

# epln

EDEN PRAIRIE LOCAL NEWS

# VOTER GUIDE



## Eden Prairie Voters

Eden Prairie School Board	p. 2
Eden Prairie City Council	p. 9
Hennepin County District 5	p. 12
House District 49A	p. 15
House District 49B	p. 17
U.S. Congress 3rd District	p. 20
U.S. Senate	p. 22

## Minnetonka Voters

Hennepin County District 6	p. 14
House District 49A	p. 15
U.S. Congress 3rd District	p. 20
U.S. Senate	p. 22

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## Welcome to the 2024 Voter Guide. Meet your candidates

Meet your local candidates! That could very well be the theme of this special publication.

You are receiving this because Eden Prairie Local News (EPLN) believes that an informed and engaged community is the lifeblood of democracy.

Four years ago, a group of concerned local residents convened when the local newspaper of 46 years, the Eden Prairie News, was shut down by its owner, a New York City hedge fund. From the ashes emerged a new approach: a nonpartisan, nonprofit, citizen-run, online news organization called Eden Prairie Local News.

Now more than four years old, EPLN is a leader in the nonprofit news movement and its local journalism has received state and national recognition. Perhaps best of all, this new endeavor is resident-run and resident-supported – truly a grassroots effort. Donations large and small,

when combined with advertising and philanthropic grants, are sustaining EPLN.

EPLN is committed to providing Eden Prairie the best online local news coverage possible, but every two years, the organization prints and mails this Voter Guide so that almost every local resident has the information needed to confidently cast votes in the general election. The 2020 election was instrumental in EPLN's birth and the September 2020 launch of a news website, and with this publication, we continue that close association with the foundation of our democracy: elections.

You'll notice that the 2024 Voter Guide carries a lot of the language you would use if hiring an employee. That's because voting for a candidate is so much like hiring: finding someone who is qualified, knows what's what, and has values similar to your own.

EPLN's staff deliberated carefully over questions to ask candidates. About half of their responses are printed here, with bonus coverage provided on the EPLN website. The QR codes at the end of candidate responses will guide you to that bonus online content. (Open your phone's camera app and point it steadily for 2-3 seconds toward the QR code you wish to scan. Whenever scanning is enabled, a notification – typically the URL of the online page – will pop up.)

The order of candidate Q&As in this publication starts with the most local of races – school board and city council – and moves up the ladder to county board, state Legislature, and U.S. Congress. In each category, Q&As are presented alphabetically according to the candidate's last name. It's worth noting that all of the candidates in these races are participating in the EPLN Voter Guide, and we thank them for making their positions known.

Spend some time reading candidates' positions. Review the other election stories on the EPLN elections page and elsewhere. Make your choices – your "hirings" – carefully. Then, vote in the Nov. 5 general election.

We also hope this special print product will move you to sign up, if you haven't already done so, for the EPLN email newsletters that conveniently bring daily or weekly headlines to your inbox. These newsletters are free, and the back page of this special publication makes the case as to why you should read – and support – local news.

If you have any questions about EPLN or this Voter Guide, please send an email to [editor@eplocalnews.org](mailto:editor@eplocalnews.org).

Most of all, thanks for allowing us into your homes.

– EPLN Board and Staff

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Voters head to the polls Nov. 5 to elect – or “hire” – the people who steer our local, state, and national governments. EPLN file photo

## Eden Prairie prepares for Nov. 5 election

This fall, Eden Prairie residents have the opportunity to “hire” their government representatives simply by voting. If you will be 18 or older on Election Day and are registered to vote – or will register at the polls – you can help determine who's hired and who's not.

Polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Election Day, Nov. 5. If you're registering to vote on that day, you'll need to bring proof of residence and proof of identity. (A driver's license or state ID with a current address will work for both.)

A Minnesota law that took effect in 2023 means you may already be registered: the default now is to automatically enroll people in voter registration with driver's license applications

or renewals. You can check your status online at <https://mn-votes.sos.mn.gov/voterstatuscheck/index>. People ages 16 and 17 can pre-register, with voter registration taking effect when they turn 18.

Absentee ballots can be requested now, and early voting in person – including locally at the Eden Prairie City Center, 8080 Mitchell Road – began on Sept. 20. Absentee ballots may be returned by mail, or in person at Eden Prairie City Center or the Hennepin County Government Center at 300 South Sixth St., Minneapolis, until 8 p.m. on Nov. 5. They cannot be turned in at other polling places, and must be received by

How to Vote continues on page 23

epln EDEN PRAIRIE LOCAL NEWS  
P.O. BOX 44242  
EDEN PRAIRIE, MN 55344

# Six candidates are competing for three school board seats

It's a big year for Eden Prairie Schools, but not just because of the Nov. 5 school board election.

The school district is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2024. In March 1924, Eden Prairie students began attending the newly built Eden Prairie Consolidated School, now the district's Administrative Services Center at 8100 School Road.

In this milestone year, six candidates are running for three open seats on the seven-member Eden Prairie School Board. Each of those seats is for a four-year term. The candidates include incumbents Kim Ross and Dennis Stubbs; a third incumbent, Charles "CJ" Strehl, is not seeking

reelection. The other four school board candidates on the Nov. 5 ballot are Ann Bradsher, Jon Cermak, Kim Johnson, and Jody Ward-Rannow.

The number of candidates makes this the most competitive local race in Eden Prairie. The top three vote-getters will begin their terms in January 2025. Their charge, according to Minnesota law, will be "the care, management, and control" of the school district, including substantial work in the areas of policy and budget.

Overall, Eden Prairie Schools – with about 8,900 students forecast for the 2024-25 school year – is generally considered a highly rated and financially sound school district. In a 2022

public-opinion survey conducted by the school district, 93% of responding Eden Prairie Schools families said the quality of education offered is excellent or good.

The school district's 2024-25 budget includes general-fund expenditures of about \$146 million, with overall budget expenditures projected to be nearly \$215 million. The district is in the midst of a teacher contract that runs through June 30, 2025. Enrollment has been steady for the past couple of years.

Another sign of the district's overall financial health is that bonds sold to finance the recent purchase of a former office building at 11840 Valley

View Road for school purposes were rated Aa3 by Moody's Corp. That rating means the obligation bonds are considered high quality with low credit risk.

Questions posed to school board candidates were developed by Eden Prairie Local News (EPLN) staff. Questions and responses beyond what you see in print are available on the EPLN website. Use the QR code at the end of the candidate responses to view the online material.

EPLN also suggests that you review each candidate's website, where available, to see their stances on other issues.

## Ann Bradsher

Bradsher, a Gateway Lane resident, is a licensed certified public accountant (CPA) whose experience at both the international and local levels of business has brought her in contact with agencies such as the Minnesota Department of Revenue.

She has resided in Eden Prairie for 18 years.

Her community and school involvement includes roles as Oak Point Elementary PTO secretary, Cedar Ridge Elementary Carnival treasurer, Eden Prairie High School (EPHS) Nest volunteer, EPHS English Resource Center volunteer, and dance team fundraising chair.

Bradsher said she has begun preparing to serve on the school board by holding discussions with current board members about their roles and challenges, and through discussions with community parents about their concerns about the school district's future path.

She reported no endorsements or donations from groups.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the school district today, and how would you address it?**

**BRADSHER:** Respect within the walls of the school buildings has steadily diminished over the 18 years I have had children in Eden Prairie schools. Students are told, "Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Responsible." I would like to add "Be Respectful" to the front of that list. The disrespect I have witnessed students display within the schools toward their teachers, volunteers, guests, and fellow students is unacceptable. Let's set clear expectations and clear consequences.

## Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

### CANDIDATES

- Ann Bradsher
- Jon Cermak
- Kim Johnson
- Kim Ross (incumbent)
- Dennis Stubbs (incumbent)
- Jody Ward-Rannow

### JOB POSTING

Eden Prairie voters are being asked to "hire" or select executives to fill three seats on the seven-member Eden Prairie School Board. Each of these seats carries a four-year term. The top three vote-getters will begin their new terms in January. Board members establish and monitor

policies for Eden Prairie School District #272 in concert with fellow office holders (one vote apiece), but delegate administrative duties to the superintendent of schools. Executives who are hired to be part of the school board – typically called school board members – approve the district's budget, monitor finances, ratify employee contracts, hire a superintendent, and establish a strategic vision.

### COMPENSATION

School board executives, who have two meetings per month, receive a stipend of \$4,800 per year.

### QUALIFICATIONS

A school board executive must be at least 21 years old, an eligible voter, a district resident for at least 30 days, and not be a convicted sex offender. The last day to file for candidacy was Aug. 12.

### ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

The school board is composed of seven members, each of whom typically is elected for a four-year term. Terms are staggered, so that the entire board is not up for election at the same time. These are at-large representatives, not assigned to specific wards or areas of the Eden Prairie School District.



Ann Bradsher

Remember when respecting our elders was the norm? It's time for the pendulum to swing back toward respectful behavior as a baseline expectation.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**BRADSHER:** I am mother to five daughters, three who graduated from

EPHS and are in college and graduate school, one who attends EPHS, and one who attends CMS. I have spent 18 years volunteering in their schools, in large and small roles. I have experienced three EPHS principals, soon to be four, and I have recognized the remarkable principals right away, as well as identifying who will not speak up for my students. It is my position that every single student deserves the attention of the principal when he or she asks for it in a respectful manner, regardless of race or creed or gender.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools, and do you think any changes are necessary?**

**BRADSHER:** The curriculum is adequately varied and creative while fulfilling graduation and college-application requirements. However, there are specific, fantastic opportunities offered



within the curriculum that are not well-publicized; I have only learned of these through word of mouth. Many high school students are considering a career in nursing. Do they know that they can take the nursing assistant course through Hennepin Technical College during their school day with free tuition (shuttle service included to/from EPHS) and sit for the Certified Nursing Assistant Exam to become a licensed CNA as a high school student? This is one of several uncommon opportunities offered by EPHS that receive little attention. Let's make such opportunities more visible!

**EPLN: What are your plans to ensure the safety and security of staff and students?**

**BRADSHER:** With the rise in violence and threats of violence within schools, some level of screening is needed

**Bradsher continues on page 3**



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# Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

## Jon Cermak

Website: [www.joncforep.com](http://www.joncforep.com)

Cermak is a 20-year resident of Eden Prairie who lives on Saratoga Lane.

He said he has been a leader in the area of corporate human resources for more than 20 years, responsible for creating and enforcing employee-related policies – an experience and knowledge that would translate to school board work.

Outside of work, he has been a coach and commissioner for youth sports. Prior to volunteer work, he was the co-founder of Minneapolis HOPE Dollars for Scholars, an organization that provides post-secondary education opportunities for young people regardless of income.

“I am motivated to make a difference and am ready to give back and serve my community,” he said. “I care deeply about our kids, know many of the current board members well, and am



Jon Cermak

educating myself on current policy and future goals in the event I am elected.”

Asked about endorsements or donations from major groups, Cermak noted that school board elections are nonpartisan and that he doesn't think individual associations or politics should ever



drive school board policy or decisions.

“Although I consider my views to be more aligned with the Democratic Party, I have not been endorsed by any group nor will I ever receive any campaign contributions from any organization,” he said. “And while I want to be very clear that the parties do not endorse school board candidates, I have received a letter of support from the Senate District 49 Democratic Party. The letter of support may simply help me connect with individuals interested in volunteering for my campaign. Again, the DFL does not provide funds for my campaign, and I am a nonpartisan candidate.”

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the school district today, and how would you address it?**

**CERMAK:** I think there are many important issues, but the most pressing to me is ensuring we provide a safe environment for all students and

staff to thrive and ensure that teachers and staff also have a forum to voice their concerns and suggestions. How might I address this? I would want to offer up an opportunity for both a student and a teacher and staff advocate that can be a specific voice directly to the school board. This will help us keep a closer pulse on the day-to-day issues and needs which might inform future policy changes. When students feel safe, included, and have an overall high level of personal well-being, they are in the best position to learn to their fullest potential.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**CERMAK:** Three things: ambition, motivation to make a difference, and the desire to serve. I know that representing my community as a member of the school board is a serious commitment. And I welcome that commitment. I also view the role of local

**Cermak continues on page 4**

## Bradsher from page 2

for all who enter Eden Prairie school buildings. I can walk into EPHS rolling a suitcase and nobody bats an eye. Granted, I'm likely just hauling gear for a fundraiser, but nobody stops me to investigate. Violence isn't just physical. Verbal attacks are common and there doesn't seem to be a clear plan to address them.

This past spring, I had an incident with an EPHS student. She was chatting with her friends and wasn't watching where she was going. She crashed into me and knocked me off balance, but instead of apologizing and asking if I was OK, she cursed at me multiple times. A security guard witnessed this and told

me there was nothing he could do.

Let's set some clear expectations for how we treat other humans in the school buildings, as well as clear consequences for failing to meet those expectations. Let's give the security team the authority to "secure" our physical and emotional safety.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the school district's budget effectively?**

**BRADSHER:** As a licensed CPA, my plan is simple and straightforward: set budget, conduct monthly assessments of progress, address any outliers, and

do not waver on spending. Budgets and finances are not based on feelings. Let's make a plan and hold the superintendent and his team accountable for not exceeding that plan.

**EPLN: How do you plan to address mental health issues among students?**

**BRADSHER:** Mental health concerns are real and those in the thick of them deserve and should demand support. "Mental health struggles" should NOT be thrown around as empty excuses for not doing homework, skipping school, or mistreating others within the building.


However, if a student/parent cites mental health as a factor in a student's academic progress or behavior, let's have a clear plan for immediately referring that family to our school counselors to document the concerns and connect the family with solid resources for help, as well as requiring follow-up with the counseling office.

Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.



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### Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

#### Kim Johnson

Website: [www.sites.google.com/view/kim-johnson4epsb](http://www.sites.google.com/view/kim-johnson4epsb)

Johnson is an Eden Prairie resident of more than 35 years. She lives on Pioneer Trail.



Kim Johnson

Johnson said she has gained experience in setting and enforcing policy – among the duties of school board members – by leading a team of professionals in learning and development, with a focus on safe and secure learning environments.

A recent graduate of Southern New Hampshire University, she said she has become a member of both the international and local chapters of the Association for Training & Development (ATD) and has served as a “thought partner” for the school district advisory team working on the Business & Management Pathway.

As far as community involvement, she is an officer in Toastmasters and has

supported community organizations with their speech contests.

Johnson said she has been preparing for potential school board service by attending meetings online for the past nine months and reviewing policies, roles, and responsibilities.

She reported no campaign endorsements or donations from groups.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most**

pressing issue facing the school district today, and how would you address it?



**JOHNSON:** There is a wide range of issues that most school districts are facing that impacts students, teachers, and community. One is mental health concerns with the rising rate of anxiety, depression, and suicide. The pressure of academic performance, social media, and peer relationships are factors. To help address the issue, we need to work with external partners that can support individuals and families holistically with health and spiritual care.

Another area of concern is bullying and violence. This is affecting students’ safety and well-being. It is important that individuals are held accountable for their actions and are not ignored. We have policies in place to ensure the safety of students and staff, creating a secure learning environment.

It is crucial that we address these concerns to prevent the loss of students and staff in our school district. I believe that our policies need to be reviewed and strengthened to clearly communicate expectations and consequences. We must also actively involve parents in supporting and enforcing these policies. It is crucial that we address these concerns together to prevent any further loss of students and staff in our school district.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**JOHNSON:** With over 24 years of experience in corporate learning and development, I offer a unique perspective that can positively influence the future of our students. As a learning professional and people leader, I bring collaborative skills, problem-solving abilities, leadership qualities, and strategic thinking to the table.

**Johnson continues on page 5**

#### Cermak from page 3

community representation, especially related to our educational system, as a very important opportunity to help drive change and progress, and I am motivated to be part of that!

I also have a unique set of experiences that would serve me well in this role, if elected. I have always been in the “people” business through my many years of experience as an HR leader, but also as a coach, a dad, and a community servant. I have not only worked with, but built strong teams that sometimes had a lot of different opinions. I listen and seek to partner in a way that advances the best results even when some stakeholders don’t get exactly what they want.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools, and do you think any changes are necessary?**

**CERMAK:** Part of the reason my wife and I moved to Eden Prairie over 20 years ago was because of the reputation of the school system. The current educational leaders have built a strong foundation designed to promote children to read at or above their grade level every year. And although I think the current curriculum within all levels in our community is strong in preparing our youth to be future leaders, I will always work toward continuous

improvement.

If elected, I would continue to explore how we improve our e-learning options for students that need it and continue personalized opportunities for students to learn in the way that is best for them. I would look to ensure the foundational subjects like English, math, science, and history remain a focus, but also be open to new, more real-world subjects like project-based learning, changes in tech/AI, and even ethics and philosophy.

**EPLN: What are your plans to ensure the safety and security of staff and students?**

**CERMAK:** This is one of the most critical issues to me should I get elected. The current well-being strategy within the Eden Prairie Schools strategic plan is a great foundation for promoting staff and student safety within our schools. By 2028, the current plan will nurture well-being among all students and staff by fostering belonging, ensuring physical and emotional health, as well as personal responsibility.

Part of my motivation for running for school board this year was that I have a close friend who was a hall monitor for Central Middle School last year and experienced many difficult situations that sometimes endangered the health and safety of CMS students.

Every student deserves to learn in an environment of safety and respect because, without that, learning and growing is nearly impossible. I am aware of these issues and as a school board member will work closely with our superintendent and staff to explore new ways to hold students accountable if they are not engaging in safe and respectful behavior.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the school district’s budget effectively?**

**CERMAK:** I am excited to run for a school board that is so aware and engaged in fiscal responsibility. There have been way too many examples this year of school districts across the state that have needed to cut important curriculum or increase class sizes due to budgetary cuts. Eden Prairie wasn’t one of those districts, and my plan as a school board member would be to fight to keep it that way.

To do this, I would tap into my years of corporate business experience as a strategic HR partner to business operations at Target, Buffalo Wild Wings and now Korn Ferry, where I have been exposed to and managed large budgets at various times. Also, in preparing for this election I attended the school board meeting when the new budget was discussed and approved, and am familiarizing myself with the process and school board responsibility.

ities.

