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The Tenino Independent

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Mara Harris-Hogland joins School Board

By James Goldmeer
Independent/Sun News

The Rochester School Board unanimously appointed youth advocate Mara Harris-Hogland to fill the vacant Director District 5 seat on Oct. 28, concluding a public candidate search to replace former board member Heather Harris.

Harris-Hogland was sworn into office immediately following a 4-0 roll-call vote by the board, taking the oath to serve Rochester School District No. 401 until the next regularly scheduled school board election.

The decision followed open-session public interviews with three applicants and a subsequent 15-minute executive session, during which board members evaluated candidate qualifications.

"We had three outstanding candidates, all of you bringing value to this board," Board Chairman Grant Rodeheaver said prior to introducing the appointment motion. "We appreciate that it's a good problem to have".

Harris-Hogland brings extensive professional experience in youth development, emotional skills training and community leadership to the Rochester School Board.

She currently serves as a Skills Coach with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Thurston County, providing youth with behavioral and emotional guidance. Her decade-long career with the organization includes progressive leadership roles, including Branch Director in Tenino, Program Director in Olympia, Teen Director in Tumwater and Program Professional in Rochester.



James Goldmeer/ Devaul Publishing
Grant Rodeheaver swears Mara Harris-Hogland into the vacant District 5 school board seat.

Her academic background includes a Bachelor of Science in Behavioral Sciences with an emphasis in Childhood and Adolescent Disorders from Grand Canyon University, a DTA associate degree in Business from Centralia College.

The District 5 seat became vacant following the resignation of Heather Harris, who stepped down at the Sept. 24 board meeting due to personal reasons and an upcoming relocation outside the district. Harris had served on the five-member body since December 2025.

Under district policy, Rochester School Board members must reside within their designated geographical director districts to qualify for appointment, though seats are elected at large by district voters for unpaid four-year terms.

During her candidate presentation, Harris-Hogland shared a personal motive for seeking a leadership role in the district. She revealed to board members that she attended Rochester schools from fifth through eighth grade before transferring to a northern school district.

"I ended up actually transferring to a different school up north because I felt like I didn't fit in here and that I didn't have the support that I needed," Harris-Hogland told the board. "I have a little one who I would love to be able to come to the school district and be proud and say, 'I know he's getting a great education, I know there are people that care'".

Witnessing positive growth across Rochester schools over the intervening years motivated her decision to apply.

Throughout her discussion with board members, Harris-Hogland outlined a student-centered philosophy grounded in empathy, engagement and holistic well-being. She framed the primary function of a school director as showing up for children and serving as an active, collaborative team member for families across the community.

Addressing ongoing district challenges regarding attendance and classroom participation, Harris-Hogland urged school leaders to look beyond symptoms to address root causes. She empha-

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Rochester football closes regular season undefeated

Friday, Oct. 30 the Rochester Warriors closed the regular season with a 55-0 victory over Elma.

This is only the second time in the school's history, and the first time since 1999 that a Warriors football team has completed a 9-0 regular season.

The team will continue representing Rochester as they continue to play for a state title.The next game is Saturday, Nov. 9 at Harry E Lang Stadium in Lakewood.

Tenino earns risk management award

The City of Tenino was recognized for its proactive safety efforts at the Association of Washington Cities Risk Management Service Agency (RMSA) annual meeting in Chelan, earning the pool's Risk Management Achievement Award.

The award honors Tenino's work over the past year to strengthen risk awareness, mitigate exposures, and improve claim outcomes, which ultimately contributes to lower insurance costs and improved community safety.



James Goldmeer/ Devaul Publishing
Tenino residents speak out at the city's public hearing.

Tenino considers $41 monthly increase to keep utility funds afloat

By James Goldmeer
Independent/Sun News

Facing mounting financial pressures and community pushback, Tenino city leaders met Tuesday, Oct. 27, to address pressing infrastructure challenges, a proposed utility rate hike and long-term wastewater solutions.

The meeting provided residents with an update on the city's financial balancing act, highlighting the difficult choices ahead as officials work to keep vital services self-sustaining.

Proposed adjustments and resident concerns

At the center of the debate is a proposed $41 monthly utility bill increase for local households, introduced by Mayor David Watterson.

Under the plan, which would take effect Jan. 1, 2027, the combined monthly base rate for water and sewer per Equivalent Residential Unit (ERU) would jump significantly. The adjustment includes a $35 monthly increase dedicated to sewer charges alongside a $6 base rate increase for water service.

Watterson has consistently framed the rate hike as an unavoidable step driven by aging infrastructure, maintenance costs, debt service obligations and strict regulatory compliance.

"I know nobody enjoys raising rates, and these numbers do land on real households, but the aim tonight ... is to make one plan now so the city isn't forced into a much bigger emergency later," Watterson said during the meeting.

