



East Village

Magazine

May 2018

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East Village Magazine

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Commentary

As the winter thaws, will distrust melt away?

By Paul Rozycki

It's been a long, hard winter. With record snowfall, dark dismal days, and months of chilling temperatures, it finally looks like spring is on the way. It's taken a long time.

Like this hard and seemingly endless winter, the frigid distrust of government that has developed in Flint is going to take a while to melt away. And like the recent winter, distrust permeates the system deeper, and has lasted longer than we expected.

There are many causes for the icy distrust that has developed over the years, but three current issues have helped freeze the city into its current situation.

The city charter

It is now well over 100 days since the new city charter has officially been in place. The voters passed it last year by a two-to-one margin, and it was supposed to take full effect on the first of this year. That didn't happen. The city council and the administration failed to nominate and appoint members to the Ethics and Accountability Board, who in turn would appoint the city ombudsperson. For several months, almost nothing happened, and there were rumors that the council and the mayor were intentionally stalling to avoid having to deal with a board that could look over their shoulders. Others warned that there would be attempts to undo some parts of the charter with amendments in the November election.

In the first months of the year the new charter was barely mentioned, and only a few council members offered potential names for the Ethics and Accountability Board. Requirements that the council develop up-to-date job descriptions for the board also seemed lost in the shuffle of other business.

While there is still a way to go, that resistance might be melting. At a recent council meeting each of the council members said that they had or would soon nominate individuals for the board. It hasn't happened yet, but it's more progress than we've seen in the first months of the year. Each council member can nominate one person from his or her ward and the mayor can make two appointments,

bringing the total to 11.

So far, according to attorney Terry Bankert, the mayor and administration have failed to set a timeline for choosing the board members and the ombudsperson. A public hearing is required as a final step in the appointment process. Once the board is in place it can begin the process of selecting an ombudsperson for the city. The new budget for the city did include a line item to fund the ombudsperson, as required by the charter.

Similarly, the council has begun the process of creating and applying accurate job descriptions for some city positions, as required by the charter. Here too, there's still a way to go, but the process is underway.

The water crisis and the water PODs

There have also been signs that the Flint water crisis was starting to turn the corner. While distrust remained high, a variety of experts have reported that the lead levels in the water have dropped and are (for the most part) within traditionally acceptable levels. Assurances have been given that while Flint's water isn't perfect, it's comparable to other cities, and back to the levels before the water crisis began.

That's all well and good — except for one thing. Many of those offering quality assurances on our water were the same individuals or groups who assured us four years ago that all was well, and there was nothing to worry about. So it's hardly surprising that even the chorus of apparent good news was met with doubts. Under any conditions that trust will take a long time to heal, but if the numbers are accurate, things seemed to be going in the right direction.

Until the water PODs were closed.

Perhaps, if the water really has improved and is safe to drink, it was reasonable to close the water PODs at some point. But the way the governor's office handled it by announcing a last-minute closing on a Saturday morning was a perfect way to roll back any hint of trust that might have been growing. The weekend cutoff caused a near stampede

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Cover: Former J. Ed & Louise Burroughs home at 925 Avon Street



Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Photo of the Month: Hamilton Dam demolition on the Flint River

Come hell or high water, Flint is bursting with dam issues

By Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.

A deluge of rain in February resulting in a breach at Thread Lake and unusual weather in general this spring have wreaked havoc on the dams in Flint, causing lower water levels at Thread Lake and issues with the removal of both the Hamilton and Fabri dams.

Rebecca Fedewa, executive director of the Flint River Watershed Coalition (FRWC) explained, "During this time of high water, the dam at Thread Lake breached along its western side. The FRWC was informed that as soon as the city of Flint was aware of the breach, they connected with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), as well as local engineering firms to assess the situation."

According to Fedewa, the breach at Thread Lake Dam came as no surprise, as the MDEQ and many others had warned that this was a possibility for many years due to the deteriorating condition of the dams.

For the moment, there is no permanent fix for the Thread Lake Dam and the city of Flint has had issues closing the gate on the dam as they attempted to restore some of the lake's water levels. Further study of the dam will be required in order to come up with a real long-term solution, but "that

could take a long while," Fedewa said.

Mona Munroe-Younis, a resident of the Thread Lake neighborhood, said people are worried about "the long-term effect on the lake and their property values. After the dam breach, Munroe-Younis reached out to Kevin Schronce, lead planner for the City of Flint Planning and Zoning Division. She asked him if there were concerns about there being contaminants in the sediment after hearing also that the island in the middle of the lake used to be used by the military and that she had heard many lead rounds had been fired into the lake.