**EPLN: How do you plan to address mental health issues among students?**

**CERMAK:** I am very aware that mental health among our youth is a serious issue in today’s society. Between the volatile political landscape, the pressures of being an adolescent, and the stresses of social media, it is clear that a focus on mental health for any school board must be a priority.

One of the first things I would focus on is strong and consistent collaboration with parents and staff to recognize the signs and work with the superintendent to appropriately allocate budget to support students who need mental health support. I was glad to read that targeted mental health programs were a key component of the district’s well-being strategy. To me, this must be part of a long-term focus and solution in our school district at all levels starting with early childhood education.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



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# Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

## Johnson from page 4

In my current role as a learning manager, I navigate challenging situations and bring diverse individuals together to solve learning-related challenges. I am also responsible for budget planning and expenditure monitoring for my department. I am always conscious of spending our company's resources efficiently and finding cost-saving opportunities when possible.

As part of the learning team, I prioritize creating an inclusive environment where all voices are heard and respected. This means fostering open communication and ensuring that everyone feels safe to contribute their ideas and opinions. I am confident in my capability to establish high-performing teams and apply that expertise to the school board and staff. With a focus on responsible budgeting and a commitment to inclusivity, I am eager to contribute to our education programs, providing the resources and support needed for the success of our school district.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools, and do you think any changes are necessary?**

**JOHNSON:** I'm in the process of reviewing our current program alignment and resources, aiming to inspire each student through critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. While the core learning courses are solid, limited resource access prevents me from forming a definitive opinion on necessary changes. However, I'm committed to comprehensively understanding the curriculum to identify potential areas for improvement.

My involvement with the district's advisory team, such as the Business and Management Pathway, has impressed me with their collaboration and support for students throughout their academic journey. I appreciate the focus on the learning pathways that allow students to explore career paths and discover passions. Nurturing their skills and knowledge is essential.

Yet, I remain cautious about invasive content in our curriculum. Education programs should prioritize quality education without distractions. Listening to parents is crucial to understanding our strengths and areas for improvement. By actively engaging with them, I can gather insights to enhance the educational experience.

My commitment is to further evaluate our curriculum, safeguard against inva-

sive content, and engage with parents to ensure we have a quality program in place for the future. With a focus on inspiring each student, we can create an exceptional educational experience for all.

**EPLN: What are your plans to ensure the safety and security of staff and students?**

**JOHNSON:** This is one of my main concerns for our schools today and should be taken seriously. We need to develop a comprehensive plan that addresses all concerns and ensures preparedness for any emergency situations.

Our priority is to protect the well-being of our students and staff and to provide timely and informed communication to concerned parents in the event of an emergency. To achieve this, we may need to go back to the basics of respect and hold those accountable for not adhering to our policies.

Violence and bullying are ever-increasing; without consequences, it will continue. Our policies need to be addressed to guarantee that all protocols are followed and that consequences are enforced for any disorderly conduct on our premises, in the classrooms, and with any misuse of technology. Integrity should be highly valued in our school community.

I understand the importance of involving parents in upholding these standards. By working together, we can ensure that everyone is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for our children. We want to have a place where everyone feels protected and secured.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the school district's budget effectively?**

**JOHNSON:** As the person who manages the learning and development department budget, I prioritize responsible spending. My personal values, shaped by living within limited income and managing a family budget, make me a strong advocate for fiscal responsibility.

I firmly believe that every dollar in the school budget must be accounted for and appropriately spent. In a time of high inflation and increasing expenses, it is crucial for the community to trust that taxpayer dollars are being wisely invested in our students' future.

As a school board member, I will take it upon myself to ask the necessary questions and ensure we are spending appropriately. I am dedicated to maintaining the community's trust by advocating for their interests. Increasing taxes should be a last resort, and if it becomes necessary, it must be done reasonably and fairly. I understand the impact of tax levies and referendums on our community, and I am committed to justifying any increases and ensuring they benefit our schools and students.

I am also committed to managing the school budget with integrity, transparency, and fiscal responsibility. I strive to earn the community's trust in the school district's investment in our students' future.

**EPLN: How do you plan to address mental health issues among students?**

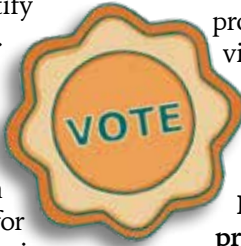
**JOHNSON:** I understand the impor-

ance of prioritizing mental health within our school environment. I am committed to reviewing our policies to ensure that we have effective protocols in place that help identify and address this issue.

It is crucial for our staff members to be equipped with the necessary tools to teach coping strategies, stress management techniques, and promote positive mental health habits among our students. To provide the best support possible, we can also consider partnering with community organizations to offer specialized services on-site or referrals off-site. By reaching out to parents and the community, we can create a collaborative and supportive environment where everyone works together to build a place for learning and support. When parents are empowered with similar strategies



**Johnson continues on page 23**



Early voting begins Sept. 20	<b>Election 2024</b>	Vote by Nov. 5
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## BREAKING NEWS!

### COMMON SENSE EXISTS!

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## Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

### Kim Ross

Website: [www.kimaross.com](http://www.kimaross.com)

Ross, who lives on Hiawatha Avenue and has resided in Eden Prairie for 40 years, is seeking re-election after having served eight years on the Eden Prairie School Board during two different periods of time.



**Kim Ross**

The marketing executive of 30-plus years has also spent two years as Eden Prairie's representative on the Intermediate District 287 Board. Her other activities include involvement with the Eden Prairie School District Strategic Planning Committee, the Eden Prairie School District Referendum Committee, the Eden Prairie Noon Rotary Club, and Rotary District 5950.

"With a passion for continuing education and commitment to listening to our community, I'm prepared to make decisions that support the success of each student," said Ross.

Asked about endorsements or donations from groups, Ross stated: "The Eden Prairie School Board election is nonpartisan, reflecting a commitment to focus on the best interests of each student rather than political affiliations. While I align more closely with the values of the Democratic Party, it's important to emphasize that the parties do not officially endorse school board candidates. I have received a letter of support from the Senate District 49 Democratic Party, but I want to make it clear that I have not and will not accept any campaign donations from the party."

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the school district today, and how would you address it?**

**ROSS:** The most pressing issue facing our school district is continuing to ensure every student achieves their full academic potential. The Eden Prairie School Board monitors this via its Ends policies. Third grade is a critical milestone where students shift from learning to read to reading to learn, making Ends Policy 1.2 – aiming for every student to read at grade level by third grade – vital for future success.

However, our commitment must go beyond this. Ends Policy 1.3 emphasizes the importance of proficiency in reading, math, and science from elementary grades through high school. These core skills are essential

for both academic achievement and real-world application. Additionally, Ends Policy 1.5 focuses on developing skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, which are crucial for success in the global economy.

To meet these goals, we must continue to enhance our assessment and intervention programs, providing tailored support for each student. Our district is well-positioned for this challenge, thanks to our innovative, personalized learning strategies and strong financial health. With our dedicated staff and these solid foundations, we can ensure every student not only meets but exceeds academic standards, preparing them for future success.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**ROSS:** What sets me apart from other candidates is my extensive and proven experience in educational leadership. Having served on the Eden Prairie School Board from 2008 to 2011 and again since 2020, I bring institutional knowledge and hands-on experience that no other candidate or board member can match.

During my first term, I led as board chair through a challenging redistricting process due to changing enrollment patterns. This difficult but necessary task balanced our elementary schools and laid the groundwork for improvements that benefited each student.

When the pandemic struck, I stepped up to help our community navigate this crisis. Despite the many obstacles, our district managed to keep students in classrooms more than many others in Minnesota, demonstrating our resilience and commitment to education.

Currently, I serve as Eden Prairie's

representative on the board of Intermediate School District 287. ISD 287 is supported by 12 west metro member districts and provides specialized services for unique learners, further broadening my understanding of diverse educational needs.

My experience is more than just time served – it's about effective leadership and the ability to make impactful decisions that enhance our students' educational experiences and success.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools, and do you think any changes are necessary?**

**ROSS:** The current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools is robust, selected and designed by our talented educators to exceed state standards and prepare students for success both in school and beyond. It helps students develop critical skills such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking. Our "Inspired Journey" curriculum is particularly noteworthy, as it empowers students to explore their interests and develop their unique talents.

I am consistently impressed by how our district incorporates best practices in K-12 education. Our commitment to innovation is evident, with many of our staff regularly sharing our successes at local, state, and national conferences. This not only showcases our leadership in education but also demonstrates our dedication to providing the highest quality learning experiences.

Objective measures of student achievement are key to assessing our curriculum's effectiveness. When data indicates areas for improvement, the school board receives detailed reports from the administration about necessary adjustments. This ensures that our curriculum evolves based on evidence and continues to meet the needs of our students.

In short, while our current curriculum is strong and forward-thinking, we remain committed to continual evaluation and improvement to ensure every student thrives.

**EPLN: What are your plans to ensure the safety and security of staff and students?**

**ROSS:** Ensuring the safety and security of our staff and students is paramount for academic success and well-being. To address physical safety, the district has invested significantly in enhancing facilities. Recent renovations at Eden Prairie High School are a prime example, reflecting our commitment to creating secure learning environments. We also conduct regular training and drills at each school to ensure preparedness for any situation.

Our unique alignment of the district boundary with the city boundary enhances community ties and fosters a strong partnership with local law enforcement. This summer, we conducted a reunification drill with the Police Department, demonstrating our proactive approach to safety.

However, emotional safety is just as crucial. Students must feel seen, heard, and valued. We are committed to nurturing this through our "be safe, be responsible, be kind" culture and by maintaining small class sizes. Smaller classes allow teachers to build meaningful relationships with students, which is essential for their emotional security. Additionally, promoting cultural proficiency helps us harness the power of diversity, ensuring all students and staff feel respected and included.

By integrating these strategies, we create a safe, supportive environment that fosters both physical and emotional well-being, setting our students up for success.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the school district's budget effectively?**

**ROSS:** Effectively managing the school district's budget is a responsibility that requires diligence and foresight. The Eden Prairie School Board employs a comprehensive and strategic approach to ensure our financial resources are used effectively.

Our budget management process is continuous and involves parallel tracks: overseeing the current budget while preparing for the next fiscal year. It includes a thorough review of our five-year financial model, which provides crucial context for shaping the upcoming budget. We base our budget on clear assumptions about enrollment, state funding, and future costs, ensuring that every decision is grounded in reality.

We conduct a detailed review of the current budget to track its progress and identify any necessary adjustments for the future. This proactive approach allows us to adapt to changing circumstances and ensure financial stability.

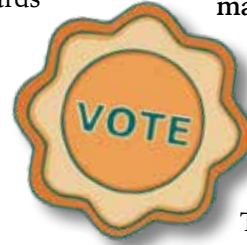
Capital and operating budgets are managed separately for clarity. By the time we reach the June deadline for approving the next school year's budget, the board has discussed and refined the budget through multiple meetings, ensuring transparency and thorough consideration.

Eden Prairie's strong track record in financial management reflects the effectiveness of this process and our commitment to using taxpayer resources wisely to benefit all students.

**EPLN: How do you plan to address mental health issues among students?**

**ROSS:** Addressing mental health issues among students is a priority I take very seriously. The challenges our students face, which were magnified by the pandemic, require a compassionate and proactive approach. That's why the 2023-2028 strategic plan includes a dedicated well-being strategy aimed at, among other things, providing targeted mental health resources to meet the specific needs of our students.

We are committed to ensuring that our staff receive ongoing professional



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**Ross continues on page 7**

# Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

## Dennis Stubbs

Website: [www.stubbs4epschools.com](http://www.stubbs4epschools.com)

Stubbs, a Spoon Ridge resident, is an Eden Prairie School Board incumbent who was elected two years ago. He and his wife Miranda have three school-age children and moved to Eden Prairie in 2014.

While on the school board, Stubbs said, he has played a lead role on the Community Linkage Committee and the Board Development Committee. "On the Community Linkage Committee, I created the Board Field Assignment (BFA); it's a sign-up tool to help organize and coordinate board activity participation around the community," he said. "One of my goals is to get out in the public and make us more approachable, visible, and available."

Stubbs said that actively listening and keeping an open mind to all perspectives have been important to serving as a board member. He has completed Level Two Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) and policy governance training. "I've worked very hard while on this board and I'm always in attendance," he added. "I have never missed a committee meeting. I've missed one workshop out of 50-plus scheduled school board meetings. I chose to miss that meeting because I was scheduled to participate in an event for Young Life MN, which supports teens in this area."

Outside of elective office, he has served as a youth leader at church and has coached hockey, golf, and football.

He said he has not accepted endorsements or donations from groups. "I don't feel school board candidates should accept endorsements," he said. "This is a nonpartisan position and it says that on the ballot next to our names."

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the**



Dennis Stubbs

**school district today, and how would you address it?**

**STUBBS:** As soon as I was elected to the school board, I asked to be on the Board Development Committee, which is where ideas are gathered and generated to improve and inform our board work. One of the issues early on, and still at the surface of all conversations, involves screen time and excessive screen time. Having young kids in the district, and being around other parents, I was approached far too many times with concerns about screen usage. My wife and I also share those same concerns. When folks reach out to you, you listen and get to work. Being on the Board Development Committee, I spent a significant amount of time pressing the issue of devices and the impact that they and screens have on our kids – the social impact, their mental health, their physical health, and their general behavior. We pushed for a policy that was aimed at protecting human-to-human interaction and the effects of too much screen usage. We even coordinated and brought in a guest speaker, a professor from the University of Minnesota, to present to the board and the district administration team the harms (and benefits) of devices.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**STUBBS:** I can't speak about the other candidates running for school board. I will say, though, during my first campaign I was very appreciative that all the other candidates treated each other with respect and civility. After all, most of us are parents, and whether I agree or disagree with another candidate, I will always appreciate the fact that they are willing to put in the time and effort to try to make a difference for our kids. Regardless of the outcome, I thank all the candidates in this race for their willingness to step up. Being on the board is a lot of work, and it's a sacrifice. But you get to be there on opening day at the elementary schools and see the excitement on those little faces when they come running into the building. Then, to be there on the back end of it all, at graduation. Being able to hand out a diploma to a smiling, teary-eyed senior who has worked so hard to earn it. Those two days I will never forget. That's what it's about for me. I'm honored to do this for our kids and try to help them on their journey.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools, and do you think any changes are necessary?**

**STUBBS:** One thing I've learned being on the board is that there can be a lot of misunderstanding or miscommunication of what the role of the school board is. I spent most of my first year listening and learning about the process, and how things get done. The board as a group, not an individual, has a certain scope of work, and that doesn't typically include curriculum. If a parent ever brought a curriculum concern to my attention, I would certainly investigate. And I would work with the board to make appropriate policy changes. I haven't seen any curriculum concerns from any parents thus far. I read every email that comes to my inbox, and I'm always out in the community. On the school board, it's important to always be available and to make sure people are heard.

**EPLN: What are your plans to ensure the safety and security of staff and students?**

**STUBBS:** I fully support the district's work to ensure the safety of our students. It is imperative that our families trust their children will be safe in our schools, and for our students to feel the same. The district thoughtfully invests time and resources to ensure the safety of our kids, teachers, and staff. My votes at the board table when monitoring Executive Limitations policies reflect a strong and consistent advocacy for safety and security.

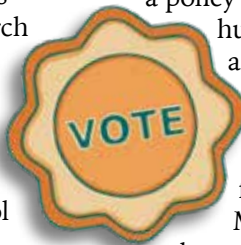
**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the school district's budget effectively?**

**STUBBS:** I ask a lot of questions and listen. I gather as much information as possible from cabinet-level and district financial professionals to make the best and most informed decisions. I've studied the budget, and we are blessed with a very talented team that does an amazing job. I'm proud that we are one of the only school boards in the state that did not "levy to the max." We voted on behalf of the taxpayers to NOT utilize the full, allowable, tax levy. On several occasions, I have used my background in construction and project estimating to help examine the costs for some of the renovations and additions around school properties.

**EPLN: How do you plan to address mental health issues among students?**

**STUBBS:** I voted to support the use of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSR) funds, received during and after the pandemic, to provide support for student mental health initiatives. On the Community Linkage Committee, we drafted an inspiring newsletter that will be sent out to everyone in Eden Prairie; it will also be emailed and distributed several other ways.

**Stubbs continues on page 8**



## Ross continued from page 6

development to foster a supportive environment. We are working diligently to hire more mental health professionals, despite the shortage of qualified staff. We leverage partnerships with organizations like the Washburn Center for Children to provide clinical mental health services.

It's crucial to understand that mental health treatment is a collaborative effort involving the student, their family, healthcare providers, and the school district. The district plays an important role in support but must work within legal boundaries. As a board member, I will continue to advocate for regular updates on our

mental health initiatives and the effectiveness of our support systems.

Together, we can create a nurturing environment where every student feels valued, supported, and equipped to overcome their mental health challenges.

Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.



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# Position: Eden Prairie School Board Member

## Jody Ward-Rannow

Website: [www.jody4ep.com](http://www.jody4ep.com)

Ward-Rannow is a Franl Road resident who has lived in Eden Prairie for almost 12 years.



Jody Ward-Rannow

She has been involved in the community as the current vice president and past president of the Eagle Heights PTO, a member of the District PTO Presidents Council, a board member of the Foundation for Eden Prairie Schools, committee chair for the 2022 District 5th Grade Spring Fling, co-service unit manager of Eden Prairie Girl Scouts, and has been involved with Prairie School of Dance.

Ward-Rannow said these leadership positions, as well as developing and enforcing policies for clients through her job, have given her experiences that would be valuable to the Eden Prairie School Board. She is a lawyer who represents employers and said her training includes observing organizations, identifying risks, and developing workable solutions.

She has not received endorsements or donations from groups. "The DFL for Senate District 49 issued a letter of support for my candidacy based on my issue positions. The letter of support helps me connect with volunteers but does not provide campaign donations and is not an endorsement," she explained.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing the school district today, and how would you address it?**

**WARD-RANNOV:** I think safety and mental health are the most pressing issues in our school district, and they are related.

If students have concerns for their safety, this can create or worsen anxiety. Anxiety can impact a student's ability to learn. Policies designed to control student behavior that do not resolve the cause of the behavior can lead to more anxiety from students as they experience the tightened security measures and continued safety concerns. An example is the restriction on Smart Passes at Central Middle School that apply to all students, limiting

their ability to use the bathroom. This can create anxiety, especially for middle school girls. Frequent safety holds in classrooms due to security incidents can further disrupt learning and increase anxiety.



