

D203’s new bus system more efficient

New system aims to optimize routes, save money, avoid delays

By Michelle Mullins
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Naperville School District 203 has initiated new, more efficient bus routes designed to save money and avoid parents scrambling for transportation when a driver calls in sick. The district is using a route optimization plan implemented this August for increased reliability and fewer cancellations. The changes, which affect more than 10,000 students and their families every day, was highlighted at Monday’s

school board meeting. Last year, the district averaged one canceled route per school day, Director of Transportation Cynthia LaBorn said. “For families, those cancellations meant finding transportation with very little notice,” she said. “That was not the level of reliability we wanted for our families and it became an important driver for the work we undertook this year.” A nationwide bus driver shortage has affected transportation operations, and the district is not immune, LaBorn said. About 80% of school administrators across the country said driver shortages have affected their transportation operations, she said.

“Every eligible student should have transportation safely to and from school every school day without a route being canceled because we do not have enough drivers available,” LaBorn said. “To achieve that level of reliability, we knew incremental changes would not be enough. We needed to examine the structure of the system itself. This resulted in the district undertaking its first significant stop and route optimization in decades.” With the bus route optimization, the district has cut 76 bus stops, decreasing from 576 stops last year to 500 stops this year, said Lisa Xagas, assistant superintendent



Naperville School District 203 has initiated new, more efficient bus routes designed to save money and provide consistency. **CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

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Over 100 infrastructure projects that would expand Naperville’s bike network have been proposed in the city’s revamped bicycle and pedestrian plan. **FILE PHOTO**

100-plus projects proposed in revamped bike, pedestrian plan

By Carolyn Stein
NAPERVILLE SUN

Dozens of new bike lanes and trails aimed at improving connectivity in Naperville could be coming to the city. After roughly a year of work by city staff and engineering-firm A. Epstein and Sons International, Naperville has unveiled a new bike and pedestrian infrastructure plan that would reshape the city’s bike network. The plan, which would cost about \$54 million, includes more than 100 infrastructure recommendations and would be implemented through 2050. The city’s last bike and pedes-

trian plan was adopted in 1997 and had an interim update in 2006. Since then, Naperville has grown significantly, becoming Illinois’ third largest city with a population of about 153,000. “Our existing plan is over 20 years old so there was definitely urgency on staff’s part to update that plan,” said Michael Prousa, the city’s transportation manager. “That was further solidified based on the 2023 community survey, with mobility being one of the key points from residents that improvement was wanted.” In the 2023 community survey results, 63% of residents rated the ease of biking in Naperville as

“good” or “excellent.” In the more recent 2026 community survey, that number dropped to 52%. The city’s Transportation Advisory Board, which was given its first look at the draft plan last week, is expected to sign off on a more finalized plan in October before sending it to the Naperville City Council for approval. “When you look at peer communities that we always compare ourselves to, whether it’s Overland Park, Kansas, or Carmel, Indiana, this is one area where a lot of them have honestly gotten a decade or two ahead of us,” Councilman Ian Holzhauser said at the council meeting last week.

At a high level, suggestions in the plan aim to better connect the north and south sides of Naperville, provide alternative routes on lower-speed, lower-volume streets, decrease traffic stress throughout the city and enhance intersections with high-visibility treatments. “In general, people in Naperville want to walk and bike, and in a lot of situations, they just don’t feel safe doing so,” Greg Osborne, vice president and senior project manager at Epstein, said at the council meeting. While Osborne said Naperville

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Crowded City Council race gains 9th candidate

By Carolyn Stein
NAPERVILLE SUN

Another candidate, Michael Christin, is throwing his hat into the ring for a spot on the Naperville City Council, bumping up the number of candidates running to nine. Four council seats are up for election this spring. Council incumbents Josh McBroom, Supna Jain and Nate Wilson have confirmed they are running for reelection. Councilman Patrick Kelly is not seeking another term.



Christin

Challenging them for those four-year terms are Judd Kendall VFW Post 3873 Cmdr. Staci Boyer; Indian Prairie District 204 School Board President Laurie Donahue, Naperville District 203 School Board members Kristine Gericke and Marc Willensky and newcomer Xavier Sims. Resident Bruce Jones picked up a packet to run last week, according to city spokesperson Linda LaCloche. He was unable to be reached for comment. Christin said he was inspired to run after hearing a speech many years ago by then-Wisconsin Gov. Lee Sherman Dreyfus. At the time, Christin was in his early 20s and working for IBM. “He said, ‘When you get to a certain age, after your career is over, when your career is winding down, be able to give back. Run for city council. Run for chamber of commerce. Join your Knights of Columbus. Just be able to give back because you have a lot of things to offer,’” he recalled. That advice resonated with Christin, who is now 59 and works as a senior vice president of sales and marketing for a facility management company. “He said, ‘You want to give back in any way you can,’ and I decided it’d be kind of cool to run for city

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Judge orders \$16,500 in fees for dismissed defamation suit

By Michelle Mullins
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A Will County judge recently dismissed a defamation case filed against Homer Glen Mayor Christina Neitzke-Troiike, former Will County treasurer candidate Raj Pillai and two local podcast hosts under the Illinois Citizen Participation Act. Judge Brian Barrett ruled in favor of the four defendants and awarded about \$16,500 in attorney fees, which included \$7,500 to Pillai and \$9,000 to Neitzke-Troiike and podcast hosts Justin Virgin and Danny Sourì, who were all represented by the same attorney.

The case is expected to be appealed. Carmen Consolino, of Homer Glen, filed a defamation lawsuit in March against the four individuals based on the podcast “The 815 Has Problems,” hosted by Virgin and Sourì, which had Neitzke-Troiike and Pillai as guests earlier this year. The discussions included questions about veterans benefits. Pillai, a U.S. Navy veteran and former president and current commissioner of the Will County Veterans Assistance Commission, was asked a question concerning veterans’ disability benefits and if disabled veterans qualify for a reduction in property taxes.

During this podcast, the hosts introduced a scenario but did not name Consolino, and Pillai responded, “I do not know the answer to that question,” and said he could check with the veterans service officers. According to the complaint, Consolino, a Marine Corps veteran is a disabled veteran with a 70% disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for post-traumatic stress disorder. The complaint alleged that during the podcast, statements were made accusing Consolino of fraudulently claiming an Illinois property tax exemption for disabled veterans and suggesting he was “gaming the

system.” The lawsuit stated that these accusations are false and that Consolino lawfully qualifies for the Illinois Disabled Veterans Standard Homestead Exemption under state law due to his VA-certified disability rating. During a separate interview with Neitzke-Troiike, the podcast hosts ask about Consolino and whether he was entitled to property tax exemptions. She responded she doesn’t know what his disability is. She said sometimes disabilities are something that can’t be seen on the surface. Neitzke-Troiike also mentioned that Consolino’s wife, Jennifer, a

former Homer Glen trustee, has politically attacked her and spread misinformation about her for 10 years. The lawsuit said Neitzke-Troiike and the podcast hosts had a prearranged plan to defame Carmen Consolino. The lawsuit was announced days before the March Republican primary in which Neitzke-Troiike was a candidate for lieutenant governor and Pillai was a candidate for Will County treasurer. Both candidates subsequently lost their primaries. Attorney Joe Giamanco, who

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