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The St. Paul Voice



Design trends for 2025
Page 12

Volume 59 | Number 3

Your Community News & Information Source

March 2025

More delays at former YMCA property

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

With a March 1 development deadline looming and still no final development plan in place, the City of West St. Paul is poised to grant yet another 6-month extension to Greco Properties, the developer planning to add multifamily housing to the site of the former YMCA property at 150 Thompson Ave. E. This will be the fourth extension for the project since 2022 when Hy-Vee backed out of its plans for the 9.5-acre property and sold it to the city for \$5.2 million. The final plan is now expected to be complete by September. Pending further delays, construction could begin next year.

Greco intends to build a 461-unit market rate apartment complex with underground parking and a retail component such as coffee shop or fitness center, as well as 27 townhomes. Additionally, it will use the former AutoZone property on Robert Street for a 13,000-square-foot restaurant. That building is adjacent to the YMCA site. The project is expected to cost about \$134 million, and the City of West St. Paul has approved tax increment funding to support creation of public amenities.

Some may be disappointed to hear that an indoor community center is not part of the project, but significant investments are slated for a large public outdoor gathering space.

Housing / Page 4

Hunger epidemic still on the rise

FoodShare campaign begins March 1



Stock image: Metro Creative Graphics

Nine million people in Minnesota visited a food shelf last year, shattering the record of 7.5 million visits set in 2023.

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

Neighborhood House and Neighbors, Inc. are among the hundreds of food shelves across the state participating in the 44th annual Minnesota FoodShare campaign, an initiative of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches. The campaign challenges food shelves to see which one can raise the most food and money, and the Council donates a proportionate amount of funds to each based on how much they raise. While these organizations rely on donations throughout the year, the

boost is especially needed this time of year as they restock after the holidays and prepare for the busy summer months ahead. The campaign runs March 1 through April 6 and, like last year, the need for contributions is at an all-time high.

According to the Council, there were an estimated 9 million visits at Minnesota food shelves in 2024, shattering the record of 7.5 million visits set in 2023, and dwarfing the 5.75 million visits made in 2022 and 3.6 million made in 2021. Overall, annual visits to food shelves are about 150% higher than they were before the pandemic began

FoodShare / Page 2

Chime in now for big changes on Robert Street

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

West Siders need to step up now if they want to help shape the future of Robert Street in their neighborhood. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is planning to make several improvements to the corridor in conjunction with the full street reconstruction occurring between Kellogg and Annapolis. Beginning as early as 2026, the project calls for creating a roundabout at the intersection of Robert, State and Sidney streets, and adding bike lanes and Metro Transit stops. However, staff from the West Side Community Organization (WSCO), St. Paul's planning council for the West Side, are skeptical on whether those improvements were called for by people living in the community, and if they would even truly benefit for the neighborhood.

A survey to provide feedback about the proposed changes is available on the WSCO website through mid-April, and those who complete the survey will be entered into a raffle for a \$300 prize. The survey results will be brought before MnDOT, which is expected to complete its final plan for the project this fall. The \$25 million project is being covered by a Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity federal grant recently

Robert Street / Page 3

Noecker named St. Paul City Council president; gears up for ambitious year

Jake Spitzack
Staff Writer

Veteran Ward 2 St. Paul City Councilmember Rebecca Noecker was recently elected president of the St. Paul City Council. The leadership change took effect Feb. 12 and stems from outgoing council president Mitra Jalali's decision to step down, citing concerns about her health. Ward 5 Council-



Noecker

member Hwa Jeong Kim will continue as vice president. Noecker will also chair the Council's Orga-

nizational and Policy Committee, which is responsible for advancing shared policy priorities, and continue chairing the audit committee.

"I've had the good fortune to have several really great mentors in the role beforehand, and I'm excited to be stepping in at this time because it feels like a moment of real opportunity for our city," said Noecker in a recent interview. "Serious

challenges are ahead of us, especially with all the uncertainty at the federal and state levels of government.... I want to model good government and really listen to people and make sure they know that there are productive ways they can engage in the process."

One of the biggest responsibilities as council president is helping set the city's annual budget. Noecker said she's heard a great deal of concern

from residents about rising costs across the board, including housing, childcare and taxes. Last year, she and the other councilmembers worked to bring down the levy increase from 7.9% to 5.9% — in part by rejecting some of the mayor's proposed increases — but "bigger structural budget changes" need to happen to mitigate future increases, she said. This year, Noecker has tasked the budget committee

to work year-round, rather than waiting until the year is half over as has been the practice in the past.

Under her direction, the council is also launching a new public safety committee to oversee the St. Paul Office of Neighborhood Safety and the St. Paul Police Department's overtime spending. The police department has surpassed its overtime budget by \$8 million over the

Noecker / Page 3

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FoodShare

from page 1

in 2020.

Neighborhood House, 179 Robie St. E., St. Paul, operates the Wellstone

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Center Food Market, which serves residents of Ramsey County. Last fiscal year, the market distributed a record-breaking amount of food – nearly a million pounds – to 6,590 families. That is 30% more food and more than three times as many families as the year before. Its goal for this year's campaign is to raise 350,000 dollars/pounds of food. Donations may be dropped off at the center at any time.

"With the cost of essen-

tials soaring and economic uncertainty weighing on families, we see more people walking through our doors every day – parents who can't afford a gallon of milk, seniors forced to choose between food and medicine, and children whose meals at home are never guaranteed," said Neighborhood House food drive manager Miranda Hernandez. "The reality is stark: in fiscal year 2023, we distributed about 60,000 pounds of food each month. Today, that number has surged to over 100,000 pounds monthly. The demand is growing and our March FoodShare campaign allows us to create a safety net as we manage that need."

This year, Neighborhood House will collect donations at four grocery stores and host events including "Stuff the Truck" and a new interactive family event at the Wellstone Center. Its Food Market Wish List includes shelf-stable staples including rice, canned tuna, oatmeal and coffee, culturally specific items including corn flour, dry beans, fish sauce and curry paste, and some miscellaneous items such as reusable shopping bags and gallon-sized Ziploc bags. Neighborhood House also recently opened a food shelf on Montreal Avenue in St. Paul to help fight the battle against hunger. People seeking to receive food at the Wellstone Center must make an appointment before visiting the market. To make an appointment, call 651-789-3630 between 9 a.m.-4 p.m. on weekdays. For more information, visit neighborhoodhousemn.org.

"With the opening of our second site, we know this need will only grow," said Hernandez. "We anticipate our distribution could triple next year, and we are committed to rising to the challenge – ensuring that no one in our community must face hunger alone.... After 128 years of serving our community, we know one thing for certain: we can't do this alone. It takes all of us to ensure that no one goes hungry – so let's make this our most impactful March FoodShare yet!"