When I have talked to families that have left the district, many have said that safety or mental health concerns made CMS not the right fit for their family. I think we need a review to identify causes for increased safety concerns (real and perceived) and develop workable solutions that reduce safety concerns and improve mental health. The district could provide additional mental health resources to families and examine policies that may be negatively impacting students' abilities to focus in class.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**WARD-RANNOV:** I believe that every problem has a solution and I work until I find a solution. In my day job, clients reach out to me with difficult problems and expect me to deliver a solution that meets their goals. If there is an obstacle, I need to think outside the box and find a solution that works. I cannot return to the client without suggested paths forward.

I have this mindset in everything I do, and I would bring it to the school board. If the community raises concerns, I believe the district administration and school board need to find solutions. If there is a policy/practice that is limiting the ability to resolve a community concern, then I believe leadership should review that policy/practice and find a solution. I do not believe "that's the way we have done it" is an answer.

I am practical and look for simple solutions. I think sometimes organizations, our school district included, can build new programs on top of existing programs until the entire program becomes so complex that it is too difficult to use. I am trained to cut through complexity to make organizational practices more user-friendly.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current curriculum in Eden Prairie Schools, and do you think any changes are necessary?**

**WARD-RANNOV:** I think Eden Prairie has a great curriculum, and I am excited for plans to further develop the Pathways programs. Our individualized learning programs provide impressive benefits for our students. I think our district could continue to improve these programs by taking a deeper look at how each of our students learns. For example, neurodiverse students may be missed for accelerated classes because a wrong answer caused by a simple mistake is confused with an inability to master subject matter concepts. Students for whom English is a second language may score lower on a test not because they do not understand the concept, but because of confusion about the wording of the question. Continuing to dig deeper into individualized learning will allow our district to continue to strengthen our already strong curriculum.

**EPLN: What are your plans to ensure the safety and security of staff and students?**

**WARD-RANNOV:** Safety and security is one of the top issues motivating me to run for school board. My daughter is an eighth-grader at CMS, and it feels like we were constantly hearing one thing or another about safety at CMS. Last year, there was a threat on social media directed at CMS. As parents came together to try to help each other make decisions that were right for their families, I noticed a theme that I think is important: the parents who felt most comfortable sending their kids to school on the day of the threat had personal experiences and relationships with the CMS principal. So, when she said she couldn't provide details, but the school was safe, they felt safe. I did not have that personal relationship. I wanted to trust, but the stakes were high, and I just did not know.

I think an important action our district can take is for administration and school board members to build broader relationships with our families. Then, when district leadership says, "We can't give you details for safety reasons or because of the law, but it is safe to attend school," there is an existing, trusting relationship.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the school district's budget effectively?**

**WARD-RANNOV:** I think to manage the district's budget most effectively, we, as a school board, need to spend time in the schools understanding what resources actually improve student learning. During my time on the Eagle Heights Spanish Immersion PTO, I learned that things the PTO thought would be most helpful were not necessarily what teachers or students needed. I think it is important to get input from inside the schools to most effectively manage the budget so that resources can be spent wisely.

I also think it is important for the district to maintain strong relationships with community nonprofits like the Foundation for Eden Prairie Schools, local businesses, and alumni. There are resources, experiences, and expertise that can aid the district in its mission to inspire each student every day while effectively managing its budget.



**EPLN: How do you plan to address mental health issues among students?**

**WARD-RANNOV:** As a board member, I would seek to increase resources for students, staff, and families to learn about mental health. The High School PTO partnered with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) last year to present mental health resource information to the community. I would love to see more programs like that for our community. As a parent, it can be overwhelming trying to find resources, and the district can help.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



### Stubbs continued from page 7

I encourage everyone to read it and think about what it says – as a community, a school district; as parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, students, and friends of one another. We have to recognize mental health and be servants to one another. And, if it becomes a group effort, progress will be made. Because mental health is different for each individual; each individual needs their own support mechanisms. Help ultimately comes from others. So, we all need to be an "Other"!

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



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# Voters to choose from four candidates for two city council seats

Who should hold two at-large seats on the Eden Prairie City Council is among the decisions that local voters are being asked to make on Nov. 5.

The four-year terms are being sought by incumbents PG Narayanan and Lisa Toomey, as well as first-time candidates Mihajlo Babovic and Andrew Toperzer.

The city council, which includes the mayor, consists of five members. In the short term, the council faces several challenges, including reno-

vating city hall to accommodate a growing Police Department, hiring more firefighters to improve emergency response times, and potentially redeveloping Eden Prairie Center mall.

City council votes are rarely anything but unanimous, but a change in membership could potentially change that.

One of the council's most public responsibilities is to review development and redevelopment plans, including on "infill" parcels surrounded by existing neighborhoods

or businesses. But, council members also set policy, determine the annual budget and city share of property taxes, and hire and evaluate the city manager.

Eden Prairie city services typically get high marks from residents in a public-opinion survey conducted by the city every two years. In terms of finances, the city has maintained bond ratings of Aaa from Moody's and AAA from Standard & Poor's, which city officials say reflect a healthy local economy, conservative fiscal management, and manageable debt levels.

The questions posed to council candidates were developed by Eden Prairie Local News (EPLN) staff. Key responses are printed here, but you can find more on the EPLN website. Use the QR code at the end of candidate responses to view the online material.

EPLN also suggests that you review each candidate's website, where available, to see their stances on other issues.

## Mihajlo Babovic

Hawatha Avenue resident Babovic has lived in Eden Prairie for nearly one year. Practicing law for the past decade has given him experience understanding and arguing on law and policy, which would be valuable in serving on the Eden Prairie City Council, he said.

"I have been learning more about the city by reading City Council minutes and the weekly reports to prepare myself to best serve the community," Babovic said about his preparations as a candidate.

He did not report having received endorsements or donations from groups.

**EPLN: What do you believe is the most pressing issue facing the City of Eden Prairie today, and how would you address it?**

**BABOVIC:** I think Eden Prairie could benefit from a stronger sense of community and more engaging activities. Although the community events calendar is a wonderful resource, I would aim to create more events and opportunities for residents to become involved with the city and each other. Increased advertising for events and helping people with similar interests connect with one another would be great ways to help further bind Eden Prairie together and enhance the quality of life in the city.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**BABOVIC:** I come from and have grown in a diverse environment, both culturally and professionally. I believe that has provided me with the ability to observe and address issues from many different perspectives and given me the ability to be pragmatic and creative when needing to craft solutions in seemingly impossible situations.

I'm a newer resident of Eden Prairie, but I have set my roots in this city and plan to remain here long-term. My candidacy, more than anything, stems from a desire to invest myself into Eden Prairie and work hard with the community to continue to build and create a safe, prosperous, and enjoyable future for the city in which I intend to grow my family. I hope to be able to represent the people of Eden Prairie, both new and long-term residents, and work with them to continue to make this city something of which to be truly proud.



## Position: Eden Prairie Council Member

### CANDIDATES

Mihajlo Babovic  
PG Narayanan (incumbent)  
Lisa Toomey (incumbent)  
Andrew J. Toperzer

### JOB POSTING

Eden Prairie is seeking two city council members who will participate in city-related policy and leg-

islative decisions, including budget and tax-levy determinations, alongside fellow officeholders (one vote each). Administrative duties will be delegated to the city manager.

### COMPENSATION

City council members, excluding the mayor, are paid an annual salary of \$13,351.10.

### QUALIFICATIONS

Candidates must be 21 or older and have been a resident of Eden Prairie for at least 30 days before the election.

## ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

Four city council members and a mayor serve four-year terms, with terms staggered so that there are openings every two years. These are at-large positions, not assigned to specific wards or areas of Eden Prairie. The top two vote-getters will begin their terms in January.



Mihajlo Babovic

**EPLN: How would you plan to balance growth and development while maintaining the character of Eden Prairie?**

**BABOVIC:** Encouraging the development of local businesses and empowering those aspiring to become entrepreneurs in our city is of paramount importance. That being said, Eden Prairie has a well-deserved reputation for being a clean and safe place, and it's one that the city should strive to maintain. Because of this, newly proposed developments for shopping, housing, and industry should be carefully vetted in order to both maintain and grow the essence of the community that has been built here over many years. This all boils down to creating and following a careful development plan that allows the city to thrive, while never losing touch with the family-friendly environment that makes Eden Prairie so special within the metro area.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the city's budget and fiscal priorities?**

**BABOVIC:** In a word: carefully. I'm a strict believer in fiscal responsibility and planning to avoid overextending oneself, and maintaining flexibili-

ty and independence. I do not like the idea of leaning on taxpayers for funding city developments and would much rather the city grow its own fiscal capabilities to help both the city, and its residents, prosper. To that end, I trend toward slower growth that is sustainable, in an effort to allow Eden Prairie to make decisions in its own best interest without having to rely on outside influence for funding (and, in turn, having to cater to such helping hands). All proposals must be heavily considered and studied, and provided to the public for feedback, prior to any action being taken – especially if the financial impact might be felt by residents. I'm happy to do the heavy lifting and learning necessary to provide Eden Prairie with a solid base with which it might move forward for years to come.

**EPLN: The city may be asked to approve tax-increment financing to help finance the redevelopment of Eden Prairie Center, our regional shopping mall. Is this something you would favor? Why or why not?**

**BABOVIC:** Taxation is always a difficult concern to balance. On the one hand, the residents of Eden Prairie deserve state-of-the-art amenities close to their front door, but on the other hand, nobody likes an increase in taxes. While a good location for our tax dollars is great conceptually, the impact on individuals in the community is very likely to outweigh the benefits it provides.

Ultimately, I think it's important for the persons or entities benefiting most from a proposed project to bear the burden of bringing that idea into reality. While I understand that the proposed redevelopment plan also includes some residential uses that could provide centralized housing, it isn't fair or appropriate to shift a large

tax burden onto residents so that large corporations can alter their bottom line. It is true that redevelopment of Eden Prairie Center is also likely to benefit local businesses; however, a majority of the benefit of redevelopment would go to national chains that have the ability to finance a majority of a project like this on their own.



**EPLN: The Metro Green Line light-rail project to Eden Prairie is scheduled to be completed in 2027, within the next City Council term. What steps would you propose the City of Eden Prairie take to ensure that LRT does not add crime or other problems to our community?**

**BABOVIC:** Having resided in Minneapolis for over a decade, I've experienced the increased safety concerns with the LRT firsthand. The severe lack of any monitoring within the trains themselves allows for drug use and crime – which makes the public transportation experience unsafe and unclear. While having an easy link to the Twin Cities from Eden Prairie is a wonderful concept that would allow for easy commuting, it will be important to utilize security cameras and personnel to keep the system functioning efficiently and safely so that the entire community can benefit from its presence. I would propose an identification of the major hubs on the new line, so that we can properly focus and allocate our resources to stop crime and other problems from entering Eden Prairie.

**Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.**



## Position: Eden Prairie Council Member

### PG Narayanan

Website: [www.pgforep.com](http://www.pgforep.com)

**N**arayanan is a 25-year Eden Prairie resident who lives at 17995 Cascade Drive and has served six years on the City Council. He and his wife raised two children in Eden Prairie and they now have grandchildren in EP.

In addition to serving on the City Council, Narayanan has been vice chair of the SouthWest Transit Commission; vice chair and chair for two years of the Eden Prairie Community Foundation; and a member, vice chair and chair of the city's Human Rights and Diversity Commission.

A former assistant commissioner for the State of Minnesota, his community involvement has included volunteer work and/or leadership in the TPT public-television board, the India Association of Minnesota, Eden Prairie Rotary, and Eden Prairie Lions Club.

Narayanan says his six years on the council have prepared him to effectively fill another four-year term. At the deadline for this publication, he had not received group endorsements or funding.

**EPLN: What do you believe is the most pressing issue facing the City of Eden Prairie today, and how would you address it?**

**NARAYANAN:** Maintaining exceptional city services while working to keep taxes low. The City Council needs to listen more to the residents, listen to nonprofits, and work closely with the city manager and city staff to fine-tune it to make Eden Prairie a better place to live, work, and raise children. One of the key areas I will be focusing on is the city budget that is appropriately and adequately funding our police, fire, parks, and public works.

As the sole person of color on the council and the only culturally diverse candidate, it's crucial that our city reflects this transformation in its leadership and policies. As the sole minority member on the City Council and the only minority candidate, I am committed to advocating for the needs and perspectives of our diverse community. I will actively work to educate my fellow council members about the unique challenges and aspirations of minority groups, ensuring that all



**PG Narayanan**

voices are heard and valued in our decision-making processes.

To sustain and build on Eden Prairie's impressive survey approval rating, we must continuously engage with our community. I will advocate for increased community involvement through listening sessions, more involvement with nonprofits, and more town hall meetings.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**NARAYANAN:** I bring a broad spectrum of experience to the table, with a proven track record across diverse roles and organizations. My background includes service on the City Council, the Human Rights and Diversity Commission, the Eden Prairie Community Foundation, AM Rotary, Eden Prairie Lions, SW Transit, and the TPT Television board. Additionally, my involvement with the State of Minnesota has provided me with a comprehensive understanding of public service and governance.

I have managed budgets ranging from \$100,000 to \$300 million and have overseen hundreds of employees, demonstrating my capability in financial stewardship and team leadership. My leadership roles in various nonprofits – as vice president, president, vice chair, and chair – highlight my ability to drive meaningful impact and navigate complex challenges, such as those posed by COVID-19.

In the business world, I have successfully led multiple ventures, from startups to established enterprises, holding titles such as director, VP, president, and CTO in both medium-sized and Fortune 500 companies. Currently, as an entrepreneur at the helm of an AI-based data analytics company, I continue to thrive in dynamic environ-

ments, innovating and leading with a focus on excellence.

**EPLN: How would you plan to balance growth and development while maintaining the character of Eden Prairie?**

**NARAYANAN:** To me, Eden Prairie's unique character is defined by its outstanding parks, clean water, pristine lakes, extensive bike paths, abundant trees, timely snow removal, excellent school system, and well-maintained roads. These elements contribute significantly to residents' satisfaction and the city's overall quality of life. I collaborate closely with city staff and the city manager to ensure these key attributes are preserved and enhanced. This includes diligently working to allocate the budget effectively to support and maintain these essential features, ensuring that the needs and expectations of our community are consistently met.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the city's budget and fiscal priorities?**

**NARAYANAN:** With extensive experience managing budgets from \$100,000 to \$300 million, I employ a strategic approach to financial oversight. My process begins with a comprehensive assessment of priorities and strategies to establish budget needs. I allocate resources accordingly while diligently monitoring expenditures to avoid substantial budget increases. This careful balancing involves reallocating funds in response to evolving priorities and community needs, ensuring financial decisions enhance both efficiency and responsiveness.

Our City Council and staff engage in an annual off-site strategy session where members present and prioritize their goals, creating a consolidated list for staff review. Our skilled financial team then develops the budget, which the City Council reviews, provides feedback on, and refines through multiple iterations. This collaborative and iterative process ensures that our budget aligns with the city's priorities and effectively supports our community's needs.

**EPLN: The city may be asked to approve tax-increment financing to help finance the redevelopment of Eden Prairie Center, our regional shopping mall. Is this something you would favor? Why or why not?**

**NARAYANAN:** Tax-increment financing (TIF) is a valuable tool for advancing city development goals. It allows the city to allocate funds to projects that align with its strategic objectives. The decision to offer TIF funding involves careful negotiation to ensure the development supports these goals.

For instance, if the Eden Prairie Center redevelopment includes a mixed-use project featuring apartments, senior housing, and recreational facilities, providing TIF could be a beneficial investment. However, if the project merely involves a standard shopping mall, it may not align with our strategic priorities, and TIF funding might not be the best use of resources.

In summary, I recommend utilizing TIF only for developments that align with the city's strategic direction and offer substantial community benefits.

**EPLN: The Metro Green Line light-rail project to Eden Prairie is scheduled to be completed in 2027, within the next City Council term. What steps would you propose the City of Eden Prairie take to ensure that LRT does not add crime or other problems to our community?**

**NARAYANAN:** I've been listening to residents' concerns about the potential for increased crime associated with the light-rail transit (LRT) system in Eden Prairie. To address these fears, I will be advocating for a comprehensive approach to safety. Eden Prairie Police already holds monthly meetings with the Met Council to discuss train and station security.

I will be working closely with the police chief and city manager to develop a proactive plan aimed at mitigating these concerns. This plan will include enhanced measures such as increased surveillance with additional cameras, bolstered police presence, and other effective policing strategies. I am committed to staying actively involved in this issue and will ensure that our community's safety remains a top priority.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



### Lisa Toomey

Website: [www.lisatoomey4ep.com](http://www.lisatoomey4ep.com)

**T**oomey, who lives at 14302 Stratford Road, is a 23-year Eden Prairie resident who is completing her first term on the Eden Prairie City Council, where she has gained experience in setting and enforcing policy. She said that council experience has prepared her to continue to effectively represent the citizens of Eden Prairie.

As a council member, she also represents the city on the 494 Commission, the Municipal Legislative Commission, and the Southwest Corridor Management Committee.

Elsewhere in the community, she is president of the Eden Prairie Crime Prevention and Criminal Apprehen-



**Lisa Toomey**

sion Fund and treasurer of The PROP Shop. She is also a longtime member of the Eden Prairie Lioness Lions Club and the Optimist Club. Toomey is past executive director for Meals on Wheels of Eden Prairie, has served as a board member for the Eden Prairie

Education Advisory Council and Metro Meals on Wheels, and has been on the city's Planning Commission.

As of the Aug. 27 deadline for this publication, she had not received any endorsements or donations from groups.

**EPLN: What do you believe is the most pressing issue facing the City of Eden Prairie today, and how would you address it?**

**TOOMEY:** I believe that the most pressing issue facing the city today is the lack of affordable housing. This has become a multi-generational issue in many communities.

Rising property values, coupled with stagnant wages, have made it increas-

ingly difficult for young adults to find housing within their means. Without affordable options, younger generations are often forced to delay homeownership, starting a family, or even moving out on their own.