However, the proposal has drawn criticism from residents concerned about affordability. Several community members spoke during the public comment period and city staff reported receiving more than 25 letters before the hearing began.

"Several seniors have reached out to city hall, writing in or calling, saying, 'I stay in my house all day long. All I have is my TV. And with this rate increase, I'm going to have to turn the TV off'," Watterson said. "It kills me. It makes me sick. I was nauseated before this just knowing I had to give this message."

One resident urged the council to explore senior discounts or utility assistance programs for sewer bills for community members on fixed incomes, pointing out that while electric assis-

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Annual Tenino Holiday Market set for Thanksgiving weekend

By James Goldmeer
Independent/Sun News

The Kodiak Room in downtown Tenino is preparing to transform into a festive showcase of local craftsmanship as the Tenino Holiday Market returns for its seventh year.

Scheduled for Thanksgiving weekend, Nov. 27 through Nov. 29, the three-day holiday shopping event will run daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 225 Sussex Ave. W.

Organized through a partnership between Tenino Arts and the Tenino Area Chamber of Commerce, the market will feature hand-crafted items, holiday decor and specialty treats from more than 36 skilled local artisans. This year's roster highlights regional creators including

- Black Lotus Art
- Colvin Ranch Provisions
- Creative Ginger
- Found-Tins N Things
- Gaean Allusions Pottery
- Happy Tails PNW
- Jewels Epoxy
- Karmakee Farm
- Lyons Pride Wood Designs
- Megan Tribble
- Onion Flower Arts
- Puyallup Leather
- Raintoad Designs
- Suzie Holt, Fused Glass Art
- The Tenino Stone Carvers
- Woolen Whimsy Fiber Arts

alongside dozens of other independent makers.

Operating in a unique retail storefront format, individual artisans will not be stationed at personal booths during the weekend. Instead, all purchases are processed centrally at checkout counters managed by the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and community volunteers.

What began as a modest gathering of displaced artisans operating out of a parking lot during the pandemic has evolved into a staple of the region's cultural calendar. After transitioning downtown and co-hosting multiple seasonal markets, Tenino Arts has officially incorporated as a nonprofit organization dedicated to fostering creative opportunities and community support.

Donna Mayo, owner of glass art booth Of Water Wind and Woods and president of Tenino Arts, said the event's enduring appeal lies in its strong sense of community and mutual encouragement among small business owners.

"For me, it's the community aspect that I appreciate most," Mayo stated in a review of a previous Tenino Holiday Market. "As small business owners it is imperative that our efforts have a financial payoff, but our small venue affords us more. We have the opportunity to connect with each other as well as invest and encourage."

Mayo noted that local officials and downtown merchants have consistently welcomed the economic boost and steady foot traffic driven by the seasonal markets.

"Our local officials are pretty proud of Tenino's growing arts culture, and the downtown businesses have seen an uptick in customer count when we hold events," Mayo stated. "We have some seriously talented and innovative artists in our collective. It's exciting for what will be created and revealed next."

Doors open to the public at 10 a.m. on Friday, Nov. 27, continuing through Sunday, Nov. 29. Community members interested in viewing the full artist line-up or learning more about future artisan applications can find details online through Tenino Arts.

Local church offers free Thanksgiving baskets for families

Grace Valley Church at Stone City has launched "Grace at the Table," a Thanksgiving outreach initiative aiming to provide free holiday meal baskets to 20 local families in need.

Each basket includes the ingredients necessary to prepare a traditional Thanksgiving dinner at home. Registration is required, and baskets are available on a limited basis to Tenino-area residents at no cost.

In-person sign-ups will take place during the church's Wrapped in Grace Community Coat Drive from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 8, at the Stone City Event Center in Tenino.

County Veteran Resource Fair set for Nov. 5

Thurston County's Veteran Assistance Program will host its annual Veteran Resource & Job Fair from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 5.

The free event connects active-duty military members and veterans with local workforce development opportunities, community services, and regional support programs. Free lunch and promotional giveaways will be provided to attendees. The event will be held at the Lacey Community Center, 6729 Pacific Ave. SE.

Turkey Day 5K to benefit local nonprofit

Get Fit Tenino will host its annual Tenino Turkey Day 5K on Thanksgiving morning, Thursday, Nov.26, raising funds for a local nonprofit organization.

The 5-kilometer run, walk, and stroll begins at 8:30 a.m. at Tenino City Park, located at 215 Park Ave. E.Registration is $35 per person, with all proceeds benefiting Raise for Rowyn, a local nonprofit that provides financial and emotional support to families navigating the loss of a child.

Participants who sign up by Nov. 11 will be guaranteed an event T-shirt in their preferred size.