In a letter Schronce responded, "MDEQ (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality) was initially concerned with sediment migration, however, after inspecting the situation they told us they were no longer concerned and that we would not have to test the sediment or investigate the creek further."

Schronce clarified the lake will not naturally refill, as it was not a naturally occurring lake but a reservoir. He also explained the reason the dam was installed in the first place was so the lake would freeze and ice could form. The ice was then harvested and sold around the city of Flint for people to use in their ice boxes.

Schronce added, "The City and Wade

Trim are working closely on a report that would provide cost estimates on potential repairs/replacement/alternatives. The current level of the lake will remain and obviously fluctuate based on weather events." He encouraged Munroe-Younis "to partner with any community entities who are interested in improving the city of Flint. The only thing at this point that can be done is to wait on the report and then weigh our potential options. Please remember that ultimately, dam repairs are extremely costly and time consuming. The City, as you know, has little-to-no capital improvement funding."

While the rupture of Thread Lake Dam is causing concern, some have seen it as an opportunity for a cleanup held April 28, Fedewa said. It was the annual Stewardship Day, "where we organize activities across the watershed. Thread Lake has been a traditional location, and we're working with partners to adjust due to the current lake levels." With the water levels so drastically low, she predicted, it would be easy for the community surrounding the lake to clean up the trash and debris along the now-dry shoreline.

"We are grateful no one was hurt during the breach," explained Fedewa, "and

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... Dam

(Continued from Page 4.)

that the city and state officials were effective in mitigating any immediate danger resulting from the breach.”

She warned, “We have longer-term concerns for both the health of Thread Creek downstream of the dam, as well as any human health impacts resulting from exposure to potentially contaminated sediments on the lake bed that were uncovered due to the lowering of the water levels.”



Water levels way down at Thread Lake (Photo by Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.)

The breach at Thread Lake Dam emphasizes the importance of maintaining and improving Flint’s water infrastructure, including its drinking water pipes, its sewer lines, and its dams; this in the face of Mother Nature’s unpre-

dictability, Fedewa said.

According to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) the typical amount of water discharge flowing in the Flint River is around 1200 cubic feet per second, but April of 2018 has seen levels

of discharge well over 4000 cubic feet per second.

Fedewa explained that due to the enormous flux in river discharge there’s been some delay on the removal of the Hamilton and Fabri dams. The temporary coffer

dams needed to safely remove the remaining sections of the Hamilton Dam have failed. Because of this, the crew attempted to move downstream to begin work at the Fabri Dam, but that has been postponed due to what Fedewa described as, “this crazy spring weather we’ve been having.”

As spring is just kicking into high gear, the likelihood of any real work getting done at these sites in the near future is a wash, she suggested. With that in mind, the interested parties are persistent, but they are patient as well. Safety seems to be the primary concern for all involved,

so for now, the city awaiting the removal of the dams will have to go with the flow.

EVM staff writer *Jeffery L. Carey, Jr.* can be reached at jlcareyjr@hotmail.com.

... Distrust

(Continued from Page 3.)

at the water PODs, as residents scrambled for what they thought would be their last free water bottles. (Thankfully, some private groups have stepped forward, and are doing what they can to provide water, at least for a while.)

Yes, there will be a time when the water PODs have to go, but given the level of distrust, wouldn’t it have been wiser to gradually phase out the pods? Announce a final date some weeks or months in the future and give people time to adjust. While many current measures showed the water to be at safe levels, many worried that the continuing pipe replacement would displace more lead and cause new problems. A subsequent meeting with Mayor Weaver and the governor where, apparently, Flint was told to “get over it,” certainly didn’t help to build any trust at all. Also, ending the water distribution at the same time that Nestle was getting increased access to huge amounts of Michigan water for \$200 a year only made things worse.

In an ironic spinoff, the governor’s clumsy closing of the water PODs allowed Atty. Gen. Bill Schuette, not an ally of Gov. Snyder, to step forward as a defender of Flint’s water PODs.

The water fund – \$6.1 million for Flint?

The continuing distrust between the state and the city bubbled up again as the city council recently passed a resolution requesting the state turn over \$6.1 million in emergency reserve water funds that were set aside for dealing with Flint’s water crisis. Though no final decision has been made, several on the council feared that the state would appropriate the money for other purposes not directly connected with the water crisis, such as settling lawsuits.

In the end, most of the council wanted the money directed primarily toward helping those who couldn’t pay their water bills. Most likely the funds will be used to replace lead pipes in Flint. Though the six million is only a small part of the \$25 million added to the fund for the current year and the nearly \$29 million from earlier years, the friction over the money only highlights the deepening distrust between the city and the state.

A spring thaw?