The lack of affordable housing also significantly impacts older adults. As property prices and rental rates climb, seniors face increasing difficulty finding housing which meets their needs within their budgets. This can force some older adults to downsize to less desirable or less accessible living arrangements.

Addressing this issue requires a concerted effort to develop housing policies that prioritize affordability and access. The council has already



**Toomey continues on page 11**

## Position: Eden Prairie Council Member

### Andrew J. Toperzer

Toperzer, a Portal Drive resident, moved with his family to Eden Prairie in December 2017.

He is an adoptive father of four children and studied political science in college. He said it is his first foray into politics since the student senate of his college days.

“My children live, study, and play in this community. I want it to be the best it can for them and their peers,” he said about his decision to run for city council.



Andrew Toperzer

**EPLN: What do you believe is the most pressing issue facing the City of Eden Prairie today, and how would you address it?**

**TOPERZER:** Eden Prairie is full of wonderful schools, parks, and programs for families. But the housing available is not friendly for young, growing families. I believe there is a lack of moderately priced housing for young couples and families that are just starting out. I want to encourage more moderately priced housing in Eden Prairie. I want Eden Prairie to be a place that families can afford to live and enjoy all the things we have to offer.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**TOPERZER:** I'm running my cam-

paign a little differently than is conventional. You will not see an advertisement for me or a yard sign. I want to show that you can participate in local politics and help your community without having to spend and worry so much on how many ads or signs or mailers you are able to afford.



**EPLN: How would you plan to balance growth and development while maintaining the character of Eden Prairie?**

**TOPERZER:** Eden Prairie is a beautiful place to live. I think there are great opportunities for growth but we have to allow for it. I am someone who is against the Not in My Back Yard (NIMBY) attitude and believe that allowing the city to grow in new ways will be best for its progress.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the city's budget and fiscal priorities?**

**TOPERZER:** From what I've seen, the city is doing a great job with handling its budget. I believe that there are opportunities that we miss out on to get revenue for the city without increasing the tax burden. One such opportunity I believe we are missing out on is we make so much money for the city with the municipality-owned liquor store, and the idea that we have a municipality-owned cannabis dispensary (there's going to be dispensaries no matter what) would be a great source of revenue for the city.

**EPLN: The city may be asked to approve tax-increment financing to help finance the redevelopment of Eden Prairie Center, our regional shopping mall. Is this something you would favor? Why or why not?**

**TOPERZER:** Now with JC Penney permanently closed, I do see the importance of redeveloping part of the mall. I am not in favor of using public funding to help finance a privately-owned entity without caveats. If the city would approve tax-increment financing for the mall, I would hope that we could make sure there is more room for local non-chain businesses and dining to come to Eden Prairie and upgrade the mall in a way to be as carbon neutral as possible.

**EPLN: The Metro Green Line light-rail project to Eden Prairie is scheduled to be completed in 2027, within the next City Council term. What steps would you propose the City of Eden Prairie take to ensure that LRT does not add crime or other problems to our community?**

**TOPERZER:** In 2017, when I was looking to move with my young family, one of the reasons I chose Eden Prairie was the promise of the Green Line expansion. The positives of the Green Line will outweigh any negatives. I do not believe that the Green Line will bring any increase in crime – it makes no sense that people will come all the way out to the end of the line on public transit just to commit crimes. There have been studies in other metropolitan areas that show that having a transit line that comes from the inner city and terminates in a suburban area has little or no effect on crime. I believe that the police department will continue to do a great job, and we need to be a welcoming community. I am more concerned about traffic and accidents happening when we're getting used to the train going across our community at level crossings.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



### Toomey continued from page 10

passed an Inclusionary Housing Ordinance, established an Affordable Housing Trust, and utilizes funding from both state and federal sources to help realize more affordable housing within our city. It is important that everyone has the opportunity to live and thrive in Eden Prairie.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidates?**

**TOOMEY:** My service to the community. For the last 22 years I have worked/volunteered extensively with nonprofits and civic groups in Eden Prairie. I have experience working with the elderly and those in need through my past position as the executive director of Meals on Wheels as well as my current position as the treasurer of the PROP Shop. I have a strong commitment to public safety as the long-serving president of the Eden Prairie Crime Prevention and Criminal Apprehension Fund. I have held leadership roles and been a member of several civic groups including the Eden Prairie Lioness Lions Club and the Optimist Club.

I have an excellent relationship with the nonprofit community in Eden Prairie. I believe that the City Council needs to stay informed about the challenges faced by local nonprofits, as these organizations play a crucial role in addressing community needs.

I am also one of two candidates running for reelection. I have learned so much and am familiar with what it takes to make Eden Prairie an exceptional place to live, work, and raise a family. It would be an honor to continue serving my community.

**EPLN: How would you plan to balance growth and development while**

**maintaining the character of Eden Prairie?**

**TOOMEY:** The ability to balance growth and development while maintaining the city's character requires thoughtful planning and community engagement. We need to ensure the preservation of the parks, trails, and any historic sites while allowing for sensible development.

Eden Prairie does not have much available buildable land. When these parcels come up for sale and if a developer acquires them, we need to look at all aspects of the project carefully. That is where community engagement becomes important.

The council has rejected and modified projects in the past based on community feedback.

The council has adopted sustainable building standards intended to promote practices that meet current needs without compromising the environment or the community's character. Integrating new developments that complement existing areas as well as responsible growth is important to maintaining the character of Eden Prairie.

**EPLN: What is your approach to managing the city's budget and fiscal priorities?**

**TOOMEY:** Managing the city budget and fiscal priorities requires allocating resources efficiently and effectively. Transparency and accountability are extremely important. Eden Prairie is in excellent shape, due in part to the leadership of our city manager and the diligence of city staff.

Since 2003, Moody's investors have assigned a rating of AAA to Eden

Prairie. This means that we have strong financial health, and we can issue bonds at lower rates, giving us more flexibility to allocate funds in our budget toward different priorities.

We consistently offer excellent services at reasonable tax rates. For fiscal year 2024, we have the third lowest tax rate in Hennepin County of cities with a population over 10,000, and we are proposing one of the lowest tax levy increases in the county for 2025.

The city also has excellent comprehensive long-range capital planning. Large projects are executed judiciously, resulting in one of the lowest debt levies in the metro.

**EPLN: The city may be asked to approve tax-increment financing to help finance the redevelopment of Eden Prairie Center, our regional shopping mall. Is this something you would favor? Why or why not?**

**TOOMEY:** In Eden Prairie, it is unusual to utilize tax-increment financing for businesses; almost all tax-increment financing has been used for housing, specifically to use toward affordable housing. One exception is when the mall went through a redevelopment in the 1990s. The other exception is the construction of Windsor Plaza.

If the city is asked to approve tax-increment financing to help with the redevelopment of the Eden Prairie Center, it would depend on the project. If it is eligible for tax-increment financing, then the amount requested and the recommendations of city staff would also be factors.

I am in favor of redeveloping the area around the mall, specifically where JC Penney is located, but cannot know if I

would support tax-increment financing until a project is proposed.

**EPLN: The Metro Green Line light-rail project to Eden Prairie is scheduled to be completed in 2027, within the next City Council term. What steps would you propose the City of Eden Prairie take to ensure that LRT does not add crime or other problems to our community?**

**TOOMEY:** I know that with change comes apprehension. People are concerned that the integration of the LRT into Eden Prairie might bring with it additional crime. We are extremely fortunate to have one of the finest police departments in the state, if not the country.

I would support having a safety plan, hiring additional police officers, utilizing our community service officers, and purchasing an additional K9 to maintain a presence around the light rail stations.

It is also important to collaborate with the Metro Transit Police. I would support a satellite station like the one at the Eden Prairie mall at one of the railway stations or allowing them to have an office in the Eden Prairie Police Department.

As the light rail becomes functional, it would be wise to revisit this plan and trust the recommendations of the Eden Prairie Police command staff.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



## Eden Prairie has two races for Hennepin County Board commissioner

The District 5 and District 6 races for the Hennepin County Board mirror each other in a way: Each has a longtime elected official facing a candidate without previous political experience. Ultimately, it will be up to voters to decide whether that really matters.

District 5 is mostly Bloomington, Richfield, and roughly the area of Eden Prairie south of Highway 5. The race is between incumbent Debbie Goettel, elected to the county board in 2016 and Richfield mayor before that, and political newcomer Jeffrey A. Beck.

In District 6, Heather Edelson was

elected county commissioner in May to fill the unexpired term of Commissioner Chris LaTondresse, who resigned in September. Edelson defeated Marisa Simonetti, and now the same two are squaring off on Nov. 5 for a full, four-year term on the board.

Edelson is coming off six years of service in the Minnesota Legislature, whereas Marisa Simonetti's 2023-24 candidacies are her first.

District 6 generally includes Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and several other cities bordering Lake Minnetonka, as well as the area of Eden Prairie roughly north of Highway 5.

The top vote-getter in District 5 and the top vote-getter in District 6 will begin four-year terms starting in January.

Hennepin County has seven commissioners from seven different districts who comprise the county board. It's Minnesota's most populous county, with 45 cities and about 1.26 million residents. Eden Prairie's population is about 5.1% of that number.

Commissioners' work is wide-ranging and includes areas such as public transit, affordable housing and homelessness, environmental and natural resources, transportation

infrastructure, jobs and economic development, health care, child welfare, criminal justice, and library services.

This publication separates the District 5 and 6 races, but identical questions were posed by Eden Prairie Local News (EPLN) staff to all of the candidates. As with other local races featured in the Voter Guide, additional coverage is on the EPLN website and can be accessed with the QR codes at the end of candidates' responses.

Please also refer to candidates' websites, where available, for additional information.

### Jeffrey A. Beck

Beck has been a resident of Main Street in Eden Prairie for several months and previously lived in Richfield, Bloomington, St. Louis Park, and Hopkins.

Now a caregiver to his elderly parents, he previously served on the board of the Hennepin County Soil & Water Conservation District.

Beck said that if elected to the county board, he would "work for all the people in my district, not just rich people like others do."

When asked about endorsements or donations from groups, Beck said, "This position is supposed to be non-partisan – by definition, not allowed to have any party endorsement. Yet, we have candidates breaking this rule every day."

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Hennepin County, and how would you address it?**

**BECK:** Housing is the No. 1 issue. I will see that spending on multifamily housing increases by 30 percent and that 5,000 units of low-income housing are built in every city of Hennepin County – three-floor, 60-unit complexes at a cost of \$600 per month for one or two people.

My pledge is to make sure everybody has a roof over their head, has enough to eat, and has access to the best and lowest-cost health care.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidate?**

**BECK:** I have plans in place already to solve all of the communities' problems – crime, light rail, housing, garbage, taxes, home prices, health care, transportation, and job creation, now and in the future.

## Position: District 5 Hennepin County Commissioner

### CANDIDATES

Jeffrey A. Beck  
Debbie Goettel (incumbent)

### JOB POSTING

Residents of southern Eden Prairie, Bloomington, Richfield, and parts of Minneapolis are seeking an executive – specifically a county commissioner – who will represent District 5 residents on the Hennepin County Board. The commissioners, as a county board, enact and enforce local ordinances, approve budgets, oversee spending, and hire county employees for Hennepin County, which has about 1.26 million residents. Law enforcement, corrections, parks and roads, social services, libraries, and emergency management are among the areas

overseen by commissioners. Hennepin County government has about 10,000 employees and a \$2.6 billion annual operating budget. Commissioners' duties are defined by the state constitution and state statutes.

### COMPENSATION

Salaries for commissioners are set by the Hennepin County Board and currently stand at \$122,225 per year. However, as a result of board action on Aug. 20, the salary will increase 5% to \$128,337 in 2025 and 5% to \$134,754 in 2026. Commissioners are also eligible for benefits, including health insurance and a retirement plan.

### QUALIFICATIONS

Candidates for election to the coun-

ty board come from a wide variety of backgrounds, but all must be qualified voters of the state, be 21 years of age or older upon taking office, and have maintained residency in their district for at least 30 days before the general election.

### ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

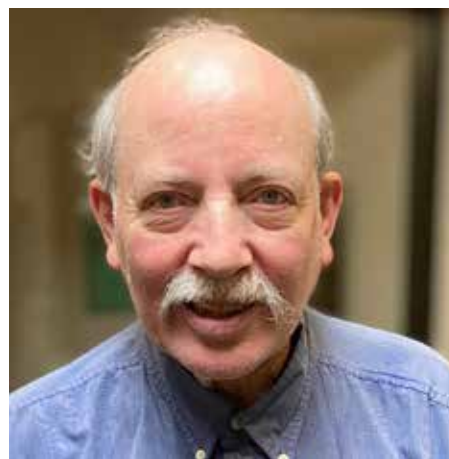
Hennepin County has seven commissioners who represent different areas of the county, with district boundaries determined during the 2022 redistricting process following the 2020 U.S. Census. Commissioners serve four-year terms. The top vote-getter in the District 5 race will serve a term beginning in January.

**EPLN: How do you plan to manage the county's \$2.68 billion annual budget effectively while ensuring that essential services are maintained and improved?**

**BECK:** My budget plans are simple – \$1 billion will be spent for housing, \$500 million for education, \$500 million for job creation, \$68 million for health care.

**EPLN: Can you outline your strategies for improving public safety and enhancing trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve?**

**BECK:** One key is to hire police officers who live in the community. However, when officers kill a man like Brian Jesus Quinones Rosario, who was shot in Richfield in September 2019, relations sour quickly.



Jeffrey Beck

Also, communities need to recruit and hire more female officers and members of minority communities. Research shows that female officers are more effective than male officers. Also, changing the color of police cars would help. No more black-and-white; maybe pink and red and yellow and green cars.

**EPLN: Eden Prairie is a small part of Hennepin County, yet the tax levy to fund the county budget is almost one-third of the average EP home's overall property tax bill. How would you propose to inform and engage Eden Prairie residents so they become more active in deciding how county money is spent?**

**BECK:** Right now, Eden Prairie residents don't care about their property taxes. They don't even realize they are paying 49 percent of the light rail's cost. Only seniors and disabled people on fixed incomes are challenging these ridiculous property taxes.

I pledge to cut your property taxes – 25 percent in the first year. I will cut your homeowners insurance by

25 percent, and cut your automobile insurance by 25 percent, also in the first year. Cut all taxes by at least 15 percent in the next three years.

Hennepin County Board members seem to enjoy raising taxes for people of Eden Prairie. It's called being envious of everything you and they will never have. Every year, even during COVID, going back to 2017, they have raised your taxes.

I will ensure that nobody loses their housing during this period. I'm here to help you enjoy life; others in charge want to make you feel as miserable as they are every day in their older, worn-out cities.

**EPLN: The county is a major stakeholder in the Metro Green Line Extension that will bring light rail to EP in 2027. How will you ensure this project is done on schedule and on budget?**

**BECK:** Bad question – how do you save a sinking, \$2.86 billion disaster? First, you put new people in charge of the disaster. What was hot in 2017 is not hot anymore. George Floyd's murder and COVID have changed the workplace landscape forever. People today want high-speed rail – Minneapolis to Duluth or Minneapolis to Rochester. People today want Amtrak-style trains to go between our cities.

Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.



## Experienced Advocate for ALL STUDENTS RE-ELECT KIM ROSS FOR EP SCHOOL BOARD

As the most experienced candidate and current board member, I am committed to:

- **Enhancing Achievement:** Engaging students with innovative learning experiences.
- **Championing Safety and Well-Being:** Advocating for the security and mental health of students and staff.
- **Sustainable Stewardship:** Operating the district with financial responsibility and environmental consciousness.



Prepared and paid for by the Kim Ross for School Board Committee. [www.kimaross.com](http://www.kimaross.com)

**Position: District 5 Hennepin County Commissioner**

**Debbie Goettel**

Website: [www.debbiegoettel.com](http://www.debbiegoettel.com)



**Debbie Goettel**

Goettel, a Richfield resident, is the incumbent county commissioner from District 5, which includes southern Eden Prairie. She was elected to the Hennepin County Board in 2016.

An environmental engineer and former Richfield mayor, Goettel also serves as board vice chair and chair of its Budget Committee.

Outside elective office, she has been involved with community organizations including the Richfield 4th of July Committee, Richfield Foundation, Hennepin History Museum, Corner House, CAP-HC, Richfield Rotary, Optimist Club, Community Service Council of Richfield, the Environmental Initiative, and various area chambers of commerce.

When asked how she has prepared to serve well in office, she responded, "I am constantly striving to improve our systems through best practices, industry-leading innovations, and through listening to constituents, so our policies reflect our residents."

She said that she has received endorsements or donations from the following: Minnesota DFL, AFSCME, Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA-MN, ND), Women Winning, Hennepin County Association of Paramedics and EMTs (HCAPE), IBEW Electrical Workers Local 292, Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman, State Sen. Steve Cwodzinski, Eden Prairie Mayor Ron Case, Richfield Mayor Mary Supple, and Bloomington Mayor Tim Busse.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Hennepin County and how would you address it?**

**GOETTEL:** Affordability for our families, seniors, and folks on fixed incomes is increasingly becoming one of the most important issues on people's minds. We need to balance how we establish and fund essential services that improve lives for our communities, while at the same time operating in a fiscally responsible manner.

Property taxes are felt first by our owners and families, so lessening the tax burden is the most direct way to impact people's economic health. As vice chair to the Hennepin County Board, and chair of the Budget Committee, I consistently advocate for our lowest property-tax levy, and work with our county administrator to ensure that we are being creative in how we limit operational costs so we can bring forward a smaller levy.

We aligned county policy and advocacy through passing a fairer taxable market value threshold at the state Legislature for homesteaded properties in 2023. Also, with Hennepin County's HRA Homebuyer Assistance Program, eligible buyers can receive \$30,000 on down payment and closing cost assistance when buying a home, one of the most generous programs in the country. These are

examples of how our advocacy and policy-making has real impacts on our communities.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidate?**

**GOETTEL:** Things that set me apart are my longtime professional experience working in environmental sustainability as an engineer, working in an executive role deeply connected with our local communities as the mayor of Richfield, and, of course, my most recent service to the residents of Hennepin County as vice chair to the Hennepin County Board.

As vice chair to the board, and chair of the Budget Committee, I guided \$245.9 million of ARPA dollars towards uninterrupted delivery of essential human services throughout COVID, while achieving historic investment in affordable housing and climate action, and elevating innovative new programming.

