



SPECIAL REPORT

The Metropolitan Council focuses on our quality of life, reliable infrastructure, and stewardship of resources

by Council Member Peter Lindstrom



It's been more than a month since Gov. Tim Walz appointed me to serve on the Metropolitan Council for District 10, and I'm already learning so much about the work the Council does to support the Twin Cities region.

My nearly twenty years in local government have prepared me well for this challenge. Though the specific work has shifted a little, I still get to focus on core issues that matter to residents of the region: quality of life, reliable infrastructure, and stewardship of resources.

Gov. Walz has committed to a comprehensive and ambitious plan to invest in our region's prosperity with his proposed state budget. Specifically, he is proposing the most significant transportation investment in a generation. At the heart of his proposal is critical support for the region's bus system, which will need additional investment for the region's anticipated growth during the coming years.

The Walz proposal will raise additional revenue through sales taxes to support ten new bus rapid transit lines across the region during the next decade, and increase bus ridership by about 40 percent in the same time frame. It will increase the fleet of electric buses by 220, and support investment in system-wide amenities to improve the customer experience.

I have firsthand experience with the value of bus rapid transit in the region. The METRO A Line serves Falcon Heights and has provided a faster, more reliable transit option for riders along Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, Falcon Heights, and Roseville. It also connects to the region's two light-rail lines, which results in a much faster option between and within the two major cities.

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Upcoming events

**May 6, 6:30-7:30 p.m.,
SD66 DFL Events Subcommittee;
7:30-8:30 p.m., SD66 DFL Caucuses
and Conventions Subcommittee**

**May 21, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Happy Hour**

**June 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 Central Committee**

**June 4, 6:30-8 p.m.
Roseville DFL**

**June 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Happy Hour**

**June 23, 1:30 p.m.
St. Paul DFL Convention**

**June 24, 6-8 p.m.
Rosefest Rose Parade**

**July 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Happy Hour**

**August 5, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 Central Committee**

**August 6, 6:30-8 p.m.
Roseville DFL**

**August 20, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 DFL Happy Hour**

See page 11 for full calendar.

This increases access to jobs, educational institutions, and the great parks and cultural amenities in the area.

We need more of these lines. And I'm also glad we're adding more buses that run on cleaner energy to the mix.

I wholeheartedly support the governor's vision of #OneMinnesota and as the chair of the Metropolitan Council's Environment Committee, I'm seeing how important it will be for us to assure that we're viewing issues from a regional and strategic perspective. None of our systems operate separately—whether it's the connections between transportation and housing, clean water and development, or the environmental impacts of our transportation investments. It's all connected.

During the next few months, we'll be watching how the legislature responds to the governor's budget proposal and getting ready to roll out additional bus rapid transit service throughout the region, with progress on the METRO C and D Lines, and the Orange and Gold Lines. Visit www.metrotransit.org for more specifics about those services.

I am among fourteen new council members appointed by the governor in March. Chair Nora Slawik, former mayor of Maplewood, was appointed in January, and two other council members were reappointed from the previous administration. We're all learning so much, asking good questions, and listening to the concerns of our districts to bring back to our regional discussions.

I am honored to serve in this role, and I welcome any ideas, questions, or feedback you have. Feel free to contact me at peter.lindstrom@metc.state.mn.us.

House DFLers are honestly, fairly investing in future of all Minnesotans

by Rep. John Lesch



My colleagues and I in the Minnesota House DFL have been dedicated this session to strengthening the way of life for all Minnesota families. Minnesotans care about one another and want to see each other succeed. We're committed to governing in a way reflecting these values and with investments in world-class schools, affordable, accessible health care, and safe and inclusive communities, we can build a Minnesota that works better for everyone.

When talking with folks on the campaign trail last year, we found health care was at the top of the minds of many people. House DFLers are putting people before profits of insurance companies and Big Pharma. Without action from the legislature, funding for the state Health Care Access Fund is set to expire. This fund allows low- and medium-income Minnesotans to obtain health care, and I'm working to extend this mechanism—a 2 percent provider tax—while Republicans have yet to put forth an alternative. Rates on the private market remain high, and instead of multimillion-dollar handouts to insurance companies, I support direct discounts to consumers.