With all the frosty forecasts there are still some signs of a thaw that might provide a hope for a sunnier and warmer spring. And there are signs, however slight, that some of the distrust frozen into the system is begin-

ning to melt — maybe at a glacial pace, but there are at least a few signs of a thaw.

The city is now out from under the Receivership Transition Advisory Board (RTAB), the last city in Michigan to be governed by the remnants of an emergency manager. Let’s hope that the mayor and the city council don’t give the state a reason to regret its decision to end its supervision of Flint.

Beyond all the squabbles in City Hall, it wasn’t the local government that devastated the city — it was GM’s decision to pull out of Flint, eliminating nearly 80,000 jobs and the tax base that went with them. A small glimmer of hope has been raised with the prospects of a new GM facility on Davison and Genesee roads. Though it’s not in Flint, and the 800 jobs created won’t come close to replacing those lost over the last 30 years, if it happens, it might be a small step in the right direction for the area.

It looks like spring is finally on its way. Maybe you can put away your boots and gloves. The water bottles? Not quite yet. Ending distrust may take even longer.

EVM political columnist *Paul Rozycki* can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

Theater of glass, heat and light opens at FIA “hot shop”

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Brent Swanson, the Flint Institute of Arts (FIA) glass program manager, says he is a “thrill seeker,” and that’s why he makes glass art. It’s fast, it’s risky, and it’s hot.

And that’s what visitors settling into their stadium seats at the new FIA glass art “hot shop” demonstration arena every Saturday afternoon since the April 21 opening will get to see: a unique and dramatic kind of art being made on the spot.

Swanson, 36, said he hopes some of the children — and adults — who watch him work, with his pipes, melted glass, huge glowing ovens, metal tools and big thick gloves, will want to follow in his footsteps and maybe even become part of a growing “glass art community” radiating outward from the FIA’s newest addition.

“It’s entertaining,” Swanson says, explaining why he was drawn to his art. “It’s earth, air, fire and water all at once. It’s very physical.”

Swanson graduated from Detroit’s College for Creative Studies, where he started out as a ceramics major, but changed his mind — and his major — after taking a prerequisite glass art class that got his full attention.

“It was the speed with which things have to be created,” he says, “as well as the turnaround for making things. In ceramics, you can set your piece aside and look at it, think about it . . . In glass, you have to prepare, because once you engage in making a piece, you’re kind of locked into making it, and you have to start and finish it in the same time frame.

“It’s more risky, it’s more exciting, more on the edge — that’s my speed,” he says.

He suspects he gets an endorphin rush from the work, which entails constantly turning the pipe on which the glass is growing, blowing in puffs of breath for bubbles or hollow cores, and pushing and pulling it in and out of the oven’s orange flames.

“You’re working with a moving and viscous material,” he says, “and you have to surrender to the flow, so to speak.

“The material is dictating what you need to do and it speaks to you in the process — it says, “I’m cold, I need to be hot!” It engages the person to engage with it — it’s very multifaceted.”

Swanson, who’s commuting from Detroit but is considering looking for a

place in Flint, has been in his FIA role for about a year. He was hired to develop glass programs — for the first time at the FIA — as the museum built its 20,000-square foot expansion, including the Contemporary Craft Wing and state-of-the-art glass arena. He says it’s “an honor and a dream job.”

He’d been making glass art for 15 years, putting in stints at Greenfield Village and art fairs. At one point, he recounted, he had



Glass Programs Manager Brent Swanson

(Photo by Ed Custer)

five or six jobs at once, traveling from town to town and shop to shop as a glass-blower or production art assistant. It was an arduous life, and “can only satisfy your soul so long,” he says.

He says for him — and for visitors and art students — the real beauty of the FIA expansion is the gallery — the Glass collection — in conjunction with the capacity for live demonstration.

“You can really see what’s happening and what it looks like,” he says. “I can pull from those ideas and show those techniques applied. People can go back and forth between the gallery and the studio and see how it’s done.”

He says one central aim of his work, within the possibilities of the FIA expansion, is to help nurture that “glass arts community” he envisions, with Flint as its nexus.

In fact, glass art itself often requires teamwork, unlike other genres of art where the creator can work alone. The first afternoon of public demonstrations in the Hot Shop, six glass artists, Swanson’s friends and glass art colleagues from around the state and Ohio, worked together to produce one new piece per hour for the capacity crowd watching in the stadium seats.

Like almost everyone else, experts and casual visitors alike, he is wowed by the

140-piece glass collection acquired by the Isabel Foundation and on long-term loan to the FIA. The new wing was built to exhibit the collection, valued in the millions, bought from the estate of an Atlanta furniture magnate, named, ironically, Sherwin Glass and his wife, Shirley.