The county has moved upstream on issues related to homelessness, employment, public safety and mental health, investing heavily in police-embedded social workers, school-based mental health, affordable housing stabilization, and supportive housing programs. I regularly fight for a low and fair yearly property levy to reduce the tax burden for homeowners and those on fixed incomes.

My sustainability background was also central in helping Hennepin create its first ever Climate Action Plan, passed in 2021.

I am proud of this track record, and I hope to bring these skills back to the board for another term.

**EPLN: How do you plan to manage the county's \$2.68 billion annual budget effectively while ensuring that essential services are maintained and improved?**

**GOETTEL:** During the annual budget process, we receive proposals from each line of business within the county, laying out what each department needs to ensure maintenance of essential services. Making sure we are moving the needle forward on programming that will improve service delivery for our almost 1.3 million residents is how commissioners have the most impact on the budget.

Personally, I ensure we are asking the right questions, vetting these proposals fully, and acting as responsible stewards of taxpayers dollars. It is im-

portant to note that many federal and state dollars we receive are restricted funds, and must be used in their defined category, i.e. housing, transit, opioids, etc.

The board has the "power of the purse," so throughout the year we must sign off on any allocation, contracts, grant dollars, budgetary change items, etc. Sometimes we need to be flexible to adjust for unforeseen needs. To help address the influx of homeless families in 2024, the county expanded our shelter capacity dollars. Ensuring we could maintain our shelter capacity and keep families housed was a top priority. I am proud to say that now we are permanently housing more families than are coming into our shelter system.

**EPLN: Can you outline your strategies for improving public safety and enhancing trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve?**

**GOETTEL:** The board collaborates with our Law, Safety, and Justice Department, the Fourth Judicial District Court, the County Attorney's Office, the Public Defender's Office, and the Sheriff's Office. Our violence prevention efforts are enhanced through the "Safe Communities" initiative, which has made significant strides in improving safety and fostering connections within the community through trusted messengers and program partners.

Policing in the county is managed by the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, a crucial safety partner to our municipal, state, and federal agencies. I am committed to providing adequate funding to Sheriff Witt's department, ensuring they can fulfill their critical public safety role and remain competitive in attracting sheriff's deputies.

The proactive collaboration between our County Attorney's Office, the Sheriff's Department, and local police agencies on upstream violence intervention has been highly successful in reducing violent crime and building trust with communities and families. Early interventions and alternative responses, such as our Police Embedded Social Worker Program, school-based mental health programming, and science-backed juvenile justice diversion approaches, are having a significant impact in guiding individuals away from negative behaviors. I see great potential in expanding these efforts.

**EPLN: Eden Prairie is a small part of Hennepin County, yet the tax levy to fund the county budget is almost one-third of the average EP home's overall property tax bill. How would you propose to inform and engage Eden Prairie residents so they become more active in deciding how county money is spent?**

**GOETTEL:** The county budget process is highly transparent, starting in mid-September when administration presents the proposed budget and tax levy to the board. This document is

refined over the next few months and adopted in mid-December. During this period, every county department presents its budget, and a "Truth and Taxation" hearing is held. This hearing explains the levy and allows Hennepin taxpayers to discuss the impact on their bills with County Assessor's Office professionals.

All budget presentations, amendment discussions, and the Truth and Taxation hearing are open to the public. We encourage everyone to attend, learn about the budget, understand where funds are allocated, and advocate for changes that reflect their values.

The county budget is more than just a financial document; it's a moral statement about our community values and the services we provide. I hope residents will engage with us during the 2024 budget process for the 2025 budget. Additionally, I'm proud to note that Hennepin's levy remains competitive and relatively low compared to neighboring counties.

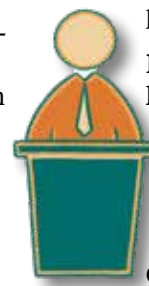
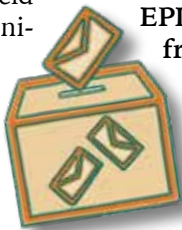
**EPLN: The county is a major stakeholder in the Metro Green Line Extension that will bring light rail to EP in 2027. How will you ensure this project is done on schedule and on budget?**

**GOETTEL:** As a member of the Executive Change Control Board (ECCB) on the Metropolitan Council overseeing the Green Line Extension Project, and with my engineering background, I am deeply involved in monitoring project milestones, reviewing engineering updates, and approving necessary changes. I actively track the council's progress each week to ensure that we advance this project efficiently and effectively.

Hennepin County has already committed over a billion dollars to this critical project, which is on pace for completion by 2027. It's essential that Hennepin County, the ECCB, and county public works staff maintain a prominent role in decision-making to ensure the project stays on schedule and within budget.

We strongly believe in the Green Line Extension's long-term benefits for our community, including connecting residents to opportunities, reducing disparities, and combating climate change. This project is not just an investment in infrastructure; it's an investment in the future of our state. The extension has already spurred billions in economic development, and its transformational impact will be felt for generations to come. I am fully committed to ensuring that this project is completed responsibly, efficiently, and with the best outcomes for all involved.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



## Heather Edelson

Website: [www.heatheredelson.com](http://www.heatheredelson.com)

Edelson, who lives on Drexel Avenue in Edina, has been serving as the District 6 representative on the Hennepin County Board since winning a special election in May, hiring staff and meeting with 16 mayors and police and fire chiefs. She filled a seat formerly held by Chris LaTondresse, who resigned last September.

Edelson previously served six years in the Minnesota House, where she was chief author of the Read Act and focused on literacy, special education services and supports, mental health, public safety, disability rights, and environmental protections. Before being elected to the House in 2018, she served on several boards and commissions.

Outside of elective office, Edelson is a former Hennepin County guardian ad litem; organized intergenerational “buddy bingo”; served on a PTO, on local education committees and on a police department crime fund; and is a supporter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). During the pandemic, she volunteered weekly to grocery shop for seniors with Help at Your Door.

Edelson also serves on the Metropolitan Mosquito Control District Commission, which brings all seven metro counties together to share resources on protecting public health and controlling mosquito populations.

She said the role of county commissioner is focused on the policy areas where she was most effective during her service in the Minnesota House, including public safety, human services, and the environment. Edelson said she brings a unique perspective to her work: a lived experience growing up in poverty and heavily relying on Hennepin County services for housing, food, and transportation.

Edelson said she has endorsements from Everytown for Gun Safety, AFSCME, Teamsters, Women Winning, and many elected officials and leaders who serve District 6. She has received campaign support from AFSCME, the union that covers employees at Hennepin County, including social workers, correction officers, child support staff,

## Position: District 6 Hennepin County Commissioner

### CANDIDATES

Heather Edelson (incumbent since June 4)  
Marisa Simonetti

### JOB POSTING

Residents of northern Eden Prairie, Edina, Hopkins, Minnetonka and communities around Lake Minnetonka are seeking an executive – specifically a county commissioner – who will represent District 6 residents on the Hennepin County Board. The commissioners, as a county board, enact and enforce local ordinances, approve budgets, oversee spending, and hire county employees for Hennepin County, which has about 1.26 million residents. Law enforcement, corrections, parks and roads, social services,

libraries, and emergency management are among the areas overseen by commissioners. Hennepin County government has about 10,000 employees and a \$2.6 billion annual operating budget. Commissioners’ duties are defined by the state constitution and state statutes.

### COMPENSATION

Salaries for commissioners are set by the Hennepin County Board and currently stand at \$122,225 per year. However, as a result of board action on Aug. 20, the salary will increase 5% to \$128,337 in 2025 and 5% to \$134,754 in 2026. Commissioners are also eligible for benefits, including health insurance and a retirement plan.

### QUALIFICATIONS

Candidates for election to the county board come from a wide variety of backgrounds, but all must be qualified voters of the state, be 21 years of age or older upon taking of office, and have maintained residency in their district for at least 30 days before the general election.

### ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

Hennepin County has seven commissioners who represent different areas of the county, with district boundaries determined during the 2022 redistricting process following the 2020 U.S. Census. Commissioners serve four-year terms. The top vote-getter in the District 6 race will serve a term beginning in January.



Heather Edelson

librarians, and others.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Hennepin County, and how would you address it?**

**EDELSON:** Mental health and access to services – partnering with the state to improve the disability waiver process. Workforce and environmental protections, specifically reducing waste and improving recycling and reuse. Public safety and recruitment and retention of first responders. All of these are pressing issues.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidate?**

**EDELSON:** Proven experience and

public service.

**EPLN: How do you plan to manage the county’s \$2.68 billion annual budget effectively while ensuring that essential services are maintained and improved?**

**EDELSON:** Careful review of services and work to improve and implement efficiencies when possible.

**EPLN: Can you outline your strategies for improving public safety and enhancing trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve?**

**EDELSON:** Knowing the issues is critical. Also, having good relationships with all leaders throughout the county and being able to address tough topics to improve safety.

We also must build support for young people who are not making it into the diversion programs and that need intervention. This is a critical area of focus for the months ahead as well as addressing and building the programs to ensure the mental health and public safety intersection is being adequately supported.

**EPLN: Eden Prairie is a small part of Hennepin County, yet the tax levy to fund the county budget is almost one-third of the average EP home’s overall property tax bill.**

**How would you propose to inform and engage Eden Prairie residents so they become more active in deciding how county money is spent?**

**EDELSON:** I am sending biweekly newsletters and encouraging people to sign up for my newsletter as budget season starts on Sept. 17. You can sign up for my newsletter by emailing [heather.edelson@hennepin.us](mailto:heather.edelson@hennepin.us). My office will also be hosting coffees throughout the district.

**EPLN: The county is a major stakeholder in the Metro Green Line Extension that will bring light rail to EP in 2027. How will you ensure this project is done on schedule and on budget?**

**EDELSON:** The project needs to keep pushing forward – the Eden Prairie section of the Green Line is complete. I will keep putting on pressure to ensure the line gets finished as soon as possible, as it is already far behind the date it was supposed to be complete.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



## Marisa Simonetti

Website: [www.marisasimonetti.com](http://www.marisasimonetti.com)

Hennepin County Board District 6 candidate Simonetti, an Edina resident, says her first home, purchased in 2013, was a townhouse near Dell Road in Eden Prairie.

She says her work has given her experience in setting and enforcing policy, as Hennepin County Board members must do. “I’ve been part of many successful real estate and business projects that must succeed or everyone loses,” she explained.

Her community involvements have included Toastmasters International and the Catholic Church.

Asked how she has prepared to serve effectively in office, Simonetti responded, “I have a proven record of fighting for freedom and family, a duty to defend.”

She did not list any endorsements or donations from major groups. “I am free of obligations and attached



Marisa Simonetti

strings, so I can behave impartially as county commissioner,” she said.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Hennepin County, and how would you address it?**

**SIMONETTI:** High property taxes, rising overall costs, and increasing crime are the primary issues faced by the majority of residents in Hennepin County.

First, I would vote “no” on property tax increases. From 2023 to 2024, commissioners raised property taxes 6.5 percent. Mayor (Jacob) Frey just proposed an 8.1-percent property tax increase for the city of Minneapolis, and other cities should expect similar increases as well. This is one factor that is crushing the American Dream of home ownership and making rental rates more expensive. I support the approval of property-tax petitions, which are fairly easy to file with the Hennepin County Attorney’s Office. High interest rates are depressing home values, yet property taxes were increased.

Second, investing in programs such as the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRRA), which focuses on job training for those incarcerated, has a proven net impact of reduced costs, monetarily and socially. The revolving door of the justice system is not reducing recidivism. We must address these issues at the correct level of resolution.

**EPLN: What differentiates you from the other candidate?**

**SIMONETTI:** Those who truly know me know that I am someone who will hold the line to protect those I care about, even when it places me at risk. I have the confidence and courage to set boundaries to hold people accountable when challenged. I am a tennis player, where both sides compete to bring out the best in each other. I like to find laughter in situations that would make one want to cry. I am a mother and care about the future I’m leaving for my son and other children in the community.

**EPLN: How do you plan to manage the county’s \$2.68 billion annual budget effectively while ensuring that essential services are maintained and improved?**

**SIMONETTI:** One repeating theme of fraud we see is billing for services not performed (such as Feeding Our

**Simonetti continues on page 15**

# Minnesota House elections will determine if DFL holds its trifecta

Eden Prairie voters will cast ballots only for the House portion of state government on Nov. 5, but by doing so, they help decide whether the DFL Party will maintain its trifecta control of the House, Senate, and governor's office.

The city is split between House Districts 49A and 49B, with northern Eden Prairie in the former and southern Eden Prairie in the latter. Highway 5 serves as the rough boundary. Portions of southern Minnetonka are also in District 49A.

The District 49A seat is open, with incumbent state Rep. Laurie Pryor, a Democrat from Minnetonka, first elected in 2016, deciding not to seek another term. First-time candidates Stacy Bettison, endorsed by the Republican Party, and Alex Falconer, endorsed by the DFL Party, are seeking this seat. Both are Eden Prairie residents.

District 49B is a contest between DFL-endorsed incumbent Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn, first elected in 2018, and Republican-endorsed chal-

lenger Wendi Russo. They are also Eden Prairie residents.

House members are elected to two-year terms.

The candidates bring decidedly different perspectives to their races. For example, in 49A, Bettison says education is the most pressing issue facing Minnesota, while Falconer says it's health care. Kotyza-Witthuhn says support for Minnesota families is the biggest need, while Russo says the top issue is inflation and taxes.

What issues get prioritized by the Minnesota Legislature overall may well come down to who has the most seats after Nov. 5.

Of the 134 seats in the House, 64 were held by Republicans in the 2024 legislative session and 70 by DFLers. Picking up four seats would give Republicans control of the House.

State Senate members aren't on the ballot until 2026.



Stacy Bettison

## Stacy L. Bettison

Website: [www.stacybettison.com](http://www.stacybettison.com)

Bettison is a 15-year resident of Eden Prairie who chose to keep her street address private. She is a business owner and practicing attorney.

The Republican candidate in this race has been a member and co-chair of two separate statutory reform working groups that resulted in bipartisan changes to criminal justice statutes.

Her community involvement has been with the city's Eden Prairie Conservation Commission (now called the Sustainability Commission), Minnesota Horse Welfare Coalition, Feline Rescue, Animal Humane Society, This Old Horse, Innocence Project, and

## Position: District 49A State Representative

### CANDIDATES

Stacy Bettison  
Alex Falconer

### JOB POSTING

Northern Eden Prairie and its more than 17,500 households is seeking a part-time executive – that is, a state representative – who will represent District 49A residents in the Minnesota House portion of the Legislature for the next two years. Incumbent Rep. Laurie Pryor is not seeking reelection to represent this district. Members of the Legislature are considered “citizen legislators.” Their higher purpose is to set the state's budget as well as enact and revise laws. In practical terms, this means the state representative works on state issues, such as funding the elementary and secondary education system, setting state tax

policy, and funding state human service programs. Members of the Legislature also propose amendments to the state constitution to be placed on the ballot for approval by the voters, elect regents of the University of Minnesota, and perform legislative oversight or review.

### COMPENSATION

Salaries for Minnesota's legislators were once set by legislators themselves. But voters amended the state constitution in 2016, and salaries are now prescribed by a Legislative Salary Council. The council has set the salaries of Minnesota senators and representatives at \$51,750 per year effective July 1, 2023.

### QUALIFICATIONS

Representatives and senators must be qualified voters of the state, be 21 years of age, and must have resided one year in the state. In addition, legislators must have lived the six months immediately preceding the election in the district from which they are elected.

### ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

All 134 members of the Minnesota House are elected by the voters in their respective districts every two years. District 49A was redrawn as a result of redistricting that followed the 2020 Census, and it generally encompasses south Minnetonka and Eden Prairie north of Highway 5. The last election of all 134 members of the Legislature was in November 2022.



Minnesota Association for Criminal Defense Lawyers.

Bettison said that listening skills honed in 20-plus years of legal and business consulting work are one of the things that has helped prepare her for elective office. “Listening is the key to effective representation,” she explained.

She said she has received endorsements or donations from the following organizations:

Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Fund PAC, National Federation of Independent Business, Minnesota Pipe Trades Association, International

Union of Operating Engineers, Women Lead, and the Republican Party.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Minnesota and how would you address it?**

**BETTISON:** Education. I have met with all three superintendents in our

**Bettison continues on page 16**

## Simonetti continued from page 14

Future, a \$250 million fraud). In May of this year, two consultants were convicted of defrauding COVID relief funds from the county with a similar tactic. In 2022, two Hennepin employees were charged with stealing roughly \$3.9 million in IT equipment, selling it out-of-state, and falsifying their time cards.

Fraud also exists in the form of inefficient and endless projects (such as Southwest Light Rail). We would be outraged if a contractor behaved this way in our personal homes, yet this same behavior is common in Hennepin County. These are senseless problems that can be avoided.

White lies and inefficiencies add up for a major impact. Wise stewardship will create funding that can be invested in public safety and for the approval of property-tax petitions.

These are a few examples of individuals who have been caught, yet it is undisputed that there is much more beneath the surface. The best lies are ones masked with truth, which is why we need someone who has the courage to look at reality to hold fraud and projects accountable.

**EPLN: Can you outline your strategies for improving public safety and enhancing trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve?**

**SIMONETTI:** My approach to public safety is one of restorative justice, which prepares those incarcerated to return to the community better than they left it. Programs such as MRRA let people earn early release in exchange for job training. Meaningful education and work opportunities for people who have committed offenses are more cost-effective (materially and socially) than the revolving door of the criminal justice system.

Job openings in demand include trades like mechanics, welding, electrical engineering, painting, plumbing, masonry, and manufacturing. Shortages of trained workers cost the economy in many ways, driving up costs of labor as companies compete over scarce workers.

Homelessness and unemployment are two primary factors for recidivism. In addition to mental health support, this program gets to the root cause. How do you know someone has changed?

When they accept responsibility to recreate their life, however hard the path forward. The cost of this new vision is less than the status quo. Teach a man to fish ...

Additionally, programs such as Canopy Roots divert 911 mental health emergencies from police to trained mental health responders. Their service model de-escalates conflict, is trauma-informed, and results in better outcomes for the community.