Minnesotans are expected to pay outrageous amounts for prescription drugs, and I've introduced a bill to prohibit pharmaceutical price gouging. Additionally, we're working to rein in middlemen known as pharmacy benefit managers who have entirely too much power over the medications Minnesotans are able to get. I'm also grateful to Attorney General Keith Ellison for appointing me to his task force to tackle the issue of high drug prices.

Education remains an issue deeply important, and we're working to ensure all students have the tools they need to achieve. It's time for Minnesota to honestly, fairly, and equitably fund schools, and our House DFL education budget does so with a 3 percent per-pupil increase the first year and another 2 percent in the second year. We're also delivering more access to critical support staff such as social workers, nurses, counselors, and psychologists at school. Our education budget also funds strategies to recruit more teachers of color, more full-service community schools, and an improvement of special education funding. To help ensure Minnesotans can seek a degree or career training when they graduate without going into massive debt, our budget proposal also funds a tuition freeze at the University of Minnesota and Minnesota State campuses, and increases funding for the State Grant Program

Someone skeptical might ask, "But Lesch, this costs money; how are you ever going to afford all of this?" Due to tax giveaways for corporations and other destructive budgeting practices from Republicans, we've experienced the consequences of not making these investments in education, health care, and infrastructure. Income inequality has meant our money is ending up in the hands of fewer and fewer people. Serving on the House Taxes Committee, we've put together a tax proposal that restores a sense of fairness, and in doing so, empowers us to make historic investments in education.

This session, I've had the honor to chair the House Judiciary Committee. Our Judiciary budget bill expands justice to more Minnesotans, many of whom find systemic barriers. Through increased investments in our courts, strengthening protections against sexual harassment, reforms to certain fines and penalties, and other strategies, our judiciary budget reflects our core values of justice and fairness.

One item I worked hard to include in the budget is a bipartisan proposal to give judges the discretion to reduce or waive fines and fees for traffic, parking, and minor criminal violations based on financial hardship. Fines and surcharges for a basic traffic ticket can often exceed \$100, which is a significant financial hardship for many families. Late fees and collection charges can then lead to driver's license suspensions and other subsequent consequences such as loss of employment and mounting debt. This, in effect, criminalizes poverty and our budget reverses that consequence.

I encourage community members to remain in touch with feedback, input, and if I can ever be of assistance with state government. Call me at [651-296-4224](tel:651-296-4224), email me at rep.john.lesch@house.mn, or visit my Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RepresentativeJohnLesch. It's an honor to serve.

Working to restore our democracy

by Sen. John Marty

Wealthy people and powerful businesses buy elections—dumping large amounts of money into races in which they cannot even vote. Can you imagine the nation’s founders finding such behavior acceptable when they were drafting the constitution? Corporations and wealthy individuals can determine the outcomes of elections in states and communities where they don’t even live!

We pride ourselves on good government in Minnesota, but we have a long way to go in living up to the ideals of a political process that works for everyday Minnesotans. While we face a steep uphill battle in working to overturn *Citizens United v FEC* and other court rulings that give big money control of many elections, there are elements of our system that can be addressed to restore an open and fair democracy and increase transparency in the process.



Here are some legislative proposals I am pushing to improve our democracy:

Address the conflict of interest that occurs when voting on legislation after a politician receives large contributions from PACs or lobbyists who would benefit. [Senate File 2035](#) would implement this change and encourage candidates to reject all contributions from PACs and lobbyists in exchange for an increase in public financing.

End closed-door budget and conference committee negotiations. [Senate File 2036](#) would change the way business is done at the end of session. Public business should be conducted in the public eye. If it is important that routine committee meetings at the legislature are open to the public, isn’t it even more important for the most important work at the capitol?

Press for a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* and other court rulings that opened the floodgates to outside spending in elections by corporations and super PACs. [Senate File 2038](#) would petition the U.S. Congress to amend the constitution to clarify that money is not free speech and corporations are not people and would stop the flood of special-interest money.

Stop the “revolving door” between public office and lobbying. [Senate File 2039](#) would impose a seven-year waiting period after a public official leaves office before they could turn around and lobby former colleagues. Thirty-four states and the federal government already have such a restriction.

Increase disclosure to ensure transparency in the political process. [Senate File 2041](#) closes loopholes in Minnesota’s government ethics law related to disclosure by public officials, lobbyists, and interest groups. This will help prevent conflicts of interest.