Neighbors, Inc., 222 Grand Ave., South St. Paul, serves residents in northern Dakota County. Last fiscal year, the nonprofit distributed more than 1 million pounds of food to 31,850 households. This is an increase of 159,000 pounds of food and 6,980 more families. The organization's goal for this campaign is to raise 300,000 dollars/pounds of

food. Donations may be dropped off at the lower level of Neighbors Inc., 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday through Friday, and financial donations can be mailed to Neighbors Inc. or made online at neighborsmn.org. Those seeking to visit the food market must make an appointment at neighborsmn.org or by calling 651-455-5000.

"Our Neighbors Nook weekly food distribution on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1-3 p.m. and the third Saturday of the month from 10-11:30 a.m. continues to see an increase in visitors," said Neighbor's Inc. hunger programs manager Erin Roeske. "On February 4 this year, 180 households visited The Neighbors Nook in a two-hour time span. The increased cost of groceries is one of the big reasons we see more people utilizing our hunger relief services." She said the organization is also seeking volunteers, and that no food or financial contribution is considered too small.

Last year's statewide FoodShare campaign raised \$10.74 million, down nearly a half million from the previous year, while pounds of food were up a million, at 7.57 million.

The Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches was founded in 1905 with the mission to unite people of faith and serve people in need. In addition to hunger relief services, it offers programs and services in youth development, senior support and more.

Second Harvest Heartland, the nation's third-largest food bank and one of the biggest nonprofit organizations in the state, last year announced its "moonshot" initiative designed to cut hunger in half for all Minnesotans by 2030. Dubbed Make Hunger History, it plans to achieve the goal by delivering more food to foodbanks, expanding its Care Center to assist more people applying to programs to receive food discounts, increasing fundraising efforts and advocating for investments that will cut costs of other basic living expenses, and more. According to its statewide hunger study completed in partnership with Wilder Research and released in January 2025, 1 in 5 Minnesota households cannot afford the food they need without using discount programs, and another 1 in 5 are worried that they may experience food insecurity within the next year. For more information, visit 2harvest.org.

Lucky Finds

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Robert Street

from page 1

received by MnDOT.

“Community members are wanting greater transparency regarding the community engagement results that MnDOT gathered before releasing these plans,” said WSCO spokesperson Julia Diaz. “They kind of came in with all these data points saying, ‘our research shows that the community wants bike lanes, or they prefer a roundabout,’ but we want them to actually share what those exact community engagement steps were. The concern is that they’re just

doing things as a box-checking exercise – doing the bare minimum to meet requirements, but not actually making a genuine effort to listen and integrate alternatives that are being offered by the community members.”

Some of the primary points of concern are that parts of Robert Street will be reduced from four lanes to two to make way for bike lanes, thus buses stopping at the proposed Metro Transit stops will force traffic behind them to stop. Likewise, the site of the proposed round-

about already has a dangerous blind spot due to the building on the corner, the former Morgan’s Mexican & Lebanese Foods. WSCO staff say the current project does not address that existing safety issue. Additionally, if there’s heavy traffic in the area, emergency vehicles may be forced to drive over the roundabout and center medians or take a longer route around.

WSCO’s Land Use Circle has created alternative options for the proposed plans, which are available to view on the survey. They include making Sydney Street a dead end instead of leading into the roundabout, and

rerouting segments of proposed bike lanes. Staff are in favor of one major piece of the project: the replacement of the nearly 100-year-old Robert Street viaduct. MnDOT also recently received a grant to create a bridge at the Southport railroad crossing at Barge Channel Road to improve traffic flow and allow for an evacuation route if a train is stopped.

“It’s such a big win after so many years of pushing for that replacement of the viaduct and adding that raised railroad crossing at Barge Channel Road,” said Diaz. “There’s been years of advocacy behind those two major changes.... We’re hoping

we can get those bus stops to have their own shoulder so that they’re not blocking traffic when they have to stop, but in general, having more forms of transportation available on Robert Street is really exciting.”

One of MnDOT’s community engagement workers for the project, Kevin Walker – a native of the West Side who still has family living there – said the Robert Street project was originally proposed in 2016 but at that time it was just to replace the road that was last updated in 1989. He said MnDOT has worked closely with WSCO since 2020 to guide the expanded plans including the

viaduct replacement. Last November, at WSCO’s request, they mailed flyers to approximately 6,500 West Side homes, encouraging people to come to a meeting regarding the proposed work.

The WSCO Land Use Circle meets the fourth Wednesday of every month and the meetings are open to all West Siders. MnDOT representatives have attended some of the meetings and are also offering monthly “office hours” at local coffee shops so residents can learn more about the project. For more information, visit wsco.org or www.dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/robertstreet/design.html.

Noecker

from page 1

past four years, according to city documents.

Economic growth

For the first time ever, the city council is poised to hire a consultant to create a robust economic development plan to help guide the city’s growth.

“Economic growth is a top priority for me,” said Noecker. “We need to be bringing in more housing, jobs and businesses. The only way that we can fuel the progressive work that we want to do for our residents is if we have the tax base to do it, and that’s also the only way that we can effectively bring down taxes while also delivering great services.... Downtown revitalization is a huge part of economic growth. I’m very invested in our office-residential conversion incentive program that we’ve launched. I’m excited about the many new units of housing that are coming online.”

Last fall, the St. Paul Downtown Alliance found

that 10 of the city’s downtown office buildings are suitable for transitioning into residential housing and could ultimately bring in 4,000 new residents. They include the U.S. Bank Center on Fifth Street, the First National Bank Building on Minnesota Street and the Park Square Court building by Mears Park. Noecker noted that the city annex building is also prime for transition, and that moving city staff to a more approachable location – perhaps on street level – may encourage more people to get involved in local governmental affairs. It should be noted that some office buildings won’t be touched because the city is looking to bring workers back to downtown offices. For example, the mayor’s office is expected to soon implement an “office forward” policy requiring its workers to return to the office at least four days a week. Downtown has been struggling since the rapid shift to remote work following the pandemic.

“I believe the city has a serious role to play in bringing people back to down-

town because we’re a major downtown employer,” said Noecker.

As part of a downtown investment strategy adopted last spring, the City of St. Paul, St. Paul Downtown Alliance, and a few other entities are working to attract 20,000 more residents downtown and 20,000 workers (for a total of 75,000) and increase the number of annual visitors downtown by 20% to 10 million.

Housing

Not all new developments will be multi-family housing. Last year the city created a fund for supportive housing and is looking to create affordable housing – including duplexes and triplexes – on its HRA-owned land. Noecker is working with Ward 3 Councilmember Saura Jost to update the city’s rent stabilization ordinance to increase affordable housing options in the city. When that ordinance is brought forward, Noecker plans to simultaneously attempt to bring back tenant protections that could limit the amount people must pay

for security deposits, require more in-depth background checks of prospective renters and more. The city once had them but was forced to repeal them due to litigation.