**EPLN: Eden Prairie is a small part of Hennepin County, yet the tax levy to fund the county budget is almost one-third of the average EP home's overall property tax bill. How would you propose to inform and engage Eden Prairie residents so they become more active in deciding how county money is spent?**

**SIMONETTI:** First, I would encourage all Eden Prairie residents to file a property-tax petition with the Hennepin County Attorney's Office (you can start the process by a simple email through their web page). Property taxes threaten the American dream of home ownership. With high interest rates, increasing insurance

costs from crime, and overall inflation, both homeowners and renters feel the pressure of ever-rising costs. It's time to reward people for investing in our community.

Second, I would encourage commissioners to be more transparent in where/what is funded to Eden Prairie to show appreciation for their investment in Hennepin County and provide opportunity for disagreement.

**EPLN: The county is a major stakeholder in the Metro Green Line Extension that will bring light rail to EP in 2027. How will you ensure this project is done on schedule and on budget?**

**SIMONETTI:** Accountability is key to ensure projects are done on time, along with addressing previously mentioned issues such as fraud and inefficiency.

*Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.*



## Position: District 49A State Representative

### Alex Falconer

Website: [www.alexforhouse.org](http://www.alexforhouse.org)

Falconer, the Democrat in this race, is an 11-year resident of Eden Prairie who lives on Avon Court. He is in charge of government affairs for the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters, part of a coalition that advocates for federal and state legislation to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in Minnesota.

He said a career working for advocacy organizations and alongside residents and leaders on local, state, and federal legislation has prepared him for elective office.

As for community involvement, he is a volunteer coach for the Minnetonka Middle School East cross-country running team and for Minnetonka High School's Nordic cross-country ski team. He is a member of the Upper



Alex Falconer

Midwest Trail Runners Association and the Superior Hiking Trail Association.

He has received endorsements and/or donations from the Minnesota DFL Party, 314 Action, the Minnesota Nurses Association, Council 5 AFSCME, Teamsters Joint Council 32, the Boundary Waters Action

Fund, Friends of the Boundary Waters Action Network, the Sierra Club, the DFL Environmental Caucus, Stonewall DFL, and the Minnesota Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Minnesota and how would you address it?**

**FALCONER:** The health care crisis in Minnesota directly affects everyone. Not just the 400,000-plus Minnesotans that are not covered by health insurance, but everyone else who faces skyrocketing premiums, climbing deductibles, and expensive medication. Too many families have to choose between medication or food for their kids – this is an indictment of a broken system. On Day 1, I will get to work to open MinnesotaCare as an affordable public option to help alleviate these costs, including those associated with mental health services, dental

and eye coverage. We must ensure everyone has access to affordable and comprehensive health insurance.

**EPLN: Polls show Minnesotans view the economy as a major concern. What specific actions or approaches should state lawmakers take next session to address those concerns?**

**FALCONER:** We need to do everything we can to support small businesses. I grew up watching my dad's small business grow to a point where he could provide for our family as well as those of his employees. I have seen how red tape and unnecessary bureaucratic processes can stifle business growth, costing our communities jobs and economic development. I want to ensure that small business owners have the infrastructure and access to capital to realize their dreams, and

**Falconer continues on page 17**

### Bettison continued from page 15

district to listen and learn about challenges schools face and why children's test scores are dropping year after year.

Under the Walz administration and the DFL-controlled House and Senate, Minnesota has sunk to 19th in national education rankings. Minnesota ranked 21st among states in fourth-grade reading proficiency. The number of Minnesota fourth-graders not proficient in reading has increased from 62 percent in 2019 to 68 percent in 2022. From 2019 to 2022, eighth-graders not proficient in math increased from 56 percent to 68 percent. Nearly a third of all Minnesota students were chronically absent – meaning they missed 10 percent or more of school days – during the 2021-2022 school year.

If our children are not adequately educated, if they have not developed basic skills, they will be unable to be healthy, happy, and productive members of society. Their future is being cut off at the knees before they are even out of middle school.

Among other things, I would undertake an audit (sitting down with teachers, staff and superintendents) of the mandates passed in the last legislative session and determine which mandates are necessary to help children learn to read, write, and be proficient in math and science.

**EPLN: Polls show Minnesotans view the economy as a major concern. What specific actions or approaches should state lawmakers take next session to address those concerns?**

**BETTISON:** Minnesota is fourth in the nation for being the least-tax-friendly state for middle-class families. We must provide tax relief that will prioritize family budgets, keep Minnesota businesses operating successfully, and ensure that Minnesotans can afford to stay in their homes.

DFL tax policies are exacerbating the cost of living, causing strain on family and individuals' budgets. We need to make day-to-day living more affordable. I support expanding the Child Tax Credit and Dependent Care Tax Credit by allowing all income levels to qualify.

Businesses need tax cuts too. At 9.8 percent, Minnesota has the highest

corporate tax rate in the country. The burden of high tax rate is felt by everyone: businesses in lost profits, customers who pay higher prices, and workers who lose wages and incomes. Repealing the DFL business tax increases that were passed last biennium will help the health of our economy.

Along with tax cuts, we need to cut spending. The DFL-controlled Legislature grew the state's budget 40 percent in the last session – after spending the \$18 billion surplus. We must sharpen our pencils and determine whether we need to spend money, and where we need to root out fraud, waste, and abuse.

**EPLN: How do you propose to address gun violence in Minnesota while respecting Second Amendment rights?**

**BETTISON:** Gun violence affects everyone, whether violence is personally experienced or affects our state as a whole.

In Minneapolis, gun violence is its own epidemic. While people impacted by gun violence peaked in 2020-2021, the number of victims remains unacceptably high. And there's a racial disparity. In 2023, roughly 79 percent of Minneapolis shooting victims were Black, and the percentage was higher – at 89 percent – for juvenile shooting victims. Needed are:

Mandatory minimums: Continue to impose mandatory minimums for felons in possession of a firearm. DFL proposals to eliminate the mandatory minimum for a felon in possession is counterproductive to reducing gun violence.

A public health approach to reduce gun violence: We must invest in the areas where gun violence is problematic – it is highly concentrated in areas of poverty and homelessness. We need to invest in evidence-based programs that break the cycle of continued poverty and measure the effectiveness of these programs.

I favor continued education about firearm safety, keeping kids safe, and gun lock distribution. I favor the newly passed law that allows law enforcement and family members to petition a court for an order to temporarily

remove firearms from an individual in crisis.

**EPLN: What is your position on reproductive rights and access to abortion services in Minnesota?**

**BETTISON:** Abortion is a protected right in Minnesota. In 1995, the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled in *Doe v. Gomez* that the Minnesota Constitution provided more protections in support of the right to an abortion than even the U.S. Constitution. The Minnesota Supreme Court ruled that the Minnesota Constitution includes a right of privacy that “encompasses a woman's right to decide to terminate her pregnancy.”

This ruling was broader and separate from the U.S. constitutional right to an abortion as defined by *Roe v. Wade*. The ruling also indicated that “the right of privacy ... protects the woman's decision to abort; any legislation infringing on the decision-making process, then, violates this fundamental right.”

I disagree with the DFL cut to funding of crisis pregnancy centers that informed women of alternatives to abortion, and a path forward for carrying pregnancies to term and finding resources for them.

A majority of Minnesotans have concerns about abortion up through the third trimester, and I do as well. I would like to study this more. Any restrictions through the third trimester will be legally challenged and ultimately Minnesota courts – not the people – will decide what the Minnesota Constitution protects and what it does not.

**EPLN: What are your top three spending priorities for the state budget?**

**BETTISON:** They are:

Stabilizing health care reimbursement costs, including mental health.

Government infrastructure – particularly health and human services.

Education – flexible funding for schools to decide at the local level how to spend money.

**EPLN: How do you plan to ensure that Minnesota's tax system is fair**

**and equitable?**

**BETTISON:** This question suggests that the tax system is not fair and equitable. To the contrary, Minnesota currently leads the nation on tax progressivity. I believe that what is done with your tax money is just as important as how it is raised. Minnesota must remain competitive on taxation so that revenue producers do not leave, taking their capital to surrounding states with a more favorable tax structure. Most importantly, our government owes its taxpayers an assurance that their money will be spent responsibly. The elimination of fraud, waste, and abuse within our government programs will be my top priority. Lastly, I will support the full exemption of Social Security benefits from the individual income-tax liability of Minnesota residents.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current level of funding for Minnesota's public schools?**

**BETTISON:** I interpret this question to ask whether I believe Minnesota public schools are fully funded or adequately funded. We had the largest funding for education in the last biennium, and yet the answer to that question is: We don't really know.

We first must ensure that the funding provided to schools does not come with unfunded mandates that force school districts to put allocated money in places other than the classroom. Individual school districts, with the help of school boards, administrators, teachers, and parents, know best how to meet the needs of families, teachers, kids, and staff in their districts.

In addition, we need to examine what exactly is needed for special education funding. We must determine whether there are gaps in services and if so, where? We also need to make sure that schools are safe places for students to learn. We must evaluate education policies, not just throw money at them in the hopes of fixing what is wrong.

**Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.**







Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn

**Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn**

Website: [www.carlieforhouse.com](http://www.carlieforhouse.com)

Kotyza-Witthuhn is a 13-year resident of Eden Prairie. She does not publicly list her street address.

She is the incumbent and Democratic candidate in this race, and has represented Eden Prairie in the Minnesota House for six years. She is the vice chair of the House Commerce Finance & Policy Committee and former vice chair of the Early Childhood Finance & Policy Committee. She has held operations/administrative roles in the private sector.

Kotyza-Witthuhn noted that her six

**Position: District 49B State Representative**

**CANDIDATES**

Carlie Kotyza-Witthuhn (incumbent)

Wendi Russo

**JOB POSTING**

Southern Eden Prairie and its more than 16,600 households is seeking a part-time executive – that is, a state representative – who will represent District 49B residents in the Minnesota House portion of the Legislature for the next two years. Members of the Legislature are considered “citizen legislators.” Their higher purpose is to set the state’s budget as well as enact and revise laws. In practical terms, this means the state representative works on state issues, such as funding the elementary and secondary education system, setting state tax policy,

and funding state human service programs. Members of the Legislature also propose amendments to the state constitution to be placed on the ballot for approval by the voters, elect regents of the University of Minnesota, and perform legislative oversight or review.

**COMPENSATION**

Salaries for Minnesota’s legislators were once set by legislators themselves. But voters amended the state constitution in 2016, and salaries are now prescribed by a Legislative Salary Council. The council has set the salaries of Minnesota senators and representatives at \$51,750 per year effective July 1, 2023.

**QUALIFICATIONS**

Representatives and senators must be qualified voters of the state, be 21 years of age, and must have resided one year in the state. In addition, legislators must have lived the six months immediately preceding the election in the district from which they are elected.

**ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS**

All 134 members of the Minnesota House are elected by the voters in their respective districts every two years. District 49B was redrawn as a result of redistricting that followed the 2020 Census, and now generally encompasses Eden Prairie south of Highway 5. The last election of all 134 members of the Legislature was in November 2022.

years in office have encompassed a split-party Legislature, DFL control of all three branches, and a pandemic that demanded remote participation. “I am efficient, effective, responsive, and future-focused,” she said.

She listed groups that have endorsed or donated to her campaign as follows: Minnesota DFL Party, EMILY’s List, Women Winning,

Planned Parenthood, OutFront MN, Education Minnesota, Minnesota Nurses Association, AFSCME Council 5, AFL-CIO, Teamsters, Minnesota Farmers Union, Hennepin County Association of Paramedics and EMTs, Conservation Minnesota, and others.

EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing

issue facing Minnesota and how would you address it?

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** No one experiences life’s difficulties in a vacuum and each challenge can increase or lessen other burdens that we carry as individuals, as parents, as employees,

**Kotyza-Witthuhn continues on page 18**



**Falconer continued from page 16**

simplify the systems so that more businesses can thrive. We also must work for a livable minimum wage so everyone working 40 hours a week can afford a roof over their head and food on their table.

EPLN: How do you propose to address gun violence in Minnesota while respecting Second Amendment rights?

**FALCONER:** I am glad for the gun violence measures Minnesota has recently passed, including background checks, blocking firearm access for domestic abusers on restraining orders, and the Extreme Risk Law. However, we can do more. The safe-storage bill should be passed with financial incentives for gun owners to afford trigger locks or gun safes. Additionally, we must require gun owners to report lost or stolen firearms. We also need to address the root causes of gun violence by increasing support and access for suicide prevention programs as well as community violence intervention programs.

EPLN: What is your position on reproductive rights and access to abortion services in Minnesota?

**FALCONER:** I am unapologetically pro-choice. I grew up watching my mother, the first female physician in Red Wing, Minnesota, dedicate her time to the local Planned Parenthood clinic. I learned from an early age why women must have autonomy over their health care decisions and control over their bodies. I will fight any attempts to block or diminish any access to the rights of women to access reproductive health care.

EPLN: What are your top three spending priorities for the state budget?

**FALCONER:** They are: Ensuring we meet or exceed our statewide climate goals on or before 2040. This will address the climate crisis head-on while also creating and supporting new, high-quality jobs everywhere across the state.

Increasing access to MinnesotaCare for those who cannot afford health insurance premiums for themselves or their families in addition to opening MinnesotaCare for everyone as a public option.

Instituting universal pre-K for all

students so they can get an early start to their education, which will support them through high school and alleviate costs for families associated with child care during those early years.

EPLN: How do you plan to ensure that Minnesota’s tax system is fair and equitable?

**FALCONER:** We need to make sure the ultra-wealthy are paying their fair share while also looking out for working families and those on a fixed income. I don’t think it is right to tax Social Security or other government payouts to safety nets or entitlement programs. We need to take an honest look at our tax system and make sure it is fair for businesses, employers, the working class, and consumers alike. I support a transparent auditing system to ensure our tax dollars are being spent wisely, fairly and as expected by voters. Wherever possible we must identify ways where we can cut spending and taxes without compromising our Minnesota values or support for those who need it most.

EPLN: What is your stance on the

current level of funding for Minnesota’s public schools?

**FALCONER:** Minnetonka, Eden Prairie, and Hopkins have some of the top-performing metrics for school districts in the state. I support everything we can do to uphold the standard of excellence we have here at home. However, a child’s ZIP code is one of the most determinative factors to their educational outcomes. We need to find ways to support communities across the state that can’t raise the revenue our districts can via property-tax levies to help level the funding gap. We also must institute universal pre-K to support early learning, which will also help alleviate the cost of child care for families. I also oppose any measure to take public dollars away from our public schools in the form of vouchers for private and for-profit schools.

Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.



“I’ve spent most of my career as a doctor – not a politician. I know that good ideas can come from both sides of the political aisle, and during my time in the Minnesota legislature I worked with Republicans and Democrats to get things done, passing more bills than almost every other legislator – many with bipartisan support. Now I want to take this common-sense approach to Congress and deliver results that improve people’s lives.”

**Kelly Morrison** *for Congress*



Paid for by Morrison for Congress

## Position: District 49B State Representative

### Wendi Russo

Website: [www.russoformn.com](http://www.russoformn.com)

A 20-year Eden Prairie resident who lives on Stanburry Curve, Russo owns Russo Entertainment Media Consulting. She said she also is a women's empowerment coach and facilitator, and a career coach.

She has had fundraising, speaking, and other roles with a number of organizations including Make-A-Wish, 3000 Acts of Kindness, Dwelling Place Shelter, Breaking Free Trafficking Shelter, Alex's Lemonade Stand for Children's Cancer Research, and Wishes and More. She has been a board member for Minnesota African Fashion Week and American Hero Wishes, and co-founded the Little Free Library at Staring Lake Park.

Russo said she has been preparing to serve in elective office by educating herself on local issues: interviewing and talking to school board members, local business owners, a city manager, and leaders in affordable housing, law enforcement, and transportation.



Wendi Russo

Endorsements received prior to this publication's deadline included Women Lead and the NFIB small business association.



**EPLN: What do you see as the most pressing issue facing Minnesota and how would you address it?**

**RUSSO:** The No. 1 issue I'm hearing from Eden Prairie residents of all ages and stages of life is that they can't afford the high inflation coupled with our high taxes. Minnesota taxes are contributing to an increasing migration out of Minnesota

to more tax-friendly states. Government spending is driving inflation and working families and seniors are feeling the squeeze.

The DFL squandered the \$17.5 billion surplus on frivolous spending, \$725 million toward a new building for legislators and a pay raise while increasing taxes up to \$10 billion more. We are the only state that has ever expanded government by 40% in one session, and we are potentially facing deficits in the next legislative session.

The reckless spending is creating an untenable economic situation that Minnesota cannot afford. I support reducing taxes, putting a cap on property-tax increases for seniors, eliminating Social Security taxes for seniors completely, and cutting spending to restore fiscal responsibility.

**EPLN: Polls show Minnesotans view the economy as a major concern. What specific actions or approaches should state lawmakers take next session to address those concerns?**

**RUSSO:** Minnesotans are wise to be concerned about our economy. One approach state lawmakers should

take next session is to give meaningful tax relief for working-class Minnesotans. I want to put more money in working families' pockets by eliminating wasteful government spending and ensuring more oversight on the dollars we invest to make certain they are not being used fraudulently.

Another priority is lowering the cost of doing business in Minnesota to attract more job creators and to encourage small businesses to flourish. Minnesota has the highest corporate tax rate in the country, which is deterring businesses to consider Minnesota for their corporate offices and expansion. I plan to ensure that small businesses are not given mandates that are out of reach for local, family-owned businesses but tenable for corporations.

**EPLN: How do you propose to address gun violence in Minnesota while respecting Second Amendment rights?**

**RUSSO:** Minnesota has enacted many bills to curb gun violence. Currently, Minnesota requires individuals to obtain a permit before carrying a

**Russo continues on page 19**

### Kotzya-Witthuhn continued from page 17

as citizens of the great state of Minnesota.

As a millennial, one of my most formative memories is the 9/11 terror attacks and the "War on Terror" that followed. I first voted in a presidential election that gave us the first Black president of the United States. I graduated from college at the beginning of the Great Recession and have experienced job loss and income uncertainty. I've lived the tech revolution personally: I took typing class in middle school and now I pass laws on AI regulation.

Becoming a parent and grieving the unexpected loss of a parent just before the onset of a global pandemic – and not being able to lean upon the village that we all know it takes to raise a family – was challenging. I am incredibly blessed to have a supportive spouse, a safe place to call home, and food in my belly. It's now my life's work to bring every Minnesotan closer to that reality. I am focused on building a brighter future for all of us.