Reapportionment reform. Although this legislation is not one that I introduced, I want to highlight [Senate File 2233](#), authored by Sen. Jason Isaacson, which would amend the Minnesota constitution to create a nonpartisan reapportionment commission. Allowing elected officials to draw their own electoral districts after a census effectively allows public officials to choose their constituents rather than have constituents choose their representatives. In Wisconsin, the 2011 gerrymandering was so unfair that in 2012, even though Democrats won a majority of the votes in state assembly races, Republicans won more than 60 percent of assembly seats. It is important that we pass this legislation in time to be ratified by voters before the next redistricting in 2021.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any comments or suggestions: jmarty@senate.mn or (651) 296-5645.

Let's talk about trash

by Commissioner Mary Jo McGuire



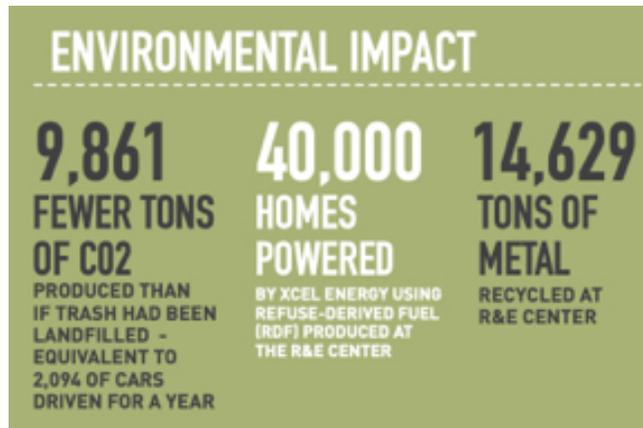
Did you know that in 2018, people living and working in Ramsey and Washington counties produced **458,294 tons** of municipal solid waste (or MSW, which is the technical term for garbage)? This number doesn't include the yard and organics waste collection sites, curbside recycling, or hazardous household waste, so if you add in those the number is much higher.

As we plan for ways to deal with all of this MSW, we are guided by the Waste Management Hierarchy and the ultimate goal of meeting the state's 75 percent recycling goal. Ramsey and Washington counties have made a bold pivot in thinking about waste by recognizing the inherent value in the materials put in the trash, viewing these items as assets. The economic and environmental value of these assets can be realized only through a complete system that seeks to recover that value.



Since 1997, Ramsey County has invested more than \$100 million in actions supporting hierarchy levels of preference than using shredded trash to make electricity. In that same time, Washington County has invested more than \$27 million on similar activities. In 2014, cities in Ramsey County spent more than \$10 million on recycling services for their residents. This resulted in the 2016 purchase of the Ramsey/Washington Recycling & Energy Center (R&E Center) by the counties. In owning the facility and requiring all trash produced in Ramsey and Washington counties be brought to it, the East Metro area is maximizing the recovery of resources and diverting as much as possible from landfills.

As was mentioned above, all trash produced in Ramsey and Washington counties has to be brought to the R&E Center, where recyclables are pulled from the waste stream, and remaining trash is either processed into a fuel source for Xcel power plants with a very small percentage sent to landfill if no other use is appropriate. Every effort is made to find a higher priority use for all MSW before processing it into RDF in addition to keeping things from even getting to this point. We have made a lot of gains on this front, and the work continues.



Looking ahead to the future....

One way we have been working to divert organic MSW from even making it to the R&E Center is through the set-up of drop off sites around Ramsey County. Some of you may use the one in Como Park (D2 staff frequents this one!), or at our yard waste sites, another of which recently opened in St. Anthony Village. These are 24-hour sites that any Ramsey County resident can use to drop off organic waste. If you would like one in your community, please let your city's elected officials know you are interested!

Our crisis of affordable housing

by Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo



During the last few years, our region's crisis of affordable housing has become harder and harder to ignore. From the sprawling encampments of people without shelter, to the chorus of complaints about skyrocketing rent and home prices, to the brave activism centered around preserving affordable housing where it still exists, it has become increasingly apparent to almost everyone that something must be done.

That's why I have made it my top priority as Ramsey County commissioner to work to address this problem. I know that my constituents in places such as Frogtown, the North End, and the East Side can't wait for relief and more stable housing, but I know also that this isn't just an issue of struggling neighborhoods. Constituents from all across my district and the Twin Cities have reached out about the challenges they have faced finding and maintaining housing that is affordable and meets their and their families'

needs. It's essential therefore that all of our neighborhoods and communities do their part to help solve this crisis and ensure that we have a region that can prosper during the coming decades.