Commerical Corridor Fund

More immediate is the launch of a new Commerical Corridor Fund, expected to go online within the next month, supported by a \$1.4 million budget. District councils such as the West Side Community Organization and CapitolRiver Council, and business associations such as the South Robert Street Business Association, will be able to apply to receive \$100,000 from the fund annually. The funds can be used for promoting a commercial corridor and its activities, as well as landscaping, public art and more. Noecker said the application process will be much easier and quicker than that of a STAR grant, so funds could get out the door within a few months of applying.

“There’s very limited funding from the city right now for anything that’s not physical capital through

our STAR program, so we wanted this to be more flexible,” said Noecker. “We also wanted to direct these dollars towards the businesses organizations rather than just individual businesses, because we know there’s a need for coordinated activity along many of our main streets – not just one awning here and one HVAC system there. We want it to be a little bit more strategic.”

Other goals

Other goals for the year include passing a tree preservation ordinance to help preserve more of the urban tree canopy, increasing Metro Transit safety, and maintaining day-to-day services. Noecker will also continue hosting Community Conversations once a month at local businesses and organizations. These are informal gatherings where people can learn about various city operations, ask questions about projects and share general concerns.

“They’re the highlight of my month,” said Noecker, noting that constituents can request topics for

conversation. “Almost every other community conversation I have now is with a guest speaker. For example, we’re going to have the Chief Judge John Guffman joining me at the next one to talk about the justice system’s role in public safety.”

The next Community Conversation is 9-10 a.m., Thursday, Mar. 13 at Linwood Recreation Center, 860 St. Clair Ave. For more information, visit stpaul.gov/departments/city-council/ward-2.

In 2015, Noecker became the first woman to represent Ward 2. Today, she oversees an all-female council. Prior to her election, she served on the St. Paul Planning Commission and on the board of directors of the West Side Community Organization. She also founded West Siders for Strong Schools, a neighborhood group promoting excellence in public schools on the West Side. She grew up in St. Louis Park, earned her bachelor’s degree in social studies from Harvard College, and spent the first part of her career as a middle school science teacher.



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651-457-1177

The St. Paul Voice is published monthly by the St. Paul Publishing Company
Circulation: 17,750 print + online. Home delivery to St. Paul’s West Side, West St. Paul and Mendota Heights.
Sister publications: La Voz Latina, the Downtown St. Paul Voice and South St. Paul Voice.

Story ideas welcome:

To submit story ideas or letters to the editor, contact Tim at tim@stpaulpublishing.com

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Housing

from page 1

City-owned amenities will include a public plaza, playground or splash pad, and lawn space with pavilion and stage. The site will also feature more connections to the regional River to River Greenway trail system.

New apartment building denied on Thompson Ave.

The West St. Paul City Council recently denied a conditional use permit that would have allowed a developer to demolish the single-family home at 212 Thompson Ave. E., next door to the former YMCA site. Reuter Walton wanted to build a 4-story, 65-unit multi-family apartment building with surface and underground parking at the 1.85-acre site. The city rejected it, saying the project doesn't align with the city's vision for the area and that it would have a negative impact on the other nearby single-family homes and townhomes.

City purchases property on Butler Ave.

The West St. Paul Economic Development Authority recently purchased the single-family home at 424 Butler Ave. E. and the city council is discussing a potential redevelopment plan, working in partnership with Rondo Community Land Trust. Discussions are centered on creating 10 cottage-style twin homes around a central green space, all available for 80% of the average median income.

TPAC events

Unless noted, all activities take place at Thompson Park Activity Center, 1200 Stassen Lane, West St. Paul. Events are for ages 55 and older. To register, call 651-403-8300.

Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, 10-11 a.m., Monday, Mar. 3. Learn about the program that supports National Guard veterans and active military personnel. Registration required. \$3.

Parkinson Foundation, 9:30-11 a.m., Thursday, Mar. 6. Learn the different stages of Parkinson's disease and strategies for living well. Registration required. \$5.

Amazing Beauty and Function: Pollinators & Prairie Flowers, 10-11:30 a.m., Monday, Mar. 17. Discover the vital role of native pollinators and plants in Minnesota's ecosystems. Registration required. \$3.

Mount Rushmore: Carving an Icon, 11 a.m.-noon, Tuesday, Mar. 18. Learn the story behind the icon. Registration required. \$9.

Looking for Spring hike, 10-11:15 a.m., Tuesday, Mar. 18. Join a hike through Thompson Park to search for early signs of spring. Register by Mar. 11. \$10.

Urban Roots, 11 a.m.-noon, Monday, Mar. 31. Hear how young people, ages 14-21, gain job experience in gardening, conservation and cooking, while developing career skills, healthy habits and a passion for the community. Registration required. \$3.

St. Patrick's Day celebration

Irish Arts Minnesota is hosting two events in March at the Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth St., St. Paul. A Day of Irish Dance runs 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 16, featuring 11 local Irish dance schools and groups, music and theatrical performances. The 43rd Annual St. Patrick's Day celebration takes place 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday, Mar. 17, featuring three stages of Irish entertainment, kid-friendly crafts and activities, and the Shenanigans Craft Fair with local food and craft vendors. The event also offers expanded children's programming to teach about Irish arts and dance and introduce Irish musical instruments.

Admission for each event is \$7-\$9 and free for ages 5 and younger. Tickets are

available online and at the door. For more information, visit irishartsmn.org.

Minnesota Bach Festival

The Bach Society of Minnesota, one of the first organizations in North America to advance the work and legacy of Johann Sebastian Bach, will host the 2025 Minnesota Bach Festival February 28-March 30. Events include the Mozart Requiem concert and community sing-along, a weekend of Mobile Mini-Concerts, Bach's birthday concert, a masterclass on Bach's keyboard music, a celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Anna Magdalena Bach Notebooks with a lecture and recital, the Bach & Friends musical workshop, and the collaborative performance of Baroque Tango: Rhythms of Desire, Longing and Passion. For more information, visit bachsocietymn.org.

Union Depot

The following events are held at Union Depot, 214 4th St. E. For more information, visit uniondepot.org/event-calendar.

Station Sounds, 6-8 p.m., Thursday, Mar. 20. 1881 by Lake Elmo Inn presents a new musical artist/group every third Thursday of the month.


Red Cross blood drive, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Thursday, Mar. 20.

Free yoga classes are offered 5:30-6:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays, and 9-10 a.m., Saturdays.

Games galore, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. each Wednesday. Giant-size games are available or bring your own. Free.

