

NEWS

Food Shelves in Demand

BY ERIKA SOUKUP

“THE STAR TRIBUNE” REPORTS that food shelves across the state were visited 3.8 million times in 2020—more than any other year on record—amid the combined crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic downturn, and civil unrest in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Many food shelves, especially in the metro area, are serving a growing number of older adults.

Food shelves in Minnesota saw a spike in June and July after the rioting following the death of George Floyd destroyed or damaged grocery stores in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Communities rallied together, with spontaneous food drives popping up in neighborhood parks, breweries, and theaters. But the need hasn't flattened. According to “The Star Tribune,” about 7.6 million pounds of food was given out in July by the state's food shelves, and after a slight dip in September the total pounds of food distributed statewide rose in the fall and winter, with nearly 8 million pounds of food doled out in November.

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One specific age group that's visiting the food shelf much more are seniors. They typically are of the highest concern due to COVID-19, and after the switch from in-person to drive-through lines, they were more likely to accept help and go to a food shelf.

Joe Walker, who oversees grants to food shelves and statistics at Hunger Solutions, stated in an interview with “The Star Tribune” that there hasn't been much of a back-up of lines with the food bank because the state's hunger relief system is well-organized and set up to respond to the crisis. “It seems like we warded off a much worse situation,” he said. “Minnesota has one of the best food shelf infrastructures in the country and one of the reasons we weren't seeing those long lines. ... If you drive through a small town in Minnesota you'll see the post office, maybe the bar, maybe an antique shop and then you'll see the food shelf.”

However, according to Hunger Solutions, this year there was a record high for visits to food shelves with 3,831,293 visits, which marks the 10th consecutive year with 3 million visits to the food shelves. If Minnesota food shelves were open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, more than seven people would visit a food shelf every minute.

Project ReConnect Rondo

BY REBECCA BEASLEY

CONSTRUCTION OF I-94 began in the late 1950s, which, as many know, ripped apart the community living in the Rondo neighborhood, which housed 85% of St. Paul's African American population. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. even visited the neighborhood before the freeway construction began, and preached at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church located on Snelling Avenue. Hundreds of homes and businesses were destroyed. Festivals, apologies, and memorial parks tried to make up for the destruction of the lively, close-knit community. In 2017, ReConnect Rondo formed, led by Keith Baker. This group's goal is to reconnect the neighborhood with a freeway cap or a land bridge.

Projects like ReConnect Rondo have succeeded in three cities: Dallas, Seattle, and Atlanta. This land bridge would be the first in the Twin Cities area. One tentative location for the bridge starts at Lexington Parkway North and goes to Rice Street. The project leaders plan to build both commercial and residential properties to revitalize the Rondo neighborhood. More importantly, this project isn't meant to be led entirely by outsiders. Rondo residents are encouraged to be a part of the project logistics. As a part of reconnecting Rondo, they need

the help of people who know and love Rondo. The project aims to bring more African American-owned businesses into the neighborhood, along with a mixture of cultural arts and nonprofit groups. Affordable housing for both multi-family and single-family homes are also planned. ReConnect Rondo is a \$6 million project. The money would come partially from the city of St. Paul in taxpayer dollars, but also through donations. This project requires the help of multiple organizations, both governmental and private/nonprofit.

This project has been in the works for years, but it is now getting a boost due to the recent call for social and racial justice. People view this as a way to right some of the wrongs, or to truly make up for the I-94 fiasco. ReConnect Rondo states on its website that the African American cultural enterprise district, which will be reconnected via land bridge, will reverse racial disparity gaps. They also claim that their project will help drive equitable outcomes for African Americans. The real question is whether these are real goals or just woke words. Either way, those living in the Rondo neighborhood can look forward to the success of this project that will, inevitably, bring life back into the community.

Need for Speed: Saint Paul Police Crackdown

BY RYAN SKILLE

ACCORDING TO THE Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS), state troopers issued more than 1,000 speeding tickets to Minnesota drivers for going over 100 miles per hour in 2020, twice as many as the year prior. Speeding accounted for 30% of all traffic fatalities in 2020, the highest number since 2008. In January of 2021 alone, state troopers handed out over 7,250 tickets for speeding, with 78 of them being drivers going over 100 miles per hour. Six people have already lost their lives due to speeding in the first month of 2021.

The problem began in the early months of the pandemic last year. Immediately following the lockdown, kids were attending school from home, many adults were working from home, restaurants and bars were closed, and the majority of highways were empty. Mike Hanson, director of the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety, told “StarTribune” that there were “plenty of lanes to use and abuse,” and many drivers took that opportunity.

The state's traffic department actually has an annual speed limit enforcement campaign that usually gets rolled out around July. However, with so many drivers taking advantage of the empty roads and speed-related

deaths spiking heavily, DPS decided to get their campaign going early this year. DPS managed to secure \$1 million in National Highway Traffic Safety Administration funding to combat the speed demons of the North. “Speeding is out of control on our roads and we will do something about it,” says Col. Matt Langer, chief of the Minnesota State Patrol according to “StarTribune.” Langer claims

that many drivers actually believe that law enforcement officers are simply not allowed to hand out speeding tickets during the pandemic due to social distancing necessities.

According to DPS's new measures, a speed ticket for going 10 miles per hour

over the speed limit will run you about \$110. That fine doubles for drivers going 20 miles per hour over and gets more expensive the further above the speed limit you are driving. If you are pulled over for going over 100 miles per hour, you could potentially get your license taken away from you for six months. DPS pleads with Minnesotans to drive smart and drive more slowly. “We need to solve this problem now,” Hanson says. “We can do this, Minnesota, but it takes all of us working together.”

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