The collection, Swanson says, is unique because of its scale — “Somebody was really particular about wanting really large

work from people who didn’t always make large scale work — the Glass family sought these people out and paid them to make things really big.”

There is, for example, a nine-foot-tall “Lavender Serving Fork” by American artist Rick Beck and a giant glass boat, “Passage” by Swedish artist Bertiel Vallien that weighs as much as a car.

In a recent demonstration for the press in the new arena, Swanson roams back and forth between a metal work bench and the glowing 1,000-degree flames of an oven, constantly rolling a “gather” of glass on the end of a metal pipe.

Over about 35 minutes, he explained he was “festooning,” threading colors into the glass, flashing, getting a skin on the surface, cooling and heating as needed.

When he finally tipped the piece — a cylindrical bud vase — gently off the pipe, the crowd applauded. “Without further ado, that’s it!” he said. The vase went into an “annealing oven” where it would gradually cool and toughen overnight.

Asked if he’d ever burned himself, Swanson says only small burns from time to time — but opens up his hand to reveal a substantial cut. He got it cooking, he says — from a knife, not a flame.

But his profession does give him one advantage in the kitchen. “I can take hot potatoes out of the oven with my bare hands,” he says.

Free public demonstrations will be held in the 3,620-foot arena every Saturday, due to support from McLaren Health Care. General admission to the museum also is free every Saturday due to sponsorship by Huntington Bank. More information is available at 810-234-1695 or at flintarts.org.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

“Arts in Detention” unlocks creativity from the inside

By Teddy Robertson

It's a drizzly April night for Art Walk, but I'm out for just one stop: Buckham Gallery and the opening of the annual “Arts in Detention: GVRC Share Art Exhibit.”

“Arts in Detention” presents the work of kids ages 10 to 17 living in the Genesee Valley Regional Detention Center (GVRC), on Pasadena Avenue in Flint. A short-term residential facility (capacity 60), GVRC currently houses 45 to 50 young people; their charges range from truancy to murder. Three nights a week, girls and boys participate in writing and spoken word, visual arts, theatre, and dance workshops. The GVRC Share Art program partners with Buckham Gallery to bring art to youth in detention and then share their work with the public in this spring exhibit.

Artwork as large as an automobile hood, and as small as a standard sheet of paper for a T-shirt logo, hangs on the gallery walls. Video screens show kids involved in dance and dramatic arts exercises. The young artists are unnamed, but for each group of art pieces, instructors and assistants have provided statements about the process and goals of the work.

“It's more about the process than the products,” says Shelley Spivack, Flint attorney, juvenile court referee, and co-founder of “Arts in Detention.”

The GVRC Share Art program began in the fall of 2011 as a pilot project. Spivack, who also teaches a juvenile justice and law class at UM-Flint, responded to the Ruth Mott Foundation's “Share Art” call for project ideas. Awarded a mini-grant to re-establish an art workshop at GRVC (a previous one had lapsed), Spivack and Steven Hull, a Mott Community College art graduate studying criminal justice at UM-Flint, co-founded “Arts in Detention.”

Instructors in the Share Art program are either members of Buckham Gallery or other creative groups in Flint, or teach at one of the colleges. UM-Flint lecturer Traci Currie (in spoken word), and Todd Onweller, Hull, and J.T. Thigpen (all artists) formed the initial core of instructors. Currently seven artists, one student assistant, and two interns teach in the arts workshops.

Although boys and girls live in separate wings at GVRC, Spivack and Hull

say, the workshops only became gender-gear as it emerged that girls had particular needs to express themselves while detained. Boys needed expression too, but their avenue of choice tended toward the visual arts. During sessions there is no talk about charges or cases; instructors strive for an atmosphere of freedom to work in the arts.



Welcoming mural at Buckham (Photo by Teddy Robertson)

“In seven years,” Hull says, “only one student was removed from class and that was for mental health issues.” Overall, the workshops relax the kids and they look forward to them. Over years, instructors have developed a relationship with staff and now work unguided in the facility.

As I walk the gallery, a stack of books grabs my eye with their DayGlo lime covers (artwork by Julie Abbott) of four girls stretching their arms upward to the book title: “HerStory: Unlocked.” The books are the 2016/2017 collection of girls' poetry and short prose interspersed with photos of the actual products in the workshops led by Currie, Emma Davis, and assistant Jia Ireland. A grant from Michigan Humanities Council helped make the volume possible.

Another eye-catcher is a display of sculpted commedia dell'arte theatre masks done jointly by workshops in Boys Theatre and Visual Arts. Titled “Shakesmedia,” the project involved study of stock character types and creating a visual image of characters. A video shows the boys acting in guided improv scenes.

