



## Governor's Council on Economic Expansion Agenda: 04/25/2022

Time: 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM

Location: Virtual and Minnesota Department of Human Services, 540 Cedar Street, Saint Paul, MN

**Objective: Understand strategies to realize the vision that Minnesota is the healthiest, greenest, safest, most equitable place for communities to thrive.**

1:30 PM – 2:00 PM Welcome

- Ice breaker exercise
- Agenda overview and timeline
- Introduce guests

2:00 PM – 2:25 PM Small group warm-up – Elements of thriving communities with guest speakers

- Seena Hodges, president of the board of trustees at the Walker Art Center
- Sondra Samuels, president and CEO, Northside Achievement
- Steve Simon, secretary of state, State of Minnesota
- Sarah Strommen, commissioner, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

2:25 PM – 3:00 PM Speaker spotlight and large group discussion

3:00 PM – 3:05 PM *Break*

3:05 PM – 3:40 PM Subcommittee roadmap scope sharing

3:40 PM – 3:55 PM Activity: Post-it notes with questions and interpretations

3:55 PM – 4:30 PM Large group discussion

4:30 PM Meeting adjourns

## Guest Speaker Biographies – April 25, 2022

### Seena Hodges, president of the board of trustees at the Walker Art Center

Seena Hodges (she/her) is a connector who loves people and is passionate about equity, intersectional feminism, and access to brave spaces for all. She founded The Woke Coach® in 2018 because she wholeheartedly believes that racial equity is the defining issue of our time.

Through The Woke Coach, Seena and her team engage with clients to facilitate conversations and complete projects that live at the intersection of equity, diversity, inclusion, antiracism, and empowerment. The company's mission is to help individuals deepen their analysis and develop an understanding around issues of bias and injustice, in turn, helping them become the best, most understanding, empathetic version of themselves. Clients often describe their engagement with The Woke Coach as “transformational,” “though-provoking,” “challenging,” and “life-changing.”



Seena is a graduate of Columbia College (SC) and earned her MFA at Columbia University in New York City. She is a trained equity, diversity and inclusion facilitator and a certified administrator of Clifton Strengths® (StrengthsFinder) and the Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI) — the premier cross-cultural assessment of intercultural competence. She has received a professional Train the Trainer certificate from the University of Minnesota. She previously partnered with the State of Minnesota to facilitate cultural competency training for teachers across the state through the Professional Education Licensing Standards Board.

Seena is also a core facilitator with artEquity — a national organization that conducts social justice and racial equity training that lives at the intersection of arts and activism. Most recently, that work has taken her to Chicago, Princeton, Washington, DC, New Orleans, and Portland.

Seena is a dynamic communications professional with extensive experience in public relations, marketing, and communications. She is a graduate of Columbia University with a master's degree in Theatre Management & Producing and has worked in both the commercial and non-profit theater industry as a producer, marketing director, publicist, development director, and audience development associate. She has also worked in the non-profit sector as a communications manager and marketing director.

Seena began her career at the Columbia Urban League — a non-profit organization committed to issues of social justice. Prior to starting The Woke Coach, Seena worked in various capacities for the Guthrie Theater, Theater Latté Da, Mixed Blood Theatre Company, Pillsbury House Theatre and Artistry MN. She was most recently Associate Vice President of Strategy and Communications at The Saint Paul & Minnesota Community Foundations (now Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation).

An avid supporter of the arts, Seena is the President of the Board of Trustees at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is the first person of color to hold this distinction. She is also a member of the Black Trustee Alliance for Art Museums (BTA), an organization created to increase the inclusion of Black

perspectives and narratives in North American art museums. In keeping with her commitment to promoting entrepreneurship and helping individuals design their destiny, Seena is a member of The Women’s Presidents’ Organization (WPO), a non-profit membership organization for women presidents, CEOs, and managing directors of privately held, multimillion-dollar companies; and Minnesota Women’s Economic Roundtable, a forum for high-profile women leaders to gather insights on broad economic issues; examine their implications; and take action in their communities and lives.

Seena is currently writing her first book, “From Ally to Accomplice: How to Lead as a Fierce Antiracist,” to be released in early 2022.