Gatsby at 100

The Minnesota Historical Society will present a collection of items pertaining to "The Great Gatsby" and its author F. Scott Fitzgerald March through May in the Gale Family Library at the Minnesota History Center, 345 W. Kellogg Blvd., St. Paul. Entry is free. The display is part of a series of programs this year marking the 100th anniversary of the publication of "The Great Gatsby" by St. Paul native F. Scott Fitzgerald. Set in the Jazz Age of the 1920s, the novel explores ideas about class and society, materialism and the American Dream.



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Communal Reconciliation Service
 Sunday, March 30 – 2:00 pm

Palm Sunday
 Saturday, April 12 – 4:15 pm
 Sunday, April 13 – 10:15 am

Holy Thursday, April 17
 Celebration of the Supper of the Lord – 7:00 pm
 Altar of Repose – 8:00 pm – 10:00 pm

Good Friday, April 18
 Altar of Repose continues
 Stations of the Cross – Noon only
 Good Friday Service – 3:00 pm
 Tenebrae Service – 7:00 pm

Easter Vigil, Saturday, April 19
 8:00 pm

Easter Sunday, April 20
 10:15 am

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Cinco de Mayo seeks grand marshal nominations and button designs

The Cinco de Mayo West Side Fiesta returns May 2-3, bringing music, dancing, a colorful parade and other festivities to Cesar Chavez Street to celebrate Mexican culture and heritage as well as the West Side community. The planning committee is seeking nominations for the parade's grand marshal and designs for the festival's commemorative button contest. Grand marshal nominations are due by Mar. 15 at <https://stpaulwestsidefiestas.com/registration/#parade>. The honor recognizes an individual who has made a significant impact on the community. Artwork for the button contest is also due Mar. 15. The theme is "Represent the spirit and culture of the Westside Cinco de Mayo Celebration." The winner will receive a special prize and public recognition. Submit designs by emailing parade@stpaulwestsidefiestas.com. Be sure to include your name and contact information. For more information about the parade, sponsorship opportunities, or event details and updates, visit stpaulwestsidefiestas.com.

Clean-up grant for Bouldering Project

The Bouldering Project climbing gym, set to open this fall at 42 W. Water St., St. Paul, has received a \$354,839 grant from the Minnesota Department

of Employment and Economic Development to remove petroleum and other contaminants from the 3.3-acre site to make it suitable for construction. The gym will have more than 35,000 square feet of bouldering walls, fitness and yoga studios, youth spaces, saunas and single-stall bathrooms with showers, and coworking spaces.

Since opening its first gym in Seattle in 2011, Bouldering Project has expanded to 14 locations across the county, including Minneapolis. The St. Paul location will be at Farwell-on-Water, a mixed-use development near Harriet Island Regional Park that opened last year with apartments, artist studios and professional workspaces.

Robert Street meetings

MnDOT is hosting monthly "office hours" on the planned reconstruction of Robert Street on the West Side. This series offers a chance to meet with Project Manager Chris Bower at a local coffee shop to learn more about the project and ask questions. The plan calls for significant improvements

to Robert Street between Annapolis Street and Kellogg Boulevard, likely occurring in 2026-2028. The new design is focused on calming traffic, improving pedestrian and bike access, and creating a safer environment for walking, bicycling, using transit and driving. Meeting dates, more information and future events are posted at dot.state.mn.us/metro/projects/robertstreet/index.html.

Art exhibit at State Capitol

Portraits of Indigenous Authors and Artists is presented through June 30 at 3rd Floor Exhibit Gallery at the Minnesota State Capitol, 75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd. Now featured is a collection of fine art photography by John Ratzloff. This project started when Ratzloff was invited to photograph the life and natural beauty of White Earth Nation. His photography honors the voices and legacies of Indigenous leaders, offering a unique visual narrative that celebrates their contributions to art, culture and advocacy. Open weekdays 8 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturdays 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Free.



St. Paul airport sees double-digit growth

If you think you've seen more aircraft buzzing around Holman Field this past year, you're not mistaken. St. Paul's downtown airport saw a 11% increase in operations last year with more than 42,000 takeoffs and landings compared to roughly 38,000 in 2023. It's the biggest increase among the six reliever airports in the Metropolitan Airports Commission (MAC) system. These small airports support business aviation, flight training, recreational flying and other aviation services. They are also home to 850 hangars that house more than 1,400 aircraft. Collectively, the reliever airports had 372,000 takeoffs and land-

ings last year. By comparison, MSP served 37.2 million passengers, a 6.9% increase over 2023.

Over the past six years, MAC has invested more than \$50 million in safety and modernization projects at the reliever airports, including new runways and lighting and enhanced navigation systems. This year it will invest more than \$30 million to enhance safety and operations. Two of the biggest projects are slated for St. Paul Downtown Airport: rehab of the primary runway and construction of a new U.S. Customs and Border Protection facility to clear international passengers and cargo.

Let Us Know

Have a news tip or idea for an article?
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651-457-1177
tim@stpaulpublishing.com

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Lutheran Social Service of MN is seeks volunteers age 55 or over in your area to provide companionship to older adults or mentor school-age children. Volunteers commit to regular weekly hours for a tax-free stipend and mileage reimbursement. Contact us at 888.205.3770, or AmeriCorpsSeniors@lssmn.org for more information and to make an impact in your community.



Annual Organ Recital - FREE

Featuring Sarah Hawbecker
Friday, March 7 | 7:00 pm

Acclaimed organist Sarah Hawbecker will perform on Augustana's magnificent Glatter-Götz/Rosales pipe organ. Winner of numerous competitions, her performances have been recorded and broadcast on American Public Media's radio program Pipe-dreams®. Ms. Hawbecker is organist and Director of Children's Music at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia.

Wednesday Lenten Worship

Ash Wednesday — March 5
Worship at 11:00 am and 7:00 pm with Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes
11:00 am - Midday Worship
11:30 am - Music Meditation with guest musicians in the Sanctuary
Noon - Light Lunch in the Fellowship Hall
5:30 pm - Congregational/Community Dinner
7:00 pm - Evening Worship



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Arts & Entertainment

Children's Museum

10 7th St. W.
St. Paul
651-225-6000
mcm.org

Dinosaurs: Land of Fire and Ice, through May 11. Travel back in time and discover what life was like when dinosaurs roamed the earth. Dig for fossils, explore a swampy bog and oozing volcano, climb through icy terrain and more.

Exhibits and activities include "The Scramble," "The Studio," "Creativity Jam," "Sprouts," "Our World," "Forces at Play," "Shipwreck Adventures" and "Imaginopolis." Tickets are \$17 on weekdays and \$19 on weekends. Admission is free the first Sunday of each month; reservations are required, and tickets are limited. The next free date is Mar. 2.

History Center

345 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-259-3000
mnhs.org

"Girlhood (It's Complicated)," through June 1. This exhibit from the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History features more than 100 objects that explore how young women have influenced politics, education, work, health and fashion.