Here are some of the initiatives I have already been involved in:

First, I am representing Ramsey County on the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness. It is a partnership of elected officials and key staff from across the seven-county metro that is working to immediately address the lack of shelter space for our growing population experiencing homelessness. We know that we can't solve this problem with property taxes alone; not only are our taxpayers already stressed by the weight of the existing levy, but further increases may only add to the difficulty of finding housing. That's why we are pushing for a sustainable and adequate funding source from the legislature and our regional partners; it is important to spread the burden of solving this regional problem.

Second, I have been a strong advocate at the Ramsey County Board for continuing and expanding our efforts to find temporary and permanent shelter and resources for people who currently lack it. That includes expanding the Winter Safe Space, a collaboration between Ramsey County and nonprofit partners that provides additional emergency shelter beds during the colder months. I am also supporting tailored, wraparound services that work to help people who have gone years or decades without shelter build stability and a new path forward.

Third, I am working hard to ensure that Ramsey County maximizes opportunities for more affordable housing, especially in developments that are subsidized by taxpayers. That's why I have fought hard to ensure that Arden Hills lives up to its commitments in building more and more deeply affordable housing at the Rice Creek Commons development, which represents a transformative opportunity for our region to build an innovative and ecologically minded mixed-use and mixed-income community. Ramsey County has been clear throughout this process that Arden Hills' new position (a mere handful of units affordable to people who make more than \$70,000 each year) is unacceptable, and I will fight to maintain that position going forward.

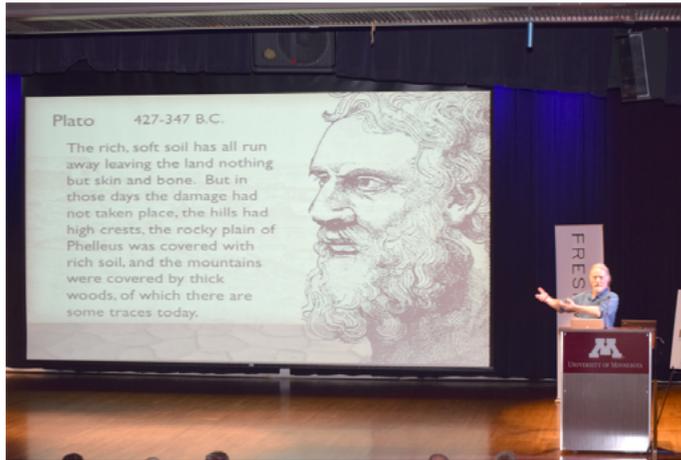
As always, please reach out to me if you have any issues or concerns. My doors are open, and I am always happy to take your call.

The importance of healthy soil

by Gwen Willems

Civilization itself rests upon the soil.
—Thomas Jefferson

Dave Montgomery is into soil. He's written three books about it and speaks on the topic regularly, as he did last month on the University of Minnesota's St. Paul Campus, thanks to the Freshwater organization and other sponsors.



The first book, *Dirt*, focuses on the bad news of how civilizations—including Classical Greece, Rome, Mayans in pre-Columbian Americas, Polynesia's Easter Island, Central America, and early China—declined when they did not take care of their top soil. He noted it's not a new concept and certainly not just his. Classical Greek philosopher Plato, circa 427-347 B.C., beat him to the idea.

Montgomery says we have already degraded at least a third of the world's agricultural land. Humanity loses another .3 percent of our global food production capacity each year to soil erosion and degradation, according to the UN's *Global State of the Soil*.

Dave Montgomery quoting Plato. Photo courtesy of Freshwater.

Montgomery looked at five hundred studies worldwide that indicate soil is eroding from farms at the rate of 1.5 millimeters per year. That might not sound like much, but it means an inch is eroded in less than twenty years. In contrast, how fast does nature make soil? It does so naturally at the rate of only .1002 millimeters per year, so it takes more than 1,000 years to naturally make an inch.

