

This past year has been perhaps the most unusual and challenging in St. Cloud Municipal Band's 150-year history.

Tonight, I'll report on the year's challenges, opportunities and what's ahead for 2022.

First let's recognize board members Bob Bach, Tammy Creasy, Lucy Gerold-Amundson, Vicki Johnson, Tammy Krogstad and Patric Lewandowski for their work. The board conducted 14 meetings, this year, mostly on Zoom.

How to handle Covid-19 dominated all band activities. The board balanced everyone's desire to restart rehearsals and performances with the health and safety of band members and their families.

Our decisions were guided by advisories from the Minnesota Department of Health, Centers for Disease Control, the International Coalition of Performing Arts and band directors at the University of Minnesota. The board generally took a conservative approach on how we should move forward.

We surveyed members on how comfortable they would be returning to rehearsals under different circumstances and their vaccination status. During the summer, we rehearsed outdoors with masks and bell covers. As vaccines became widely available by mid-summer, the board decided to resume indoor rehearsals with a vaccine or testing requirement, masks and bell covers.

The pandemic indirectly caused a financial challenge for the band. For many years, the city of St. Cloud contributed \$15,000 a year to our budget. When the pandemic hit, the city's revenue from sales, food and beverage and hotel/motel tax dropped significantly and revenue from the convention center dropped to zero. As a result, the city cut their contribution, and correctly pointed out that we were not performing.

Last winter, the board contacted the city about future support. Business Manager Joe Fox worked out an agreement with Matt Glaeseman from the city so that we could rent the former Media Services building. This helped us out in several ways. Redeemer Lutheran Church asked us to move our music library from their church. Meanwhile, our usual practice locations were shut down and prospects for when we could return to them looked very uncertain in the spring.

We moved our library, equipment and instruments to the Media Services building and there was enough space for indoor rehearsals. Joe continues to negotiate future support with the city and they have proposed a fee-per-performance plan. The city also raised the possibility that we could rent the band room space in the old Tech building once the remodeling work is done. That would give us a permanent home for rehearsals, equipment and music.

Other than one thunderstorm, we successfully rehearsed outdoors at the Media Services building and returned for three concerts at Barden Park.

During the spring, Tammy Creasy and I worked with the Charities Review Council as they reviewed our financial operations. The review takes place every three years. The reviewers found that we continue to meet the organization's standards and we can continue to use that approval in our marketing. Much like a financial audit, the review includes a detailed look at our finances, operations and structure. The process included a self-review of the board and its effectiveness. The council recommended that we develop a diversity, equity and inclusion plan. I appointed Vicki, Lucy, Patric, Tammy Krogstad and Catharine Bushman to a committee to come up with a plan. The band's future depends on enlarging our audience and membership to include all members of our community. The committee's first action was to conduct a survey of our summer and fall audiences and study 2020 census data released this fall.

In August, Catharine informed the band that she had accepted a temporary position at St. Olaf College. While this is a tremendous professional opportunity for Catharine, the duties conflicted with our Monday night rehearsals. Catharine requested a leave of absence for this season, but the band's bylaws do not offer that option. The board decided not to amend the bylaws because there was concern about locking the board and Catharine into a leave. The board launched a search for an interim director with help from Catharine and Lowell Larson. We offered the position to Andrew Nelson and he agreed to conduct for the fall and spring seasons, including conducting the band at its first Paramount Theater concert in two years.

Looking ahead to 2022, we need to keep the band and our audiences healthy. We need to work with the city of St. Cloud to secure long-term funding and support. We need to develop and implement a measurable diversity, equity and inclusion plan. And most importantly we need to focus on rehearsing and performing great music.