"Reframing our Stories" is featured through October. The exhibit was created from a decades-old box of photographs simply labeled "Indians." Inside the box were dozens of pictures of Native community members, organizations, activities, and events that are relevant today.

"Our Home: Native Minnesota" features historic and contemporary photo-

graphs, maps and artifacts that show how Minnesota's native communities have retained cultural practices, teachings and values.

Other exhibits include "Minnesota's Greatest Generation," "Then Now Wow," "Grainland" and "Weather Permitting." Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$12 for seniors and college students, and \$8 for children ages five to 17. Admission and parking are free on Thursdays, 4-8 p.m.

History Theatre

30 E. 10th St.
St. Paul
651-292-4323
Historytheatre.com

"Secret Warriors," Mar. 29-April 19. Inspired by the stories of the Japanese Americans who served as translators and interrogators for the U.S. Armed Forces, "Secret Warriors" features two men, Koji Kimura and



Photo by Matthew Murphy

"Come from Away," returns to the Ordway Center Mar. 5-8.

Tamio Takahashi, who took extraordinary risks to save their fellow soldiers in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Discover their compelling personal journeys and heartfelt love stories set against the backdrop of the war and the incarceration of their families. From \$49.

Landmark Center

75 5th St. W.
St. Paul
651-292-3225
landmarkcenter.org

Courtroom Concerts:

Artaria String Quartet, noon-1 p.m., Thursday, Mar. 6 and Thursday, Mar. 20; and Ernest Bison, violin; Greg Byers, cello; and David Feily, guitar, Thursday, Mar. 27. Free.

Ballet Tuesdays, noon-1 p.m. Mar. 11. Ballet performances and demonstrations by BalletCo.Laboratory. Free.

Woodturning demonstration, 1-4 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 16 in the AAW Gallery

of Wood Art. Free.

Day of Irish Dance, 10 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 16. Witness artistic dances from performance and competition teams. \$7-\$9.

St. Patrick's Day celebration, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday, Mar. 17. This event features local and regional music on four stages, traditional Irish dancing from local dance schools and adult performance groups, an Irish Marketplace with authentic Irish merchants, artisans and

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Urban Expedition: Guatemala, 1-3 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 30. Authentic music, food, dance performances and crafts. Free.

Public Building Tour, 12:30 p.m.-1:15 p.m., every Sunday. Learn about the building's history, gangster connections and restoration.

MN Museum of American Art

350 Robert St. N.
St. Paul
651-797-2571
mmaa.org

"Here, Now," features 150 artworks across media from historically significant and notable new artists. All are in the M's permanent collection. The museum is open 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday-Sunday. Admission is free.

Ordway Center

345 Washington St.
St. Paul
651-224-4222
ordway.org

"Come from Away," Mar.

5-8. Based on true events, when 38 planes carrying 7,000 passengers were ordered to land at Gander International Airport in Newfoundland following the September 11 terrorist attacks. The passengers were welcomed by a town that banded together to house and feed them, and to offer them friendship. From \$45.

Cantus & The Swingles, 7:30 p.m., Friday, Mar. 7. Cantus partners with The Swingles, the iconic UK vocal ensemble, for a collaborative concert with a repertoire spanning nearly every genre and time period. From \$55.

Mozart Requiem, 4 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 9. Presented by the Bach Society of Minnesota. From \$17.

"Dear Evan Hansen," Mar. 11-16. A contemporary musical about connection in the digital age. Meet Evan Hansen, a high school student who always feels like he's on the outside looking in. After writing a letter to himself that was never meant to be seen, Evan becomes entangled in a lie that was never meant to be told and a life he never dreamt could

be his. As a result, he finally gets what so many of us are searching for – the chance to finally fit in. From \$45.

The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra presents Haydn's Drum Roll Symphony with Richard Egarr, noon, Mar. 14-16, and Bruch and Korngold with Tabea Zimmermann Mar. 2-29. From \$16.

National Geographic Live: From Roots to Canopy, 7 p.m., Tuesday, Mar. 18. Tree canopy ecologist Nalini Nadkarni shares the worlds hidden in the tree-tops. From \$29.

Classic Albums Live: The Beatles' Abbey Road, 7 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 23. The entire album is performed live on stage. From \$40.

The Schubert Club presents Leif Ove Andsnes, piano, 7:30 p.m., Friday, Mar. 28. From \$36.

"Sister's Easter Catechism: Will My Bunny Go to Heaven?" 2:30 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 30. Sister answers the timeworn questions of the Easter season like "Why isn't Easter the same day every year like Christmas?" and "Will my bunny go to heaven?" From \$43.

Park Square Theatre

20 W. 7th Place
St. Paul
651-291-7005
parksquaretheatre.org

The New Standards, featuring Chan Polling, John Munson and Steve Roehm, 7 p.m., Friday, Mar. 21. From \$20.

Kevin Kling and Victor Zupanc, 7 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 29. Heartfelt stories and songs to feed your soul and tickle your funny bone. From \$20.

RiverCentre

175 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-265-4800
rivercentre.org

The Minnesota Royal Weekend, Mar. 1-2. Features the Crown Cheer and Dance Championship on Saturday and the Ultimate Championship Experience on Sunday. \$25 for one day, \$45 for two. Ages 5 and under are free.

Let's Play Hockey Expo, Mar. 7-8. The world's largest hockey show. \$5. Ages 18 and under are free.

Donnie Smith Bike Show, Mar. 29-30. Includes a bike show with over 35

classes and 20 custom bikes, vendors and entertainment.
Minnesota Roller Derby, 6 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 29. From \$22.

Science Museum of Minnesota

120 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-221-9444
smm.org

Virtual Reality Transporter - Use the VRT to hurtle through the cosmos at fantastic speeds, scuba dive into prehistoric seas, and join the astronauts of Apollo 11 as they moonwalk for the first time. \$9.95.

Museum Nights, 5-8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. Explore museum galleries, check out special Science Live performances, enjoy food and drink, then catch an Omnitheater show.

OminiFest continues through April 13. Includes:

- **"Extreme Weather"** - An up-close look at some of the most astonishing and potentially deadly natural phenomena. Learn what causes turbulent tornadoes, receding glaciers and rampant wildfires.
- **"Cuba"** - Journey to the heart of the Caribbean

through the eyes of those exploring under the ocean's surface and dancing in the streets of Havana.

- **"Fungi Web of Life"** - The film unravels how plants and animals would not exist without mushrooms, molds, yeasts and toadstools.

- **"Secrets of the Sea"** - From the smallest krill to the largest whales, explore how ocean ecosystems depend on biodiversity and a surprising level of animal cooperation.

- **"Stellar Tours: A Star is Born,"** Wednesday-Sunday. Follow the life cycle of a star through this live digital telescope show.