**EPLN: Polls show Minnesotans view the economy as a major concern. What specific actions or approaches should state lawmakers take next session to address those concerns?**

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** While corporate profits soar, many working families are struggling to keep up and are rightfully feeling uncertain about their future. The House DFL majority and our partners in the Minnesota Senate DFL know that the best way to grow our economy is to grow the middle class and support working families.

By tackling the rising cost of early care and learning, health care, and housing, we're growing the middle class. By creating a Paid Family Leave program and investing in public infrastructure like roads, bridges, and broadband, we are growing the middle class. Through jobs with good pay, benefits, and safe working conditions, Minnesotans can build better lives. By giving people the opportunity to earn a college degree debt-free, we are helping Minnesotans

build a better future.

These are issues that I've delivered on for Eden Prairie families throughout my legislative tenure, and I will continue to champion our shared priorities in the years to come.

**EPLN: How do you propose to address gun violence in Minnesota while respecting Second Amendment rights?**

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** I first ran for office as a Mom Demanding Action – and my husband and I are safe and responsible gun owners. Minnesotans know with rights come responsibilities and when it comes to gun violence prevention, with deference to our Second Amendment rights, all options should be on the table.

I've co-authored and voted in support of criminal background checks and a red flag law, which Gov. Walz signed into law in 2023. In recent years, I've championed secure storage, which we practice in our home because this is yet another way we can keep all Minnesota children safe when in proximity to guns. I believe these policies fall under the "well-regulated" portion of the language of the Second Amendment. These policies do not infringe upon our right to own guns. Instead, these policies help make it harder for bad actors to get a gun.

Our children and grandchildren have the right to live free from gun violence in schools, our neighbors in places of worship, and our friends and family as they enjoy shopping or a movie. We must add "policy and action" to "thoughts and prayers." This mom demands it.

**EPLN: What is your position on reproductive rights and access to abortion services in Minnesota?**

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** After almost 50 years of precedent, the Supreme Court took away constitutional rights from women nationwide in the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Most Minnesotans are not aware that

prior to 2023, our reproductive rights also hinged on an existing ruling from the Minnesota Supreme Court called Doe v. Gomez. In January 2023, I took urgent action and authored House File 1, The Protect Reproductive Options (PRO) Act, which codified the fundamental right of reproductive freedom into state law.

As a member of the Reproductive Freedom Caucus and as a person of deep faith, I am committed to protecting patients and providers from post-Roe attacks and ensuring equitable and affordable access to abortion care.

Make no mistake: Minnesota Republicans introduce bills to ban, limit, and restrict access to abortion every year. Not one Republican voted for the PRO Act. These medically unnecessary and extreme restrictions put the lives of Minnesotans in danger.

Every pregnant person faces her own unique circumstances, challenges, and potential complications. Personal reproductive health care decisions should not be made by the government, period. Abortion is on the ballot again this year and I will never back down when it comes to protecting your right to choose.

**EPLN: What are your top three spending priorities for the state budget?**

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** They are:

Child care

Public education

Housing

**EPLN: How do you plan to ensure that Minnesota's tax system is fair and equitable?**

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** During the last legislative session, I voted for the largest tax cut in state history. I authored our nation-leading Child Tax Credit, which will cut childhood poverty in Minnesota by one-third. I supported a tax cut on Social Security income and a property-tax rebate expansion to help lessen the impact of

municipal needs.

I'm proud to say that Minnesota has one of the most progressive tax systems in the country, which means that those among us who earn the least also pay the least in terms of share of their annual income.

Corporate profits continue to rise, and Minnesotans are struggling to pay for everyday essentials like groceries, child care, and rent. As your state representative, I will continue to push for targeted tax relief to working families instead of padding the pockets of corporations and the ultra-wealthy. Everyone in Minnesota should pay their fair share.

**EPLN: What is your stance on the current level of funding for Minnesota's public schools?**

**KOTYZA-WITTHUHN:** Funding for public education in Minnesota has been falling behind for decades. As a result, we are seeing overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages as salaries have lagged behind other professions, and missed opportunities to educate students today for the careers of tomorrow.

Here in Eden Prairie, we've seen an exodus of our incredible educators for surrounding districts. For example, Minnesota is last among all states for computer science education, which could have a huge impact on our economy down the line.

In 2023, the DFL made a down payment on much-needed investments, but it was not a one-and-done funding fix. We will need to make sustained and targeted investments over time to meet our constitutional commitment to educating our kids.

**Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.**



## Position: District 49B State Representative

### Russo continued from page 18

concealed firearm in public. It enforces waiting periods for gun purchases and has child access prevention laws to hold gun owners accountable for unsupervised access to firearms.

I want to strengthen legislation that prevents criminals from obtaining guns and enables removal of illegal firearms from our streets. To address this, I support increasing penalties for straw purchases, armed carjackings, and other gun-related crimes. We need to stop the revolving door of catch-and-release for repeat offenders by enforcing the laws we currently have in place and not allowing for early release.

### EPLN: What is your position on reproductive rights and access to abortion services in Minnesota?

**RUSSO:** This is a deeply personal topic that will impact a woman for many years ahead and not one to be taken lightly. I support women accessing reproductive care and I also think we should make the adoption process faster and more affordable.

The PRO Act, authored by my opponent, removed all restrictions, allowing abortion up to birth using taxpayer dollars. In June 2023, U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) told CNN, "I support allowing for limitations in the third trimester that do not interfere with the life or health of women," and I agree.

The PRO ACT also removed all funding for pregnancy crisis centers. As the daughter of a teen mom, I support returning funding to crisis pregnancy centers for support. If we are going to truly give women a choice, we should also support teens and young mothers who would like to keep their child, helping them through their pregnancy and baby's first year.

### EPLN: What are your top three spending priorities for the state budget?

**RUSSO:** I first want to ensure we are being responsible with our current government spending and investments. With a \$17.5 billion surplus spent with little to no accountability, a \$725 million government building to house legislators being built, and up to \$10 billion in additional taxes being approved, it's time to look at execution, accountability and respecting our taxpayers.

The Minnesota Star Tribune wrote a feature on the fraud within Feeding our Future, a federally funded meals program that lacked adequate oversight, resulting in \$250 million in fraud. This is in addition to fraud within the COVID Frontline Worker Pay Program, Paycheck Protection Program, and Federal Child Nutrition Program for lack of appropriate oversight. Minnesotans are tired of paying into a system that is not responsible with their money. GOP members sought legislation to provide oversight that could avoid some of these fraudulent schemes, and the legislation was voted down.

My priorities for the state budget are: education, roads/transportation, and reducing taxes to make life more affordable for families.

### EPLN: How do you plan to ensure that Minnesota's tax system is fair and equitable?

**RUSSO:** Minnesota has the nation's most progressive tax system in the U.S., as calculated by the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. That means higher-income taxpayers pay a larger percentage of their incomes to taxes than lower-income taxpayers. In addition, we are the sixth-highest state in income taxes, one of only 10 states that still tax Social Security, and one of only 12 states that have an estate tax. Ours ranges from 13-16%.

We need our tax code to be more competitive so we can attract talent, retain

high-income earners in the state, and attract investment to grow the economy in Minnesota.

### EPLN: What is your stance on the current level of funding for Minnesota's public schools?

**RUSSO:** Last spring, more than \$2.2 billion in new spending went toward education. Funding is important in our schools, but what is also important is where the money is allocated. Execution is everything.

The Minnesota Legislature was provided with a unique opportunity to fund education at desired levels with the 2024, \$17.5 billion budget surplus. Unfortunately, they also passed over 60 unfunded mandates as part of the 2023 education budget bill, increasing non-classroom funding. Adding to these challenges, many Minnesota schools were not disciplined with their spending of one-time COVID money that expires this September. This is forcing schools to implement classroom/school budget cuts.

We need to elect leaders who recognize that throwing additional funds at our educational challenges is not the only answer. Minnesota needs legislators who will be held accountable for spending and ensure our tax dollars produce the results we expect, i.e. improved educational outcomes.

It's hard to believe that over the last 10 years, Minnesota's educational ranking has declined from 4th in the nation to 19th, and the Feeding our Future fraud was disgraceful under the oversight of our current government leadership.

Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.



## EPLN has coverage of candidate forums

Another good way to learn about the 2024 candidates and their positions on issues is to read Eden Prairie Local News (EPLN) reporting on various candidate forums held this fall.

The forums included:

- An Eden Prairie School Board candidates forum held Sept. 5.
- A Hennepin County Board, District 5, forum held Sept. 11.
- A Hennepin County Board, District 6, forum also held Sept. 11.
- An Eden Prairie City Council candidates forum held Sept. 12.
- A Minnesota House Districts 49A and 49B candidates forum, also held Sept. 12.

The forums were organized by area chapters of the League of Women Voters and featured questions both from the League and from members of the public.

To read news coverage of forums and other election news, go to the "2024 Election" area of [www.eplocalnews.org](http://www.eplocalnews.org).



## Lone constitutional amendment would extend conservation funding

Should a portion of the state's lottery proceeds continue to be earmarked for conservation, clean water, and park projects?

Minnesotans will decide that question Nov. 5 by voting on the lone constitutional amendment on the general election ballot. If over 50 percent of voters vote "no" or leave that portion of their ballot blank, the spending

decisions will revert to legislators.

The amendment is formally titled the "Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Renewal," and the wording voters will see on the ballot is this:

"Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to protect drinking water sources and the water quality of lakes, rivers, and streams; conserve wildlife

habitat and natural areas; improve air quality; and expand access to parks and trails by extending the transfer of proceeds from the state-operated lottery to the environment and natural resources trust fund, and to dedicate the proceeds for these purposes?"

Minnesota voters in 1990 approved an amendment dedicating 40 percent of state-lottery proceeds to the envi-

ronmental fund, then approved an extension in 1998. The 2024 extension, if approved by voters, would last through 2050.

Since 1991, the fund has provided approximately \$1.027 billion to over 1,601 projects around the state, according to the Minnesota Legislature.



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### Jude, Morrison seek Phillips' 3rd District seat in the U.S. House

Republican Tad Jude and Democrat Kelly Morrison are running for the U.S. House of Representatives from Minnesota's 3rd District, which includes Eden Prairie.

They are vying for the seat that has been held since 2019 by Dean Phillips, who decided not to seek re-election in favor of a long-shot run for U.S. president.

All 435 U.S. House seats are up for election. Members run every two years. Republicans are currently in control of the House.

Both Jude and Morrison have served in the Minnesota Legislature. Morrison, of Wayzata, is an OB-GYN physician and Jude, of Maple Grove, is a lawyer and former district court judge.

Jude says his top three legislative priorities would be inflation, immi-

gration, and public safety. Morrison says hers are lowering costs for families and seniors, protecting access to reproductive health care, and supporting veterans.

Both say they're ready to work across party lines to get things done in Congress.

The 3rd District – comprising the suburbs of Hennepin and Anoka counties – was highly competitive in 2018, the year that Phillips flipped it from Republican to Democrat. It has become somewhat more "blue" since then, with Phillips receiving 60% of the vote in 2022.

Questions to Morrison and Jude were posed by Eden Prairie Local News (EPLN) staff. Some appear here; the rest are on the EPLN website.

The candidates' websites are listed with their responses.

### Position: 3rd Congressional District Representative

#### CANDIDATES

Tad Jude  
Kelly Morrison

#### JOB POSTING

Eden Prairie and other suburbs west and southwest of Minneapolis – together forming the 3rd Congressional District – are seeking a representative to the U.S. House for a two-year term. The district has a population of roughly 701,000. Incumbent U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips is not seeking re-election. Representatives are also called congressmen or congresswomen. Among other duties, members of the U.S. House and Senate – together known as Congress, or the legislative branch of the U.S. government – make all laws, declare war, regulate interstate and foreign commerce, and control taxing and spending policies.

#### COMPENSATION

Rank-and-file members of Congress are paid \$174,000 annually, an amount that has not changed for about 15 years.

#### QUALIFICATIONS

The Constitution requires that members of the House be at least 25 years old, have been a U.S. citizen for at least seven years, and live in the state they represent (though not necessarily the same district).

#### ABOUT THE HIRING PROCESS

The United States is divided into 435 congressional districts, each with a population of just over 700,000 individuals. Each district elects a representative to the U.S. House of Representatives for a two-year term.

### Tad Jude

Website: [www.tadjude.com](http://www.tadjude.com)

Jude, of Maple Grove, is seeking the 3rd District Congressional seat held by Dean Phillips, who is not running for reelection.

The Republican candidate in this race, Jude has served as a 10th District Court judge, a member of the Minnesota House and Senate, and as a Hennepin County commissioner.

"In addition to my experience in public service, I have been a small business owner for over 45 years, a veteran, and, most importantly, a husband and father," he added.

Jude currently serves as a commander



Tad Jude

at American Legion Post 303. He has participated on the Northwest YMCA Board, Catholic Charities of St. Paul/

Minneapolis Board, Senior Community Services Board, and Jodi's Network of Hope Board. Additionally, he sits on the board of Action for Children/Zambia, an organization committed to global humanitarian efforts.

He has been endorsed by incumbent Republican U.S. representatives from Minnesota as well as current and former community leaders from Minnesota's Third District, who are listed at [www.tadjude.com](http://www.tadjude.com).

**EPLN: What are the most pressing issues facing the United States today, and how do you plan to address them if elected?**

**JUDE:** The rising cost of living is, without question, the top issue facing Minnesotans and all Americans today. We need to make Minnesota affordable again. Food prices have risen 26 percent in the last four years, along with steep increases in the prices of housing, fuel, transportation, and insurance costs. Just about everything we need to live costs more today than it did a few years ago, and people are struggling to make ends meet.

There are things Congress can do to address this problem. First, we need to reign in federal spending. Next, we must increase access to clean and inexpensive energy sources. Rising fuel costs impact everything we grow, manufacture, ship, and consume, contributing to rising prices. We must also reduce taxes for families, people who work for tips, and senior citizens. Fi-

nally, we must create an environment that encourages businesses to invest in communities and create high-paying jobs.

**EPLN: What are your top three legislative priorities if elected to Congress?**

**JUDE:** My top three legislative priorities are the top three concerns that I've heard from people across the district, which are inflation, immigration, and public safety.

Rising prices have made life tough for many hard-working Minnesotans and retirees. As it has become more difficult to buy a house, send kids to college, or save for the future, people are ready for economic security again. Making life affordable for all Minnesotans will be my top priority in Congress.

Not only do people want economic security, but they also want safe communities, and the current administration's open-border policies are making our communities increasingly less secure. America now faces heightened security risks, and over the last few years, the FBI alone has seized enough fentanyl to kill 270 million people. We have to close the borders and control who and what enters our country.

Finally, we must reduce crime in the 3rd District, particularly carjackings, and increase our support for law

**Jude continues on page 21**



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## Position: 3rd Congressional District Representative

### Kelly Morrison

Website: [www.kellyforcongress.org](http://www.kellyforcongress.org)

**M**orrison, a Wayzata resident, is the DFL candidate for U.S. representative from Minnesota's 3rd District. It's a seat currently held by Dean Phillips, who is not running for reelection.

An OB-GYN physician, she has co-owned her practice. Morrison has served in the Minnesota House and Senate, and said she authored and passed more than 90 bills into law. She noted that she is the wife of an Army combat veteran and is also a mom.

Her involvement in the community includes service on the board of the YWCA-Minneapolis and Milkweed Editions, a nonprofit publisher of literature. She said that she has also volunteered as a team manager during her daughter's involvement in soccer.

Morrison said she has been endorsed by former Gov. Mark Dayton, Congressman Dean Phillips, Eden Prairie Mayor Ron Case, former WCCO anchor Don Shelby, and more than 30 other elected officials and community leaders. Group endorsements have come from labor unions, the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, and the Minnesota DFL.

**EPLN: What are the most pressing issues facing the United States today, and how do you plan to address them if elected?**

**MORRISON:** One of the most pressing issues our country faces is rising



**Kelly Morrison**

costs. As a doctor who has practiced in Minnesota for over 20 years, I know what it's like to see my patients struggle to afford the medication they need. That's why, when I got to the Minnesota Legislature, I took on the pharmaceutical companies to lower the cost of prescription drugs, and I will continue to take this issue on in Congress. I'm also focused on lowering the cost of housing and child care to make it easier for families to get by.

I also believe we need to stand up for our fundamental freedoms, including protecting our democracy and making sure that women – not politicians – are able to make their own healthcare decisions.

Finally, I believe we need leaders who are willing to work with both Republicans and Democrats to get things done. During my time in the state Legislature, I worked across the aisle to author and pass over 90 bills – many with bipartisan support. I want to take this common-sense, results-fo-

cus approach to Congress to pass legislation that makes a difference in people's lives.

**EPLN: What are your top three legislative priorities if elected to Congress?**

**MORRISON:** My top three legislative priorities are lowering costs for families and seniors, protecting access to reproductive health care, and supporting our veterans.

**Lowering costs:** During my time in the Legislature, I proudly voted to cut Social Security taxes for most Minnesotans, ensuring that seniors could live in dignity. I also helped pass legislation to cap the cost of insulin from \$600 per month to \$35 per month.

**Protecting reproductive rights:** As the only OB-GYN in the Minnesota Legislature, I led the fight to ensure women can make their own health-care decisions, and if elected to Congress, I will continue to work to protect reproductive rights on the national level.

**Supporting our veterans:** As the wife of a combat veteran and former Army Ranger, I know how important it is that we stand up for our service members and veterans. I was proud to co-author and pass legislation that provides 9/11 veterans and their families with service bonuses, and I will continue to advocate on behalf of veterans in Congress.

**EPLN: What are your views on the current state of the U.S. economy, and what policies would you support to ensure its stability and growth?**

ond Amendment, we need to focus on removing illegally obtained guns from our communities, which would have a significant impact on addressing gun violence. Gun laws need to be enforced. Further, when you look at the statistics on gun-related deaths and injuries, it is shocking to learn that more gun deaths are related to suicide than crime. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for increased access to mental health services, and I will work to increase access to this vital care in Minnesota when I am elected.