Now the good news. Montgomery asks, "What if I told you there was a relatively simple, cost-effective way to help feed the world, reduce pollution, pull carbon from the atmosphere, protect biodiversity, and make farmers more money?" Montgomery, who for many years was an ecopessimist, now believes that although soil degradation is one of the least recognized of environmental crises, it is solvable. He focused on soil restoration in his second book about dirt, *The Hidden Half of Nature*. He and his wife, Anne Biklé, a biologist, moved into a house in Seattle with a sizable lawn. She experimented, and they saw how adding organic matter to fuel microbial life in their dead-looking soil and not plowing it up resulted in healthy soil—dark, loose, with high carbon levels (sequestration). The same is being done on a much larger scale in diverse locations all over the world by different types of farmers using ground cover and mulch to prevent erosion and keep soils fertile.

Major benefits of healthy soil are:

- Higher farmer profits
- Comparable yields
- Less fossil fuel, fertilizer, and pesticide use
- Increased soil carbon and water-retention, with less off-site pollution

His third book on the subject of dirt, *Growing a Revolution: Bringing our Soil Back to Life*, upscales regenerative farming. The title refers to conservation agriculture as the fifth revolution. The first revolution was about the initial idea of cultivation and the introduction of the plow and animal labor. During the second, farmers adopted soil husbandry to improve land. The third was mechanization and industrialization. The fourth agricultural revolution used technological advances in the Green Revolution and biotechnology breakthroughs "that boosted yields and consolidated corporate control of the food system through proprietary seeds, agrochemical products, and commodity crop distribution," according to Montgomery.

In *Growing a Revolution*, Montgomery outlines three principles of conservation agriculture that he advocates for

fapplication on farms anywhere, big or small, high-tech or low-tech, conventional or organic:

- No-till: minimal or no disturbance of the soil
- Cover crops: growing crops and retaining crop residue so that the soil is always covered
- Crop rotation: use of diverse ways of rotating crops

Regenerative farmers can maintain or increase yields and increase profits while spending less on the fossil fuels, fertilizer, and pesticides that are major costs on conventional farms. By putting carbon back into the ground through organic matter, regenerative farming does not contribute to global carbon dioxide emissions as conventional farming does.

Montgomery is a very practical educator whose presentations show the dramatic difference in how depleted soil and healthy soil look—tan and dried vs. dark and full of plant material and worms. And in his books, he gives detailed examples of how different types of innovative farmers beneficially apply these principles across the United States and various countries worldwide. *Growing a Revolution* is written in lay-person language, but is also buttressed with notes, an extensive bibliography, and an index.



Poor and rich soil as shown in Dave Montgomery's presentations. Photo courtesy of Freshwater.

David R. Montgomery has a Ph.D. in geomorphology and is a Professor of Earth and Space Sciences at the University of Washington in Seattle. He was awarded a “Genius Grant” from the MacArthur Foundation in 2008.

Gwen is co-chair of the Capitol Region Watershed District Citizen Advisory Committee.

Chair and vice chair report on SD66 DFL activities

by SD66 Chair Ryan Lee and SD66 Vice Chair Katrina Lee



This spring has already been very busy for Senate District 66 and the DFL Party as a whole! At the last State Central Committee meeting, we elected a new secretary, [Adi Penugonda](#), and we're excited for the direction that he'll be taking the party, both in terms of its communications as well as its transparency. On March 10, our neighbors in the St. Paul DFL held their city caucuses, and several wards also convened to endorse city council candidates. It was great to see volunteers from the greater senate district pitch in to help put on the caucuses, and we appreciate everyone's efforts in giving the residents of St. Paul a voice in their local government.



*Adi Penugonda speaking at the Minnesota DFL State Central Committee meeting where he was elected secretary.
Photo by Gwen Willems.*

Here in Senate District 66, we've made a change to our regular meeting schedule. While we used to meet monthly on the first Monday of every month, in February we voted to go to bimonthly meetings (every other month). For the rest of 2019, even months (e.g., June, August) will see us call to order our central committee business meetings, while odd months (e.g., July, September) will be reserved for subcommittees to meet at the same time and place. We'll still be hosting happy hours on the third Tuesday of every month, and you can check our website for the complete calendar: <http://sd66-dfl.org/>

In March, the Budget Subcommittee met to pull together a proposed budget for the next two years, which was presented and passed at the April business meeting. This way, we have allocated funds for local and out-state candidates, our district's events, as well as the operating expenses of our business meetings, such as facility fees and paper and printing costs. You can review the approved working budget at <http://sd66-dfl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SD66-DFL-2019-2021-Budget.pdf>