Tickets are \$34.95 for adults and \$24.95 for ages 4-17 and include an Omnitheater show.

Xcel Center

199 W. Kellogg Blvd.
St. Paul
651-726-8240
xcelenergycenter.com

Mary J. Blige, 7 p.m., Sunday, Mar. 16. From \$72.

NCHC Fan Skate, 7-8:30 p.m., Thursday, Mar. 20. Free.

NCHC Frozen Faceoff, Mar. 21-22. From \$45 per session.



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METRO Gold Line opens Mar. 22

Metro Transit working on plan to improve ridership

Tim Spitzack
Editor

After nearly three years of construction, the METRO Gold Line bus rapid transit (BRT) route is scheduled to open Mar. 22, connecting St. Paul, Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale and Woodbury. It follows the I-94 corridor and is the state's first BRT line to operate primarily within bus-only lanes. The line provides all-day service from 16 stations and has Park & Ride lots in St. Paul, Oakdale and Woodbury. Buses stop every 10 minutes on weekdays and every 15 minutes on weekends. Fares are the same as light rail and local buses.

BRT operates more like light rail than a traditional bus line, providing faster service by using dedicated bus lanes and making fewer stops. These buses have wider aisles, more doors, and folding seats to accommodate wheelchairs and strollers. The stations have raised

platform boarding, a waiting space with on-demand heat, NexTrip real-time departure signs, ticket machines that accept cash and credit cards, route maps, bike racks, lighting, security cameras, emergency telephones and trash bins. Approximately 70% of the Gold Line route will have bus-only lanes.

The \$505 million project began in late 2022 and is set to finish on time and under budget. In 2027, service will be extended to downtown Minneapolis, costing up to \$20 million for more buses and stations. The Gold Line extension will replace Metro Transit's Route 94, the weekday express route that carries about 800 riders between downtown St. Paul and downtown Minneapolis.

The Gold Line is one of three BRT lines opening this year. The goal is to eventually have 12 BRT lines within the METRO network. The METRO B Line is scheduled to open in June in the Route 21 corridor between St. Paul and Min-

neapolis, and the METRO E Line in December in the Route 6 corridor in Minneapolis. Also in the works is the METRO G Line, which will operate in the Rice Street and Robert Street corridors and connect with the Gold Line in downtown St. Paul.

Ridership and safety

Metro Transit is working on a service improvement plan designed to increase ridership and expand transit service by 35% over the next two years. Called "Network Now," the plans include:

- Expanding service on more than 65 routes, including 15 routes with trips running at least every 15 minutes.
- Increasing light rail frequency to every 10 minutes, from every 12 minutes.
- Offering on-demand micro-transit service in eight suburban areas.
- Introducing 20 new bus routes to areas without existing service.
- Adapting the region's express bus network to pro-



Metro Transit photo

Gold Line station ticket machines accept both cash and credit cards.

vide all-day service in key corridors.

The Metropolitan Council is also funding several initiatives this year to improve public safety on Metro Transit buses and trains. The Council's budget for this year provides \$10.75 million for contracted supplemental security services and the continued use of contracted employees such as TRIP Agents (people who inspect fares and assist riders), and up to \$750,000 to partner with organizations focused on issues like substance abuse disorders, mental health and housing. The budget also provides funding for more police officers, community service officers, and main-

tenance staff to clean and maintain stations, vehicles and track areas. The number of TRIP agents is expected to nearly double to 100 by the end of the year.

Several of the Met Council's initiatives focus on improving conditions along the METRO Green Line corridor. This includes contracting with the St. Paul Downtown Alliance to provide more safety ambassadors at downtown St. Paul light rail stations and bus stops. The ambassadors address antisocial behaviors on buses and trains, clean up trash and graffiti, and assist people with wayfinding. Metro Transit is also working with The Listening House of

St. Paul to have participants in their WORK NOW program regularly clean Green Line stations and bus stops.

Lower fares

Metro Transit lowered fares this year. As of Jan. 1, all non-express bus and light rail fares are \$2 all day, every day, and \$1 for youth, seniors and Medicare recipients. All-Day passes are now \$2 to \$4, and 7-day passes are \$20. Metro Mobility-certified riders receive one-cent fares through June 30 under a new pilot program. Later this year, people who qualify for the income-based Transit Assistance Program will pay \$1 fares for up to two years.

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Neighbors, Inc.

Dawn Wambeke
President & CEO



Neighbors, Inc., has a social enterprise within its headquarters at 222 Grand Ave. W., South St. Paul. It's a thrift store with a boutique feel. Neighbors Thrift Store is open to the public and offers high quality clothing, jewelry, personal accessories and household items at very affordable prices. It is pow-

ered by our dedicated volunteers, who bring our mission to life by assisting with sorting donations, running the cash register, pricing items and working the sales floor.

As a social enterprise, all revenue from the thrift store goes back into the organization to support our programs, including financial

empowerment and hunger relief. Additionally, the store helps prevent clothing textiles from ending up in landfills and incinerators.

Neighbors Thrift Store also serves people enrolled through our Financial Empowerment Center. Last year, we provided \$18,000 in gift cards to people to buy school clothes for their children as well as business attire for themselves.

Our thrift store is a place where the community gathers to build social connections – something we need to continue to keep at the forefront of our work.

"Neighbors Clothes Closet Thrift Store offers high-quality clothing at affordable prices, helping our

community save money while still enjoying quality items," said store manager Yudi Montes. "Beyond financial savings, our store has become a social hub where our guests regularly visit to check out the latest arrivals and engage with our friendly volunteers."

The U.S. secondhand market is a \$50 billion industry. CapitalOne estimates that one-third of clothing and apparel items purchased in the U.S. over the past year were secondhand. With thrift stores and resale being "on trend" both financially and environmentally, we view Neighbors Thrift Store as a significant opportunity to bring more resources into

our organization. Our dream is to open a standalone thrift store in a retail space, as a second location. A free clothes closet would remain at Neighbors' headquarters. A larger thrift store would position Neighbors, Inc., to achieve a "triple win" social enterprise, one that simultaneously generates positive social impact, environmental benefits and financial sustainability. Essentially, this would allow Neighbors to achieve a "win" to improve people, the planet and profit. Goals for our possible future thrift store include a high visibility retail location, easy and accessible drive-up/drop-off, larger space to allow for furniture, expanded

clothing (including a business line) and more household items, on-the-job training and increased revenue to support the sustainability of Neighbors' services.

We are forming a task force and welcome people to join it, particularly those with expertise in real estate, retail operations, start-ups, social enterprises and marketing. Please contact me if you are interested. I can be reached at dawn@neighborsmn.org or 651-272-1135. In addition, we welcome the community to "shop with a cause" at Neighbors' Thrift Store. Come find your latest treasure at amazing prices!