Reflecting on her experience with “Arts in Detention,” Spivack says, “It's done as much for us as it has for the kids; we see ourselves and our own place in the world differently.” Asked how he feels about the GVRC Share Art program, Hull says, “It's making a mark.” Then Hull glances down at his phone; he works for state Child Protective Services and both

he and Shelley are “on call” tonight. The needs of the kids are never far away. Spivack comments that of those currently in short-term detention, 16 are facing adult sentences; juvenile crime is declining, but sentencing as adults is rising.

Tonight, however, sharing the kids' art at the annual exhibit is always fun. Besides the Art Walk public, court officials, probation officers, and judges often show up. Surprisingly, Spivack adds with a laugh, “In all our years with this community exhibit, no one has done a story about (the show).”

Corinne Nuzum and Casey Hamann are former volunteers and now interns in visual arts with girls at GVRC. They would like to develop a program specifically for interns. They want to get a grant that help interns with supplies — partic-

ipants in their art group fluctuate from 9 to 12 and they never have enough materials.

“We need continuing education too, training to develop our teaching skills in all media,” says Nuzum. Hamann's dream is to develop a cooking program. She has worked at Crust in Fenton and cooking skills are practical for both boys and girls, both for employment and for life.

“Arts in Detention” is growing beyond the walls of GVRC. In response to kids leaving GVRC who want to have something on the “outside,” a 12-week pilot project (in partnership with Genesee County Family Court) began September 25, 2017. With help from Gear UP Academy students, a workshop titled “Arts on Probation” is held weekly at the Juvenile Probation Office in the McCree Building.

Current funders of GVRC Share Art Project include: the Hagerman Foundation, Flint Women and Girls Fund of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, United Way of Genesee County, and Greater Flint Sunrise Rotary International.

“Arts in Detention: GVRC Share Art Exhibit” runs until May 5 at Buckham Gallery, 134½ W. Second Street. Gallery hours: Th-Sat:12-5:30 p.m.

EVM columnist Teddy Robertson can be reached at teddyrob@umflint.edu.

Council focuses on pot zoning, city charter

By Meghan Christian

April was a long month for Flint City Council (FCC). Amid the stress of the state pulling funding for the four remaining water Points of Distribution (PODs) and pressure from residents to begin implementing the city's charter, the council approved administrative appointments and job descriptions. The council also moved toward adding two main amendments to the city's medical marijuana ordinance, which still has to go to second reading and enactment before it is official.

Appointments/Job Descriptions

The council approved one administrative appointment and three job descriptions during the month of April. Makini Jackson, previously employed by the Genesee County Road Commission as director of human resources and administrative services, was appointed as the Human Resources and Labor Relations Director by a six-to-one vote, with one abstention. The appointment was opposed by Fourth Ward Councilwoman Kate Fields. Ninth Ward Councilwoman Eva Worthing abstained.

According to Fields, based on information she said she had collected by contacting Jackson's references, she did not feel that Jackson should be appointed to the position.



Chamber entry, 3rd floor of City Hall
(Photo by Meghan Christian)

Other council members, like Second Ward Councilman Maurice Davis, were supportive of the appointment as a way of showing trust in Mayor Karen Weaver's administration. "To get this city moving, we gotta quit sitting on our hands and being so ... hard set against Administration when they do something ... " Davis said.

The job descriptions passed were for the positions of city administrator, director of the department of public works (DPW), and the deputy director of the DPW.

Marijuana Ordinance

Proposed changes to the city's existing marijuana ordinance first came to the Council when they were examining the possibility for a dispensary in the old Family Video location on Franklin and Court streets. Not wanting another dispensary in their neighborhood, Flint residents, mostly of the College Cultural Neighborhood (CCN), came out by the dozens to voice their views.

While some were in favor of changing the marijuana ordinance, most voiced concerns that adding more dispensaries would further lower property values and cause other issues for an already troubled city.

Seventh Ward resident Carolyn Shannon said, "It's not good for me, it's not good for Flint."

Sherry Hayden, vice president of the College Cultural Neighborhood Association (CCNA), was one of the vocal opponents. Noting that the proposed dispensary was at one entrance to the College Cultural neighborhood, she said it wasn't an issue of whether people should have access to medical marijuana, but of location.

"We don't need a marijuana business next to a liquor store in a tiny little business center in the heart of a residential area," Hayden said. A much-frequented convenience store and bus stop already occupy that intersection at Court Street and from time to time have elicited separate sets of resident complaints. "This is not an issue about the pros or cons of marijuana, it's a zoning issue. It's about a poor fit in that location," Hayden added.

First Ward Councilman Eric Mays urged residents to remember to look at the problem as a whole and informed them that under the current zoning ordinance, it would be impossible to put a marijuana dispensary in the old Family Video location. This is because it sits in a D2 district, meaning it is both commercial and residential, and dispensaries and other distribution centers are only allowed in D5 and D6, which are predominately industrial districts, not residential.