The Caucus and Convention Accessibility and Simplification Committee also met in March and will meet again in

May to discuss ways that we can make our 2020 caucuses and convention successful. We just found out from the state DFL that there will not be a presidential preference ballot at the 2020 caucuses, as the statewide primaries will be the following week. You can mark your calendars:

- **Precinct caucuses** will be held in Minnesota on **Tuesday, February 25, 2020.**
- **The presidential primary** will be held on **Tuesday, March 3, 2020.**

This will affect our planning as well as the expected attendance for the caucuses, but we believe this allows us to focus on issues that are important to our local party unit, as well as the statewide resolutions and platform that we want to cultivate as a party in Minnesota.

Looking ahead to this summer, we're excited to support the Rosefest Parade as well as the Rice Street Parade, and the annual potluck picnic will also be upon us before we know it. We'll release more details for how to get involved with these events on our website, so stay tuned!

Thanks again for everything we do, and we look forward to the democratic primary season heating up!

The Roseville DFL is working on endorsements for 2020

by Roseville DFL Chair Lauren Peterson

It is time to start looking forward to the 2020 election cycle and think about ways that we can increase DFL representation at all levels of government. In 2018 Roseville voters elected their first council member endorsed by the Roseville DFL. Let's build on that success. We are hoping to have two Roseville DFL-endorsed candidates running in the 2020 City of Roseville election.

There was significant push back on introducing party endorsement into "nonpartisan" city office races by those who would prefer that voters not have full information about candidates' political affiliations. However, through endorsement, voters going to the ballot box have more information about the candidates and the values they represent. The DFL has historically endorsed candidates for county commissioners, county sheriffs, and city officials in many other communities.

The City of Roseville DFL has been working on our values statement which will highlight our positions on key issues affecting the city and its residents and will demonstrate the importance of having endorsed candidates in local elections.

The Roseville DFL is encouraging anyone who is interested in running for city council to come to our next meeting on June 4 at 7 p.m. at Davanni's, 1905 Perimeter Drive, Roseville, MN 55113, or contact us at (lrpeterson8@gmail.com). Please think about running and receiving the DFL endorsement

CALENDAR

**Monday, May 6,
6:30-7:30 p.m., SD66 DFL Events Subcommittee Meeting;
7:30-8:30 p.m., SD66 DFL Caucuses and
Conventions Subcommittee Meeting**
New Life Presbyterian Church
965 Larpenteur Avenue West, Roseville 55113

Tuesday, May 21, 6:30-8:30 p.m. - SD66 DFL Happy Hour
La Casita, 1925 Perimeter Drive, Roseville 55113

**Monday, June 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
SD66 Central Committee Meeting**
New Life Presbyterian Church
965 Larpenteur Avenue West, Roseville 55113

Tuesday, June 4, 6:30-8 p.m. - Roseville DFL
Davanni's Pizza & Hot Hoagies,
1905 Perimeter Drive, Roseville 55113

Tuesday, June 18, 6:30-8:30 p.m. - SD66 DFL Happy Hour
Spring Cafe at Como Lakeside Pavilion,
1360 Lexington Parkway North, St Paul 55103

Sunday, June 23, 1:30 p.m. - St. Paul DFL Convention
Site TBD; for more information: <https://stpauldfi.wordpress.com/2019/01/29/and-confirmed-locations-thus-far/>

Monday, June 24, 6-8 p.m. - Rosefest Rose Parade
1240 County Road B2 West, Roseville 55113

Tuesday, July 16, 6:30-8:30 p.m. - SD66 DFL Happy Hour

**Monday, August 5, 6:30-8:30 p.m.
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Davanni's Pizza & Hot Hoagies,
1905 Perimeter Drive, Roseville 55113

Tuesday, August 20 6:30-8:30 p.m. - SD66 DFL Happy Hour

Visit our website at <http://www.dfl-sd66.org/> for calendar updates.

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Rep. John Lesch
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The *Senate District 66 DFL Newsletter* is published four times a year to inform and educate all interested parties in the activities and issues of SD66 DFLers including elected officials and endorsed candidates. Please contact the editor if you are interested in joining the newsletter committee or submitting an article for publication.

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