### **Sondra Samuels, president and CEO, Northside Achievement**

Sondra Samuels is the President & CEO of the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ), a collaborative of over 30 partner nonprofits and schools. Along with parents, students, partners, and staff, Sondra is leading a revolutionary culture shift in North Minneapolis focused on ending multigenerational poverty through education and family stability. The NAZ Collaborative is working toward a single goal—to prepare low-income North Minneapolis children to graduate from high school college- and career-ready.



NAZ has scaled up in support of over 1,000 parents and 2,300 students as they turn the social service model on its head and lead the creation of a college-bound culture throughout the community.

Ms. Samuels has been a resident of North Minneapolis for over two decades and is a national leader committed to results-based leadership and accountability. She, her staff, and their partners work tirelessly to ensure the integration of effective cradle-to-career solutions across the NAZ collaborative — to scale and sustain results across the community and to achieve the systems and policy changes needed for low-income families and children of color to truly share in the prosperity of the Twin Cities Region. Under her leadership, NAZ was named a federal Promise Neighborhood and has become a nationally recognized model for community and systems change.

Sondra serves on the Leadership team of Generation Next, Community Advisory Board of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank’s Opportunity and Inclusive Growth Institute, as well as the boards of Health Partners and Great MN Schools. She received her Bachelor’s degree from Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD, and an MBA from Clark-Atlanta University in Atlanta, GA.

## Steve Simon, Minnesota's 22nd Secretary of State

Simon was sworn into office on January 5, 2015, and as Minnesota's chief elections administrator pledged in his inaugural address to "work with anyone, of any political affiliation, from any part of our state" to protect, defend, and strengthen the right to vote in Minnesota.

As Secretary of State, he partners with township, city, and county officials to organize elections on behalf of Minnesota's nearly four million eligible voters, and to ensure that the election system is fair.

Simon also oversees a wide range of services for Minnesota businesses and administers the "Safe at Home" address confidentiality program for people whose personal safety is at risk, often due to physical abuse or threats.

His goals as Minnesota's Secretary of State are straightforward: expand access to voting, remove barriers to voting, make business services as streamlined as possible, strengthen protections for victims of domestic violence and, most importantly, be a Secretary of State for all Minnesotans.

Before being elected Minnesota's Secretary of State, Simon served in the Minnesota House of Representatives for ten years representing the communities of St. Louis Park and Hopkins.

Simon spent much of his time in the state legislature immersed in elections issues, including serving as the chair of the House Elections Committee in 2013 and 2014. He played a lead role in many of the election reforms that Minnesota has embraced over the last several years, including no-excuse absentee voting, online voter registration, and easier access to voting for Minnesotans overseas, including those in the military.

Simon also served as Assistant Attorney General of Minnesota and worked as a lawyer in private practice for several years. He was named a "Rising Star" four different times by Law & Politics magazine and has received many other recognitions for his work on behalf of Minnesotans, including the "Outstanding Legislator Award" from the Minnesota School Board Association and the "Civic Leadership Award" from the Citizens League.

Simon grew up in St. Louis Park and Hopkins. He graduated with a B.A in Political Science from Tufts University in Massachusetts in 1992 and earned a J.D. from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1996. Simon and his wife Leia live in Hopkins with their two children, Hannah and Noah, and rescue dog, Hugo.



## **Sarah Strommen, commissioner, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources**

Formerly the DNR’s assistant commissioner, Commissioner Strommen now oversees a DNR staff of about 2,700 located in St. Paul and around the state, with the mission of working with Minnesota citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, providing outdoor recreation opportunities, and providing for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life. Prior to coming to DNR in 2015, Strommen served as assistant director at the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) before becoming acting deputy director. She previously served as policy director for Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness and as associate director of the Minnesota Land Trust.



Strommen holds a bachelor’s degree from Grinnell College, where she majored in biology and Latin American studies. After graduating from college, she used a Fulbright research scholarship to do field work in Costa Rica, and subsequently earned her master’s degree in environmental management from Duke University.

She served several terms on the Ramsey City Council and was elected mayor in 2012, a position she stepped down from in May 2018. She is an avid outdoors person, spending family weekends fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, camping, and hiking.