**EPLN: What is your stance on immigration reform, and how do you propose to address the needs of immigrants in our community?**

**JUDE:** Our current immigration system is broken and doesn't serve Minnesotans or the people coming to this country seeking a better life. An open border has allowed unvetted people from across the globe to pour into this country, putting American citizens at risk, and has created an unsustainable financial burden on cities and taxpayers. We must rebuild our borders and pass immigration reform that takes a balanced approach, allowing people to safely and lawfully immigrate to the United States without straining our healthcare system, schools, and community services.

**EPLN: How would you maintain impartiality and fairness, even when faced with issues that may conflict with your personal beliefs?**

**MORRISON:** We need a robust economy that supports families, workers, and businesses. I am committed to lowering costs and building an economy that works for everyone. This means lowering the cost of everyday needs such as health care, housing, and child care while investing in innovation, infrastructure, and entrepreneurship.

A skilled workforce is the foundation of the economy, so we must train our workforce for the jobs of tomorrow.

We also need to reduce our debt. In the Minnesota Legislature, we are constitutionally required to balance our budget, and I think that's a good thing. It means that we always need to be looking at programs and making sure they are working – if they are, we should continue to invest in them, and if they aren't, we should cut them. It's as simple as that. I think we should take this same approach in Congress – we should be looking at what's working and what's not, and create our budget accordingly.

**EPLN: What is your position on foreign policy, particularly in relation to U.S. involvement in international conflicts – such as in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war – and trade agreements?**

**MORRISON:** Protecting our nation from foreign threats must be one of the federal government's top priorities. That means ensuring we have a strong military, bolstering our cybersecurity,

**Morrison continues on page 22**

### Jude continued from page 20

enforcement and peace officers. I'm running to make crime illegal again and restore a sense of economic and physical security for the communities in the 3rd District.

**EPLN: What are your views on the current state of the U.S. economy, and what policies would you support to ensure its stability and growth?**

**JUDE:** Our current economy is not working for many Minnesotan families and retirees, who are watching prices rise without seeing a bigger paycheck. We need to reduce inflation by addressing some of the policies I mentioned above, such as reining in federal spending; reducing the tax burden for families, those earning tips, and seniors receiving Social Security; and encouraging the creation of high-paying jobs.

**EPLN: What is your position on foreign policy, particularly in relation to U.S. involvement in international conflicts – such as in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war – and trade agreements?**

**JUDE:** Every global relationship or conflict is unique and should be addressed with a solution tailored to the specific circumstance. However, the following general principles will guide my decision-making and policies as a member of Congress.

First, the United States should have a strategic and compelling reason to intervene in the affairs of other nations. When that threshold is met, we should

have a clear objective to prevent us from being caught up in decades-long military conflicts.

Finally, I believe that the United States should be a reliable partner for our key strategic allies across the globe, such as Israel, and I stand with the Israeli people in defending their right to protect themselves and their country.

Regarding trade agreements, I am going to Washington to represent the interests of Minnesota's 3rd District. I will evaluate each trade agreement based on its impact on the people I represent.

**EPLN: What is your position on reproductive rights and access to abortion services?**

**JUDE:** The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled in *Dobbs v. Jackson* that rules and regulations surrounding abortion should be "returned to the people and their elected representatives," making abortion an issue for state legislatures. I agree with *Dobbs*. While I don't share the values expressed in Minnesota's current abortion law, I respect the right of the people in Minnesota to make this decision. Minnesota law is settled.

**EPLN: How do you propose to address gun violence in America while respecting Second Amendment rights?**

**JUDE:** It is estimated there are well over a million illegal guns on the streets in America. Of course, there is no way to know the actual number. Before debating the limits of the Sec-

**JUDE:** Having served as a 10th District trial court judge for 11 years, the values of fairness and impartiality have become second nature. Over the course of my career, I have been in public service as a Democrat, Republican, and a politically neutral judge. Given my experience looking at various issues from different sides of the political spectrum, I have the ability to see both sides of an issue and set aside my personal beliefs should they conflict with the best interests of those I represent.

**EPLN: In a Pew Research Center poll this year, 86 percent of Americans responding agreed with the statement, "Republicans and Democrats are more focused on fighting each other than on solving problems." With that in mind, outline your best idea for increasing bipartisanship in Congress as a way to solve America's biggest problems.**

**JUDE:** I believe cultivating relationships with people with different viewpoints and political persuasions is the best way to lower the temperature in Washington and improve the quality of dialog between opposing parties. In my career, I have enjoyed working with people from all walks of life and with every different political outlook. Minnesota has a long history of our Congressional delegation working together and working across the aisle, and I am committed to continuing this tradition in Washington.



# Klobuchar faces GOP challenger in Senate race

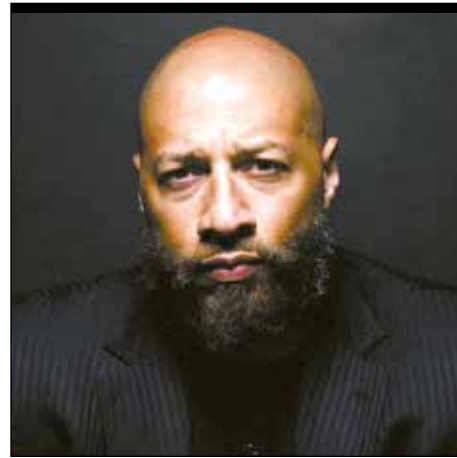
**D**FL incumbent Amy Klobuchar, one of two U.S. senators representing Minnesota in Washington, D.C., faces an unconventional challenge from Royce White, a Republican who was endorsed by the GOP and defeated Joe Fraser in the August primary. The Nov. 5 election will determine who will serve a six-year term in the U.S. Senate.



**Amy Klobuchar**

Klobuchar, 63, has represented Minnesota since 2007, with a focus on healthcare, infrastructure, and rural economic development, alongside other key issues like climate change and bipartisan reforms. She has recently emphasized expanding broadband access in rural areas, lowering prescription drug costs, and addressing climate change.

"I've always worked to bring people together to get things done and move our country forward," Klobuchar says on her campaign website (amyklobuchar.com).



**Royce White**

White, 32, a former professional basketball player and mental health advocate, was endorsed by the Republican Party and aligns closely with former President Donald Trump and the "America First" movement, which advocates for prioritizing American interests over international cooper-

ation, emphasizing national sovereignty, reduced immigration, and protectionist trade policies.

"You cannot have freedom without self-governance. You cannot have self-governance without faith and sacred honor," White says on his website (roycewhite.us).



White's candidacy has energized some voters disillusioned with establishment politics, but it has also stirred controversy. Reports of past financial issues and remarks that have drawn criticism from within his own party have raised concerns about his candidacy. However, his anti-establishment message and close ties to Trump resonate with a faction of the GOP.

Klobuchar's campaign highlights her recent legislative achievements, particularly her work on lowering drug costs, expanding broadband, and addressing climate change. These priorities have become central to her reelection platform, reflecting her bipartisan efforts to strengthen rural economies and improve healthcare access.

## Morrison continued from page 21

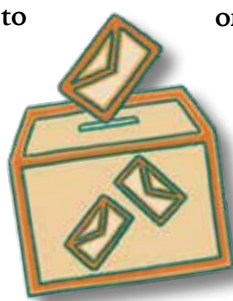
and fostering alliances with global partners to counter adversaries. I support Ukraine in its fight for its democracy and believe we must stand up to Russian aggression.

I also support the alliance between the U.S. and Israel and believe that the United States should do everything it can to bring about an immediate ceasefire and an end to the violence, bring home the remaining hostages, get humanitarian aid to innocent civilians in Gaza, and work toward a two-state solution.

Finally, I believe that we need to boost our exports and support fair trade and enforcement. If elected, I will work to make sure our businesses can access overseas markets and compete in the global economy.

**EPLN: How do you propose to address gun violence in America while respecting Second Amendment rights?**

**MORRISON:** As a physician and a mother, I'm appalled that the No. 1 killer of children in America is now gun violence, and I am ready to work to end that preventable tragedy. During my time in the Minnesota Legislature, I supported the passage of universal background checks and extreme risk protection orders in our state. Eighty-seven percent of Americans – both Democrats and Republicans – support background checks on gun purchases. We need to support policies that keep guns out of the hands of people who are a danger to themselves or others – it's about keeping our kids and communities safe.



**EPLN: What is your position on reproductive rights and access to abortion services?**

**MORRISON:** Women should be able to make decisions about their health care with their doctor and family – not with politicians. If elected, I will be the only pro-choice OB-GYN in Congress. As a state senator, I led the fight to protect a woman's right to make her own healthcare decisions, and I will continue to work to protect reproductive rights on a national level, including protecting access to IVF and birth control.

**EPLN: What is your stance on immigration reform, and how do you propose to address the needs of immigrants in our community?**

**MORRISON:** Immigrants are an essential part of our state's cultural and economic fabric, and we need to ensure that we are always a beacon for the world's talent. Congressional District 3 has incredible immigrant communities, and they make our community stronger.

Right now, our immigration system is broken, and Congress needs to take action to fix it. I am a strong supporter of comprehensive immigration reform that would strengthen border security, provide a pathway to citizenship, including for DREAMers, and reform our visa system. I supported the recent bipartisan efforts in Congress to give the president emergency powers to secure the border and give law enforcement more tools to stop fentanyl from entering this country.

We need to elect people to Congress who are willing to work together to solve problems, not play politics with them.

**EPLN: How would you maintain impartiality and fairness, even when faced with issues that may conflict with your personal beliefs?**

**MORRISON:** I've spent most of my working life as a doctor – not a politician. When I take care of patients, I don't ask their political views, I just focus on providing them with the best possible care. I spend most of my time listening to my patients, and believe that you need to meet people where they are and treat everyone with dignity and respect.

**EPLN: In a Pew Research Center poll this year, 86 percent of Americans responding agreed with**

the statement, "Republicans and Democrats are more focused on fighting each other than on solving problems." With that in mind, outline your best idea for increasing bipartisanship in Congress as a way to solve America's biggest problems.

**MORRISON:** I grew up in a Republican family, and I learned from a young age to respect people with different political views. During my time in the state Legislature, I was able to find common ground with Republicans and Democrats from across Minnesota, and that's how I was able to pass more bills than almost every other legislator. I worked with a Republican to pass bipartisan legislation that extended health care for new moms and their babies from just 60 days to a full year.

We need to put aside our differences, focus on what we agree on, and be willing to work together to deliver real results that help Minnesotans. I've spent the last six years talking to people across the western suburbs, and I've always focused on putting their priorities first. From strengthening our infrastructure in the Third District to providing resources for our veterans, improving early childhood education, and supporting our seniors and caregivers, I'll work to get things done that make a real difference in people's lives.



## Where to find retail, institutional advertisers

Eden Prairie Local News thanks the advertisers who have made this free 2024 Voter Guide possible. Here's where to find the retail and institutional advertisers in this publication:

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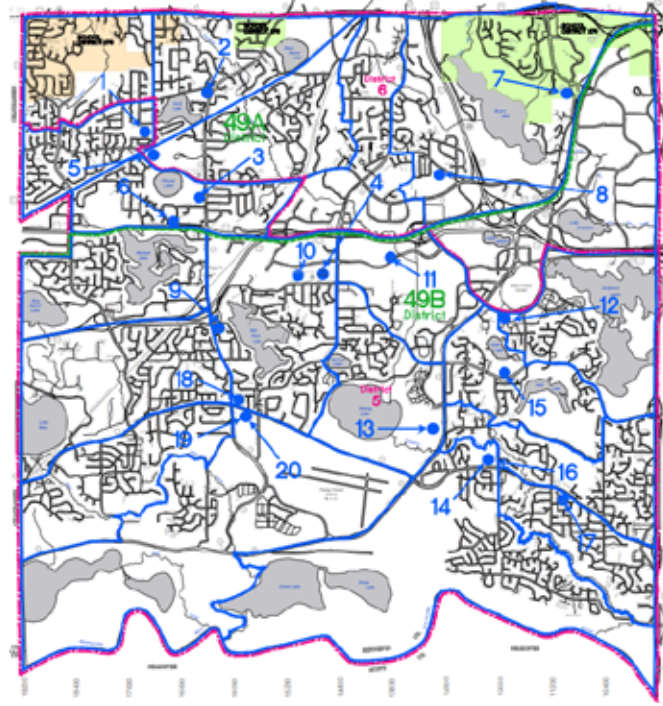
To learn more and apply, visit: [bushfoundation.org/bush-fellowship](https://bushfoundation.org/bush-fellowship)

# Voting precincts in Eden Prairie

Here are where voting polls are located in Eden Prairie:

- 1 – Prairie View Elementary School, 17255 Peterborg Road
- 2 – Eden Prairie Assembly of God, 16591 Duck Lake Trail
- 3 – Immanuel Lutheran Church, 16515 Luther Way
- 4 – Eden Prairie City Center, 8080 Mitchell Road
- 5 – Prairie Hill Evangelical Free Church, 17200 Valley View Road
- 6 – Christ Lutheran Church, 16900 Main Street
- 7 – Wooddale Church, 6630 Shady Oak Road
- 8 – City Hill Church, 12901 Roberts Drive
- 9 – Victory Lutheran Church, 16200 Berger Drive
- 10 – Eden Prairie United Methodist Church, 15050 Scenic Heights Road
- 11 – St. Andrew Lutheran Church, 13600 Technology Drive
- 12 – Eden Prairie Community Library, 565 Prairie Center Drive
- 13 – Hennepin Technical College, 13100 College View Drive
- 14 – Pax Christi Catholic Community, 12100 Pioneer Trail
- 15 – Eden Lake Elementary School, 12000 Anderson Lakes Parkway
- 16 – Pax Christi Catholic Community, 12100 Pioneer Trail
- 17 – Prairie Lutheran Church, 11000 Blossom Road

- 18 – Prairie Community Church, 9145 Eden Prairie Road
- 19 – Grace Church, 9301 Eden Prairie Road
- 20 – Grace Church, 9301 Eden Prairie Road



## Illegal voting by noncitizens is rare, yet still an issue

By David A. Lieb, Associated Press

Only U.S. citizens are eligible to vote in this fall's election for president and other top offices.

While that is nothing new, the potential for noncitizens to register or vote has been receiving a lot of attention lately.

Citing an influx of immigrants in recent years at the U.S.-Mexico border, Republicans have raised concerns about the possibility that noncitizens will be voting and they have taken steps in numerous states to address that prospect, even though cases of noncitizens actually voting are rare.

GOP officials have undertaken reviews of voter rolls, issued executive orders and placed constitutional amendments on state ballots as part of an emphasis on thwarting noncitizen voting. Some Democrats contend the measures could create hurdles for legal voters, are unnecessary and lead people to believe the problem of noncitizens voting is bigger than it really is.

A 1996 U.S. law makes it illegal for noncitizens to vote in elections for president or members of Congress. Violators can be fined and imprisoned for up to a year. They can also be deported.

(Noncitizens are also ineligible to vote in elections in Minnesota. This includes local elections such as city, town or school district elections.)

When people register to vote, they confirm under penalty of perjury that they are U.S. citizens. Federal law requires states to regularly maintain their voter rolls and remove anyone who is ineligible, a process that could identify immigrants living in the country illegally.

No state constitutions explicitly allow noncitizens to vote, and many states have laws that prohibit noncitizens from voting for state offices such as governor or attorney general. But some municipalities in California, Maryland and Vermont, as well as the District of Columbia, do allow voting by noncitizens in some local elections such as for school board and city council.

### Johnson continued from page 5

as educators and counselors, they can effectively contribute to the well-being of students and other parents within the community. I also recognize the importance of having access to a well-rounded group of health and spiritual professionals who can provide expert guidance and support when it comes to mental health.

I believe that by implementing these measures, we can make significant strides in prioritizing and addressing the mental health needs of our students and promoting their overall well-being.

Want to read more from this candidate? Use the QR code here to reach the EPLN website, where additional responses to EPLN questions can be found.



### How to Vote continued from page 1

Election Day.

For both Election Day and early voting, anyone in line in Eden Prairie by the time the polls close for the day will be allowed to vote. Early voting at Eden Prairie's city hall occurs during normal business hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday, with extended times of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Oct. 26 and Nov. 2 (Saturdays) and Nov. 3 (Sunday), as well as 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 29 and 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Monday, Nov. 4.

Assistance such as curbside voting, audio ballots, and touchscreen voting, including touchscreens with oversized buttons, is available for both Election Day and early voting.

Here are some of the best online sources for voting information:

- Minnesota Secretary of State: [sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/](https://sos.state.mn.us/elections-voting/)



- Hennepin County: [hennepin.us/residents#elections](https://hennepin.us/residents#elections)

- City of Eden Prairie: [edenprairie.org/city-government/elections](https://edenprairie.org/city-government/elections)

The Minnesota Secretary of State Office also has detailed information about voter registration at <https://www.sos.mn.gov/elections-voting/register-to-vote/>

## Voters will use county-owned ballot tabulators on Election Day

Eden Prairie residents who vote in person at their precinct on Election Day, Nov. 5, or in early voting at Eden Prairie City Center beginning Oct. 18, will enter their ballots into a ballot tabulator.

The machines, says Eden Prairie City Clerk David Teigland, are owned by Hennepin County and used throughout the county. The top portion of the machine scans a voter's completed ballot, then the physical ballots drop into locked storage in the bottom of the tabulator, also known as a ballot counter.

The scanned ballots are stored on memory sticks, which are tabulated and transported to the Hennepin County Government Center in downtown Minneapolis. Those numbers are combined with results from mailed absentee ballots and ballots cast early in person at City Center and at the Hennepin County Government Center, where any Hennepin County resident can vote.

Unofficial results will be released on Election Night, but they are not final until certified by canvassing boards in the days after the election. The state canvassing board is responsible for canvassing and certifying the results of all statewide elections, including state and federal offices and state legislative and judicial offices that overlap more than one county. A county canvassing board certifies the votes cast within the county for races that go beyond the county boundaries and certifies the election results for offices up for election that are voted upon exclusively within that county. Each municipality and school district has its own canvassing board to certify results in those races.

Because the tabulator stores the physical ballots, Teigland said, "Theoretically, you can do a hand count if you need it." Ballots cast by Eden Prairie residents are stored for at least 22 months following the election.



Ballot-tabulating machines store the physical ballots and scans of those ballots.

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