"This ordinance is D5 and D6, so you can tell the neighbors, don't worry about the video store. No one is trying to lower this one down to D2," Mays said.

Nonetheless, after hours-long discus-

sions and hearings from close to 50 Flint residents on the topic, FCC passed two amendments to the current medical marijuana ordinance.

The first amendment, moved by Mays, lowered the square footage requirement for a marijuana processing center from 30,000 square feet to 10,000 square feet and provided an exemption for the Genesee County Bike Trail. The second amendment adjusted the current residential buffer from 300 feet from the parcel line to be five acres from the actual facility itself, also moved by Mays.

According to Mays, both of these



Participating residents

(photo by Meghan Christian)

amendments would open up larger industrial areas, such as the former Buick City site, to be used for all aspects of medical marijuana including research, growing, processing, and dispensing.

The amendments still have to go to second reading before enactment, so they are not yet law. Second reading and enactment are scheduled for the next City Council meeting at 5:30 p.m. on May 14, 2018.

Charter Implementation

One issue raised by residents and city council members alike was implementation of the city charter, especially in regards to the development of the Ethics and Accountability Board. Each councilperson makes one appointment from their ward and the mayor makes two, bringing the total to 11 people. The board would then have the authority to appoint an ombudsman as outlined by

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... Council

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the charter.

One facet of charter requirements being requested is the overdue formation of the Ethics and Accountability Board, Quincy Murphy, member of the Charter Commission, said. The revised charter, produced by a nine-member Charter review commission, and the first revision adopted since 1974, was approved 2-1 by Flint voters last August. It was to take effect Jan. 1 of this year.

Murphy urged the council to set a hard deadline of May 14, the first council meeting of the month, to have their appointments for the Ethics and Accountability Board set. "We're asking that you guys to do whatever you can ... May is coming around. Set a deadline, set some dates, and bring a name," he said.

The Office of the Ombudsman serves as a sort of mediator between the people and local government, a watchdog — the word from the Swedish for "citizen's defender." The ombudsman then would relay major issues and complaints to the administration and the FCC to address them.

To CCN resident Richard Ramsdell, this position, which had been removed while Flint was under emergency management, could have had a profound impact on the city government's response to the water crisis.

"I think you can argue that the Water Crisis would never have happened, or certainly not the way it did, if there had been an ombudsman," Ramsdell said.

The administration has already included the Ombudsman's office in the budget for the next fiscal year, as required by the new charter; the Charter Commission had recommended a budget of \$250,000 for the office.

According to some residents, having the Ombudsman and the Ethics and Accountability Board would help to reestablish trust between the public and the administration. Resident Jim Richardson, like Murphy, a member of the Charter Review Commission, said, "Make the appointments to the Ethics and Accountability Board, because the residents of the city are looking for a place ... to be able to respond to their issues."

EVM Managing Editor Meghan Christian can be reached at meghan.christian22@gmail.com.

... Story

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given an opportunity to speak. One of them, Fr. James Mangan of St. Matthew's Catholic Church, quoting Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevsky, said, "The world will be saved by beauty." If that's so, the FIA is a powerful oracle. "Life is about more than just surviving," Mangan said.

This, too, is a Flint story.

At the press preview for the FIA opening, I pressed Neal Hegarty of the Mott Foundation on the significance of the \$14 million FIA project proceeding parallel to the city's water crisis: the FIA broke ground for the expansion in the summer of 2016.

How the city wrestles with its dualities is consequential; one could feel it in Hegarty's remarks.

Acknowledging "the trauma that the community has been put through," he pointed out the Mott Foundation also committed \$100 million to the city's water crisis response.

"We really feel that the community

needs to move forward," he said soberly. "There is still a future, a positive future."

The propelling positives of "education, discovery and creativity" — the arts, and culture — are stories being written here, "a vital component to a healthy community anywhere, no matter what it's been through," Hegarty said.

So, our story is a story of stories — and if you miss that plurality, you're not getting Flint. Our stories are complex, exasperating, conflicting. Some are silly and dumb. We are both a cautionary tale and a preach-out of resilience, inventiveness and style. We're about ruin and beauty and failure and abandonment and the stubbornness of boot-strap success. They're all our stories.

That's why I love my semi-colon tattoo. Anytime I doubt it, I just look at my arm. In Flint there's always more to the story; there's always more to come. It ain't over yet.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

FaLessia Booker joins EVM board

FaLessia Booker, an independent writing and editing professional and longtime resident of the College Cultural neighborhood, joined the *East Village Magazine* board of directors as of April 2018.