Stay connected with Neighbors at neighborsmn.org.

POSTSCRIPT

Talking to a Friend

Yesterday, I got to talk with an old friend.

I used to see Cheryl almost every day but for the last several years we've seen each other once a year, at most. She's going to direct my show, so we'll be working together again. We had coffee and soup on a very cold day, and I had this strange feeling I had slipped back in time. I didn't need to explain a thing, talking to this old friend. I knew her and she knew me, and I lost track of the number of times we finished each other's thoughts.

"If we can't find a chair that looks good..." I began.

"You could bring a throw to toss over it," she finished. "Exactly," I said.

We did that all afternoon.

This is also the week my editor, Patty, is retiring. Patty has been editing my columns for most of the time I've



Carrie Classon
CarrieClasson.com

been writing The Postscript. She's repaired my fractured sentences and added literally thousands of missing commas to my writing, as she has for writers for the last 44 years, and if anyone deserves a restful retirement from all that bad punctuation, it is she.

I can't imagine not talking with Patty every week because, although I'm sure she's one of the best editors in the business, that's

not what makes her special. What makes her special is that every single week she says something nice about my column. There's no need for her to do so, but it means the world to me and I will miss her terribly.

Yet I somehow feel that Patty will remain in my life, just as Cheryl drifted away for a bit and circled back. The people who are meant to be in my life have a way of staying there, in some form or another, sometimes taking a step back to make room for the new friends in my life.

And sometimes friendships end. I had a friend who ghosted me years ago. She did it three times and, finally, I decided I would stop reaching out to her except on her birthday. One year, on her birthday, she responded. She said she was sorry she had ghosted me. She said she had a lot going on in her life that made her anxious and insecure, and this was how she dealt with it.

I've learned that almost always, when people do

something that hurts me, it has much more to do with their own hurts than with me. And those hurts were usually there long before I met them. We had a good time, while we were friends, and the memory of her leaving is forgotten, replaced by memories of the lunches and laughter we've shared.

Relationships change. One thing leads to another and, before I know it, I'm spending my time with new people, talking to new friends, without realizing how much has changed. I've met a couple of people in the last few months that I suspect (and hope!) will be my friends in the future. And I know, as I grow older, keeping in touch with old friends and making new ones is important.

My grandmother lived to be 100 and outlived all her old friends. So, she made new old friends. By the time she passed, many

of her friends were closer in age to her children than to her, but she always seemed to have someone to talk to. And

that is what matters.

We all need someone to talk to.

Till next time.

Read Brave names citywide book selection

St. Paul Public Library is hosting its Read Brave citywide book club in March. It's designed to encourage teens, their families and community members to read the same book and discuss its theme. The title, "Akata Witch" by Nnedi Okorafor, is available for check out at all branch locations. The Library is also giving away free copies at its branches, while supplies last.

The African Art of Healing - Past, Present and Future, 2-4 p.m., Saturday, Mar. 22 at George Latimer Central Library. The library will host a vibrant celebration of Black and African Diaspora empowerment, art, and ancestral reconnection in partnership with Oshun Center for Intercultural Healing.

Talk Brave with Mayor Carter, Nnedi Okorafor and Youth Panelists, 5:30-7:30 p.m., Wednesday, Mar. 26 at Rondo Community Library. An evening of conversation with author Nnedi Okorafor, youth panelists, and Mayor Melvin Carter, plus a musical performance by Kashimana, and artwork inspired by the book.

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Dakota County at a crossroads

Challenges and opportunities in 2025

As we conclude the first quarter of 2025, Dakota County finds itself at a pivotal moment, facing both significant challenges and promising opportunities. While I remain optimistic about our future, success this year will demand creativity, collaboration and resilience.

The biggest challenge: state and federal funding uncertainty - The most pressing issue for Dakota County in 2025 is how counties will fare under state and federal governance. A persistent mismatch exists between the services counties are mandated to provide and the funding allocated to support them. When state and federal dollars fall short, the burden shifts to local property taxpayers.



Joe Atkins
Dakota County Commissioner

This challenge is compounded by political uncertainty. The Minnesota Legislature is evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, making it difficult to predict how funding decisions will unfold. Meanwhile, the state's economic outlook is mixed. Economists forecast a modest surplus for the next two years, but a projected multibillion-dollar deficit by 2028 raises concerns for longterm planning. At the

federal level, a new administration and one-party congressional control introduce further uncertainty regarding potential mandates and funding shifts.

Governor's proposed budget: implications for Dakota County residents

- Governor Walz's proposed budget includes several provisions that would significantly increase costs for counties and local taxpayers. Key changes include new county funding responsibilities related to the Minnesota Sex Offender Program, disability waiver services, and the behavioral health fund. While some proposals, such as long-overdue upgrades to child protection software, are beneficial, the new mandates, cost-sharing shifts, and aid reductions amount to more than \$200 million in additional expenses for Minnesota counties.

Shifting costs to counties does not reduce overall government spending - it merely changes who pays. In this case, it places a heavier financial burden on local property taxpayers. I recognize that the governor's proposal is just the starting

point for legislative discussions, and I remain hopeful that both parties will work together to ensure that the local impact is fully understood and mitigated.

Federal funding freeze: a cause for concern

- In late January, the White House announced a temporary freeze on all federal grants and loans, affecting a broad range of programs that counties are required to implement. This decision put trillions of federal dollars - including funds for health care, education, housing assistance and disaster relief - on hold pending a review to ensure alignment with the new administration's priorities. While federal district courts temporarily blocked the freeze just before it took effect, this situation highlights the ongoing funding instability that counties will likely face in the coming months and years.

The Atkins Diet: a frugal approach to county budgeting

- In times of economic uncertainty, careful financial stewardship is essential. Whether managing my own household budget or the county's finances, I

adopt an even more frugal approach when faced with uncertainty. Here are a few steps we've taken to keep Dakota County's budget in check for 2025:

Expense reductions - We cut \$250,000 from Community Services and Central Service department budgets to offset rising costs.

Staffing efficiencies - Rather than adding new positions, we reallocated existing staff to areas of greater need.

Revenue generation - We expanded solar energy production at service centers and libraries, helping offset increases in electricity costs.

Streamlined elections - Collaborating with local governments, we centralized absentee voting, making the process more efficient, secure and cost-effective.

Strategic investments for long-term gains - Being fiscally responsible does not mean disinvesting in initiatives that yield long-term benefits. Despite budgetary caution, we continue to make strategic investments in key areas:

Mental health services - Last month, the Crisis and Recovery Center in West St. Paul opened its doors. Funded entirely by grants, this facility will provide much-needed mental health services to individuals and families in crisis.

