

## EDITORIAL

# Bethesda purchase a turning point for Watertown

Watertown, this is a big deal.

The Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation's announcement — which had been rumored for months — finally became public this week — a colossal \$16 million reinvestment in the community centered around buying the former Bethesda property.

To be clear, a lot of things still have to happen for this plan to come together, but the keystone is in place to kick it off — the purchase of the 55,000-square-foot building and the 90 acres around it.

Under the savvy and astute leadership of Tina Crave, the Foundation's bold move is an attempt to meet a lot of community needs at once, although it will take years for all the pieces to fall into place. It's a visionary way to tackle things like the acute shortage of child-care, the scarcity of affordable housing and the YMCA's need to come into the modern era.

As momentous as the Town Square and the new library have been for the city, this project has potential to be transformative, to help Watertown reinvent itself and put the city ahead of surrounding communities that are struggling with similar challenges, but have not conceived of a concrete plan to resolve them head on.

The Foundation, with backing from the city, and using some Dodge County ARPA funds, will create what they are calling The Collective.

Let's step back a minute and look at the big picture. Watertown has had a history of being an innovative place to be. It's this ingenuity that drove it to be such a commercial and industrial hub a century or more ago. But what drives a lot of this are the people — hard working and abundant people from in and around the city to staff businesses and factories. They are the real engine that turns ideas into products, and leads to economic growth.

But what happens when people cannot afford to live here? What happens when families, which now almost universally require two incomes to live, cannot afford child care, and, as a result, many of them drop out of the workforce, because raising kids at home is cheaper than paying for childcare, which was already both expensive and hard to find, and that situation only got worse as a result of the pandemic.

Business are struggling to find workers, the people who can drive commerce and lift the entire community. As a result, Watertown stagnates. Without people, good people, businesses are gasping to survive. They will not make Watertown home or stay in Watertown if they know that people cannot afford to live here on decent wages.

So this project, if everything falls into place, could be key to a renaissance for the city. It tells workers and employers that we stand ready to make it happen, to do what needs to be done to make Watertown work for them.

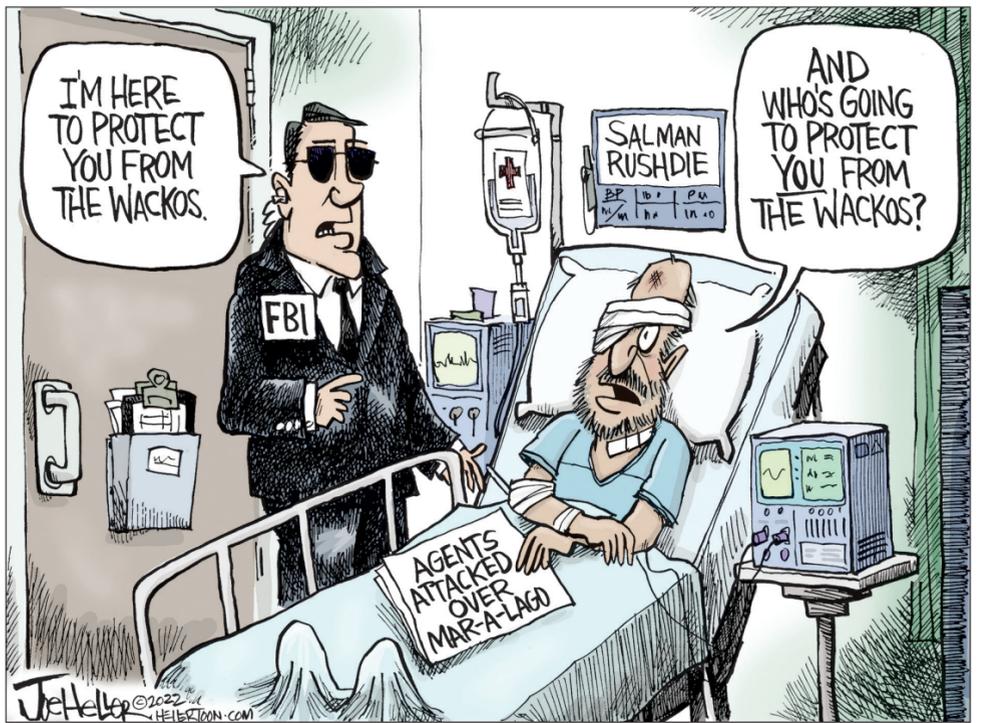
And, as an added bonus, creating a new YMCA opens the door to many recreational and cultural and other benefits. Just like at how the new YMCA in Pabst Farms has elevated the Oconomowoc area. It's a selling point for civic leaders to show off another amenity, another place that sets Watertown apart, above the rest.

The city has a history of repurposing old places and the result is something old that gets reinvented and something new that is even greater. The old hospital on Main Street was remade into senior living after the new hospital was built. Maranatha University was born after a previous religious institution closed its doors in that spot. Even the current YMCA is in the spot that was once the high school when that gorgeous new campus was built on the north side. And this Collective takes a closed office building and campus and turns it into a new vision.

The redevelopment is vital to reimagining Watertown. Times are changing and the community and the world have new needs. It's the ability to adapt and solve problems that define the character of a community and whether it will thrive. To not change and not grow is a moribund recipe.

And that's what makes this plunge so important and so exciting for the city. It's a way to turn the corner and embrace tomorrow, and to set us above the rest of the pack. It says Watertown works together and solves problems, and this is what makes us great and why you should move here, live here and do business here. It makes it a good place to raise a family.

Hats off to Tina Crave and all the other key figures who put this together. Let's hope the next steps in this process are as fruitful as this important and giant stride promise to be.



## VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

### Vote Van Someren, not Fitzgerald

Dear Editor:

This November we decide who will represent Watertown in Congress. The incumbent, Scott Fitzgerald, does not represent us.

He recently tweeted about his record on veterans, border issues, economic recovery from the pandemic.

In each case, Fitzgerald is dishonest.

He voted *against* the PACT bill that supported veterans

exposed to oil fires and burn pits in the desert wars over the last two decades. As a former guardsman himself, this is unconscionable.

His trips to the border are for show, without proposals for immigration reform. Wisconsin is *not* Arizona. We have immigration crises as dairy operations rely on undocumented immigrants to operate the core 24/7 processes of our most important industry. Solve those issues.

Fitzgerald voted against the ARP even as the communities are using funds for critical projects

benefiting small businesses, communities and schools — all had budgets ravaged by COVID-19. Watch out, he will claim credit for these improvements! Call him out if he does!

Time for a change. Consider Mike Van Someren, lawyer, tax specialist, former Badger lineman. He will be at the Watertown office, across from Towne Cinema, Saturday, Aug. 20, 5-7:30 p.m.. Find out how Mike will represent you and your family's interests in Washington.

**Ben Adams  
Watertown**

## Step up and say whether or not it's so, Joe

By S.E. Cupp

The president has said he's planning on running again. People should take him at his word."

That was Anita Dunn, a top adviser to President Biden, sounding very confident in her insistence that Biden will seek a second term — and almost indignant that the question is being raised at all.

But the question is being raised all over the place, by reporters and by other Democrats.

Two years into the incumbent's first term, Democrats clearly haven't figured out the 2024 plan or the messaging, and that's leaving the party sounding less like Biden is the done deal Dunn is promising.

The resulting fallout has been messy, to say the least.

Democratic Rep. Carolyn Maloney, running for Congress in Manhattan, raised eyebrows during a debate with Rep. Jerry Nadler and attorney Suraj Patel when she announced, seemingly unbeknownst to the White House, "I don't believe he's running for reelection."

Then, in an interview with CNN, she apologized to the president and said she wants him to run again.

Then, in an on-the-record interview with the New York Times, she said, "off the record" (but it wasn't) "he's not running again," then, "on the record," went even further, stating, "he should not run again."

This weekend, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre swatted questions of Biden's 2024 viability away, carefully insisting, "He intends to run. He intends to run."

The very same day, another New York congressman, Jamaal Bowman, had trouble answering the question of whether Biden should run again.

On a CNN panel (on which I was a participant) he dodged

the question several times, and finally hedged by saying, "Yes, if the president is running for office — if he's running — I will support him."

A third New Yorker, Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, refused to endorse a 2024 bid, saying simply, "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

Others, including Minnesota Rep. Dean Phillips, Sen. Joe Manchin, Rep. Angie Craig, and Colorado Democratic Party's first vice chair Howard Chou, have either refused to endorse him or have said outright that he should not run.

These misgivings are reflected in voter sentiment as well. A July poll from CNN revealed 75% of Democratic voters want someone else to run in 2024 — a troubling number when compared to the 47% of Republican voters who say they'd support someone other than Donald Trump.

Not since Lyndon Johnson in 1968 has a president chosen not to seek re-election, and there have only been six total in the history of the United States.

But these are extraordinary times and circumstances. Biden will be 82 years old next inauguration day if he wins reelection, and 86 if he completes his second term. His approval ratings dipped to a new low of 38% in late July, and have rebounded slightly in the days since winning a number of legislative victories.

Meanwhile, Trump — who's just three years younger than Biden — has managed to keep the Republican Party and voters mostly coalesced around him, although Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has been recently breaking through in some battleground states.

Biden insists he's the only person who can beat Trump again. And given that he's the only person from either party to do it, it's hard to argue his logic.

But "planning" on running, and "intending" to run — all things his camp has said — aren't the same things as announcing your reelection bid.

And Democrats had better sort this out soon. Trump has effectively been running since 2020, and perhaps never stopped.

As I told Bowman on CNN, there's no clear second-choice for Democrats, and if they're going to prepare voters to get behind someone else, they'd better go ahead and let them know who that should be, or let a field of contenders compete.

If Biden decides not to run, it need not be an embarrassment for Democrats. He was always meant to be a transitional president, not a transformational one. Biden can confidently own this while conditioning the environment for a successor.

If, on the other hand, he runs, he'll likely be primaried by what one Dem strategist told me would be "a thousand" other candidates. The odds of the latter happening increase with every passing day that Biden's intentions to run are doubted.

That's a bad scenario for Democrats: a divided field against an incumbent who's short on enthusiastic voters.

The lingering question of whether he'll run is undoubtedly weakening his standing. Every interview with a Democratic lawmaker is an opportunity for them to awkwardly hedge or even discourage a run. The longer this is in the news cycle, the worse it looks for Biden.

Rather than keep voters and Democrats guessing — and allow a pileup of naysayers — Biden's best move is to announce decisively what he plans to do sooner than later. In or out, the clock is ticking for Biden in more ways than one.

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LENGTH: Letters must be 400 words or less, but there are exceptions. Because Voice of the People is intended mainly as a forum for ideas, "thank you" letters are limited to 100 words, and recognizing no more than a half dozen by name. Election letters are limited to 200 words (and must

be submitted at least one week in advance of the election).

SIGNATURE: Letters should be typed or emailed and include the name, phone number and address of the author. Unsigned or anonymous letters are not permitted. For organizations, the name of one person is required to be published.