Falessia Booker

She is owner of FC Enterprises, a social media, web content and writing consulting company. An assistant librarian for 12 years until 2013 at the Flint Public Library, she is a graduate in English from the University of Michigan.

Among many community commitments, she is president of the Flint Club and a board member of the International Academy-Flint. She represents the Flint Club on the Flint Area Public Affairs Forum and also serves on the Scholarship Committee of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint.

Booker moved to the East Village in 1989 with her mother and younger sister. Not long after, she remembers, "We received our first copy of EVM tucked into our front door, and I thought that it was pretty cool for a neighborhood to have its own magazine.

"Over the years, this neighborhood has demonstrated such a sense of community. We look out for our neighbors and help each other with home repairs. I am happy to join the board of EVM and become more involved with the magazine!"

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson said "FaLessia brings an amazing portfolio of professional expertise and community engagement — she is a fabulous match for us."

Booker lives on Blanchard Street with her husband and two sons.

Other members of the EVM board are Jane Bingham, president; Edwin D. Custer, vice-president; Robert R. Thomas, secretary; Paul Rozycki; Jack Minore; and Editor Worth-Nelson, ex officio.

Spring in Flint: pipe replacement work resumes

By Jan Worth-Nelson

With the return of spring weather, work has resumed on replacing lead-tainted water lines in the city.

As of April 18, the date of work resumption, 6,264 lines had been replaced, according to Kristin Moore, City of Flint communications and public information director. Existing city records indicate about 12,000 more Flint homes have lead or galvanized service lines due for replacement.

Contractors began on Calumet Street in the College Cultural Neighborhood.

Moore said crews from three contractors will be finishing work on Phase Four, which began May 2017, of the city's Flint Action Sustainability Team (FAST) Start program over the next three to six weeks. The pipe replacement program has been organized into six phases, running through 2019.

The contractors completing Phase Four work are Goyette Mechanical, W.T. Stevens Construction, and

Waldorf and Sons. Moore said two of the contractors each have 50 to 60 service lines to complete — expected to be finished in three to six weeks. The third has mobilized four crews, expected to be finished in six to eight weeks.

At the same time, bids are going out to contractors for Phase Five.

Last fall, AECOM, an international engineering company based in Los Angeles, took over coordination of the water line replacement work from General Michael McDaniel and members of the Michigan National Guard who had been coordinating efforts in the initial stages of the water crisis.

AECOM received a 13-month, \$5 million contract from the city, which began Dec. 1, 2017.

Funding of \$25 million to cover Phases one through three came from the State of Michigan, approved in June 2016.

Another \$100 million for infrastructure replacement came from the feder-

al Water Infrastructure Improvement for the Nation (WIIN) Act passed in March, 2017.

An additional estimated \$47 million is expected to come from the April 2017 settlement of a lawsuit against city and state officials by the Concerned Pastors for Social Action, the National Resources Defense Council and Flint resident and water activist Melissa Mays.

More information on the FAST Start program, including maps for each phase, is available at www.cityofflint.com/fast-start/.

EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.

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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of interesting events available to our readers – beginning after our publication date of May 3. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our June issue, email your event to Managing Editor Meghan Christian at meghan.christian22@gmail.com by May 29.

Space School

May 3 - 13
Mon. - Wed. 4 p.m.
Thurs. - Sat. 4 p.m. and 7 p.m.
Sun. 4 p.m.
Longway Planetarium,
1310 E. Kearsley St.
237-3400
Admission: \$4-\$6

Explore how astronauts prepare for space in their underwater training habitat.

“The Geranium on the Windowsill Just Died but Teacher You Went Right On”

May 3, 10 a.m. and 12:15 p.m.
May 4, 7 p.m.
May 5, 2 and 7 p.m.
May 6, 2 p.m.
Flint Youth Theater,
1221 E. Kearsley St.
238-1350
Admission: \$14-18

A musical exploring the thoughts and feelings of elementary kids. Based on the book by Albert Cullum.

Queen Light Show: “From Mercury with Love”

May 3 - 5, 10 - 12
8 p.m.
Longway Planetarium,
1310 E. Kearsley St.
237-3400
Admission: \$4-\$6

A dazzling light show featuring 10 of Queen’s greatest hits.

Give Me that Old Time Religion

May 3 and 4, 7 p.m.
May 5, 2 and 7 p.m.
May 10 and 11, 7 p.m.
May 12, 2 and 7 p.m.
The New McCree Theatre,
2040 W. Carpenter Rd.
787-2200
Admission: \$5-20

Enjoy a journey through gospel music history. Featuring music from artists including The Pilgrim Travelers, Johnny Taylor, and more, this show explores old slave spirituals all the way to the music of the 1950s.