Opioid crisis response - We are using funds from a nationwide opioid settlement to prevent overdoses, reduce crime, and expand our award-winning initiative that pairs county social workers with local law enforcement to respond to mental health calls. This program improves outcomes, reduces repeat calls and enhances safety for all involved.

Sustainability leadership - In 2025, Dakota County will be the only U.S. county generating more electricity than its government buildings consume, thanks to newly installed hydroelectric turbines at our county-owned dam. These turbines will generate roughly \$1 million annually, lowering costs for taxpayers and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The power of collaboration - Strong partnerships with city, state and federal officials, school boards, community organizations, and volunteers remain key to delivering high-quality services efficiently. Fortunately, Dakota County has a long-standing tradition of bipartisan cooperation, particularly in public safety.

One notable example is Dakota911, our emergency response system. Dakota County and its cities collaborate to ensure that 911 calls are answered within seconds, enhancing public safety while also saving taxpayers about \$1 million annually.

Looking ahead - Despite the challenges ahead, I am confident in Dakota County's ability to navigate 2025 and beyond. Our history of innovation, fiscal responsibility and collaboration positions us well to tackle these uncertainties and seize new opportunities. By working together, we can continue to build on past successes, address current needs and prepare for a thriving future.

Joe Atkins represents District 2 on the Dakota County Board, which includes South St. Paul, West St. Paul, and Inver Grove Heights. He welcomes feedback. To share comments, concerns or questions, contact him at Joe. Atkins@co.dakota.mn.us or 651-438-4430.

St. Matthew's 36th Annual Dine-in & Curbside-to-go

Table service for dine-in, no buffet line



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Remodeling

from page 12

lanterns, and LED candles are also popular.

Bold colors and designs for patio furniture are in. Add spark to your patio with vibrant cushions, colorful throw pillows and patterned rugs.

Modular furniture sets are popular due to their versatility. They can easily be rearranged for various needs and to accommodate groups or private relaxation.

Projects worth the investment

For those looking to sell or refinance, these projects provide the highest return on investment.

- Garage door replacement
- Entry door replacement
- Siding, fiber-cement or vinyl
- Deck additions, wood or composite
- Kitchen remodel
- Bathroom remodel
- HVAC upgrade

Top 10 steps to prepare for your next project

Whether you are planning to add a fence or deck to your backyard, doors or windows, or undergo an extensive remodel, these tips

from the Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry will help save you time, money and headaches on your project.

Research - Taking time to research projects on the internet and nari.org will provide a good sense of what is involved regarding cost, scope of work, return on investment and material options. You should also research property values in your neighborhood to make sure your project is in line with other homes in the area.

Long-term plan - To ensure your project is worth the investment, consider how long you will stay in your home and how your neighborhood and family structure might change over time.

Set your budget - Deciding on a realistic budget and arranging finances to support your project are essential. Share your budget with your remodeler.

Finding professionals - Ask friends, family and neighbors for referrals and research the recommended individuals or companies online. Professional remodelers take their reputation seriously and hold credentials beyond licensing, such as



certifications, memberships in trade associations and additional training. Check online reviews to see how they interacted with past clients and peers.

Ask the right questions - Ask your professional remodeler about their educational background, training, experience, specialties or past issues with clients, and how the remodeling process will work.

Verify your remodeler - Check the information you receive, including references, license numbers, insurance information and certifications by calling providers to verify. If you are undertaking

a large project, you might want to request a visit to an active client's jobsite and talk to the homeowner.

Review contracts word by word - A remodeling contract protects you and your remodeler. Homeowners should review contracts carefully and ask questions about terms or items they don't understand. Pay attention to details about change orders, payment, additional fees, timeline and responsibilities. If it's not in the contract, it doesn't exist.

Keep design in mind - Your design guides the entire project. Think about what you dislike about your cur-

rent space and the intended use of the new space. Use websites such as Pinterest.com and Houzz.com to gather design ideas.

Make your selections - Deciding on products and materials is a larger process than most imagine. With so many options to choose from, product selections are one of the primary reasons that project timelines get extended. Base decisions on quality, function, price, style and availability. Include selections in the contract to lock down pricing and keep your budget intact.

Create a communication plan - A common downfall in remodeling is lack of communication between homeowners and remodelers. Your remodeler should lay out a communication plan at the beginning of the project. If not, ask them to do so. This plan should clarify roles of everyone involved, communication methods, availability and frequency of communication that is expected.

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SpringHome

IMPROVEMENT

Remodeling trends for 2025

Helpful advice on how to do it right

Tim Spitzack
Editor

For many homeowners, time spent indoors during the long winter evenings often leads to scrutinizing living spaces and dreaming of how to improve them. Late winter and early spring are ideal times to plan projects – both indoor and outdoor – and start searching for a contractor who can bring your ideas to fruition. This guide will tell you what's trending for 2025 and offer tips on finding the right contractor. The design trends come from Houzz, a community of more than 70 million homeowners and home design enthusiasts, and over 3 million building, remodeling and design professionals.

Kitchens

Kitchen remodels remain a top priority in 2025, with a strong focus on adding functional upgrades such as pull-down faucets, large utility sinks, and cabinet and drawer organization systems. For style, the English country kitchen is in vogue, featuring rich woods and paint colors, countertops of soapstone and butcher block, large range alcoves, limestone backsplashes and wood ceiling beams. While wood is still the dominant kitchen flooring material of choice, stone tiling in varying sizes and shapes is suggested for those seeking a fresh look. Large-format tiles are set to be used on floors, walls and even backsplashes.

Saturated & bold colors

Colors for floors, walls and furnishings are trending toward richer, bolder hues, providing a distinct contrast to any room. Adding patterns and textured elements to rooms with wallpaper, tiles and textiles will add depth and personality.

Multi-use flex spaces

Garages are being used to create spaces for a home gym, office, studio, media room, or hobby space.

Age-in-place

Practical projects include replacing bathtubs with curbless showers equipped with seating, installing slip-resistant flooring,



Creating open spaces by removing walls between a living room and kitchen make it easier to interact with family and entertain guests.

and upgrading door and cabinet handles to more ergonomic options.

Open concept

The most popular transformations include merging kitchen and dining areas or removing walls between living room and kitchens to make it easier to interact with family and entertain guests.

Outdoor spaces

Outdoor kitchens continue to be the rage, with homeowners adding luxury appliances like pizza ovens, steam ovens, elaborate grills and smokers, and stainless-steel appliances.

Adding lush greenery around outdoor living spaces is also trending, particularly using native plants. In addition to adding beauty and

color, native plants provide food and habitat for pollinators and wildlife, and natural cooling effects.

Infrared heaters, fire pits, and outdoor fireplaces add ambiance and keep you warm on the cool nights, and misting systems and fans provide relief from the summer heat. Soft lighting features, such as fairy lights,

Remodeling /
Page 11



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