resignation and to increase LGBTQ inclusivity in the county.

The group began their rally outside the government center, holding trans pride flags and signs calling for



**Outagamie County Board Chair Jeff Nooyen, left, asks deputies to remove a transgender rights activist from an Outagamie County Board meeting at the Outagamie County Government Center on Tuesday in Appleton. At a May 9 county board meeting, board member Timothy Hermes made transphobic comments regarding transgender people and their use of bathrooms that align with their gender, calling them "disgusting."**

DAN POWERS/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

people to stand against anti-LGBTQ actions.

Speaking to the crowd, Appleton SDS member Jonnie Urban emphasized Hermes' viewpoints on the trans community are baseless, stating that spreading misinformation about trans people and their motives is dangerous for the community.

"Spreading a message of hate incites violence against trans people," Urban said. "We're here to reverse misinformation that Hermes has shared."

Transgender individuals are three times more likely than other groups to feel they don't belong in the Fox Cities and LGBTQ people are 2.6 times more likely to feel they don't belong, according to 2021 data released from Imagine Fox Cities.

Trans allies like Fleischer came to the rally to show support for the trans people in his life and stand against anti-LGBTQ language.

"There's an innumerable number of trans people in my life that are incredibly important to me, so to hear this kind of rhetoric being flat-out said by elected officials is unacceptable to me," Fleischer told The Post-Crescent.

Following the rally outside, dozens of activists and citizens packed into the county board room where they pleaded with county officials to let them speak on the issue, but were turned down, as public comment was not allowed during the meeting unless it related to board action items.

Hermes did not respond to comment on calls for his resignation, however, he told The Post-Crescent after last week's protest, "I have no problem with the trans community whatsoever. I just believe everyone has the same rights to safety."

## How has the county responded?

The county board didn't put an agenda item related to Hermes' comments on Tuesday's agenda, meaning board members and the public couldn't speak on the comments during the meeting. The board additionally left out the comments from the May 9 meeting minutes.

However, Corporation Counsel Kyle Sargent told the board the county can't take disciplinary action against Hermes as his comments didn't reach the state law's definition of insufficiency of office or official misconduct that would allow the county to take action.

Sargent said the only way Hermes would be removed from office is if he chose to resign or was not reelected by his constituents.

Though the county can't take action against Hermes directly, board member Steve Thiede told activists that he would try to get place a censure on Hermes — a formal statement of disapproval of Hermes' transphobic comments.

"We're gonna see what we can do," Thiede told The Post-Crescent. "I'll do whatever's available within the rules." Additionally, board Chair Jeff Nooyen said he is going to ask committee chairs to draft a code of conduct outlining proper procedures for county board members so comments like Hermes' aren't made in the future.

"It's sad that it's come down to that," Nooyen told the board. "I don't agree with Supervisor Hermes' comments and I found them offensive and inappropriate."

*Sophia Voight is a local government and political reporter with The Post-Crescent. She can be reached for feedback and tips at svoight@postcrescent.com. Follow her on Twitter @sophia\_voight.*



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# Ong's Kitchen

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Xiong said the restaurant serves a variety of cuisines, with dishes inspired by Thai, Korean and Vietnamese cultures.

She said her children also had input in the design of the restaurant, which is located across from Appleton North High School.

The space is painted in neutral colors and has a modern design with greenery and a casual atmos-

phere. There is also a lounge area for customers to relax and wait for food or gather with friends.

"Our main goal is to make (Ong's Kitchen) like home," Xiong said. "You come in here and you feel like it's your home, you sit down and have a good home-made meal."

More information about Ong's Kitchen can be found on its Facebook page. The restaurant is open 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

*Alexandria Bursiek Kloehn is a business reporter for the Appleton Post-Crescent. You can reach her at abursiekkloehn@gannett.com or view her Twitter profile at @bursiekkloehn.*

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