FSPA Faculty Concert: Brittany DeYoung

May 4
7 p.m.
Flint Institute of Music,
1025 E. Kearsley St.
238-1350
Admission: Free

A reception will follow this concert. Seats are on a first come, first served basis.

40th Annual Showcase Concert

May 5, 7:30 p.m.
May 6, 3 p.m.
Flint School of the Performing Arts,
1025 E. Kearsley St.
238-1350
Admission: \$12

Check out a weekend full of dance featuring four ensembles: Children’s Performing Workshop, Youth Dance Ensemble, Adult Ballet Ensemble, and the Flint Youth Ballet.

Karen Schneider Jewish Film Festival of Flint

May 6, 7 p.m., “I’ve Gotta be Me”
May 7, 7 p.m., “Bye Bye Germany”
May 8, 7 p.m., “The Cakemaker”
May 9, 7 p.m., “Shelter”
May 10, 7 p.m., “Maktub”
Flint Institute of Arts,
1120 E. Kearsley St.
767-5922
Admission: \$5

In partnership with the Flint Jewish Federation, the FIA presents the 14th annual festival, which showcases films about Jewish culture and issues.

23rd Annual Healing Hands 5K Run/Walk

May 12
9 a.m.
Mott Community College,
1401 E. Court St.
964-3040
Admission: \$15-20

Benefitting the Genesee County Free Clinic, this run/walk is a USATF-certified course and refreshments will be available for participants. Register at gaultracemanagement.com.

Uplifting Spirits Benefit Concert for Musical Mission to Puerto Rico

May 12
6 p.m.
Unitarian Universalist Church,
2474 S. Ballenger Hwy.
232-4023
Admission: \$15

Come support the UM-Flint Jazz Combo as they try to raise funds for a musical mission to send members to Cidra, Puerto Rico. Refreshments will be available for purchase.

Vintage in the Village

May 19
10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Crossroads Village,
6140 Bray Rd.
484-2950
Admission: \$5, free parking

Come see exhibitors of handmade and vintage items, ranging from clothing to home decor, and more.

Gwen Pennyman-Hemphill with Ovaciir

May 26
8 p.m.
501 Bar and Grille,
500 S. Saginaw St.
410-4406

Enjoy jazz and more, featuring Gwen Pennyman-Hemphill with Ovaciir on keyboard.

Village Life

There's always more to the story; it ain't over yet

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Somewhere in the middle of February — by far the longest, the damndest, the cussedest month of the year in these parts — I got a severe attack of cabin fever. I'd been sick half the winter and between stink bugs, porn stars, scabs of snow everywhere, a terminally ill friend, threats of bottled water cutoffs, several bouts of existential dread in the middle of the night — well, let me just say that my tiny fastidious doses of Xanax were no longer enough.

I felt the need for a desperate measure. I knew what I wanted. I wanted needles applied to my skin. I wanted to wear some ink.

Before I had a chance to change my mind, I plunked down into a black leather chair in a shop on Kearsley Street, my arm strapped down, and Zach set to work on my first tattoo.

Other than extreme schizoid flailing between ennui and exasperation with the world, what propelled me into that chair was my love of the semi-colon.

That is my tattoo, simple dot and lovely flourish of the comma, paired clearly where I can look at it anytime I want, for the rest of my life. I love my semi-colon tattoo.

I am a person of ink and stories. One of my favorite scents is the smell of ink, intoxicating and soul-satisfying every time we go out to Riegle Printing to check on the magazine, for example. That scent gives me an actual high, a rush of endorphins — and reminds me of work that I love and value almost above all else: the written word.

Ink is dying out as a means of communicating, of course — all the more reason why I am so happy to have it permanently on my body. I was born into a world of ink and will depart it in a world of atomized chips and pixels, far removed from the body's experience of smell and taste and texture. I mourn that change from time to time.

But there will never be an end to stories. There is always more than one story. And no matter where you come in or opt out, there are always different ways to tell the story — a dizzying range of hypertexts: different villains, different heroes, different beginnings, different twists, different endings.

The semi-colon stands for all that. It means that there is more to the story.

It means that there is more to come. If you live in Flint, you need that hope.

We are a city wrestling with its stories.

We have our SitDown Strike story, we have our General Motors abandonment story, we have our Roger and Me story, we have our ghostly ruin porn story. We have our crazy city council story.



Semi-colon says there's more
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

And of course we have our water crisis story, wrenching and borne with a heavy load of tragedy, anger, betrayal, and recovery.

And, much on my mind lately, we have our Netflix "Flint Town" story, dark and in its darkness a certain devastating world-class lusciousness, the way violence can be beautiful, and yet we hate what we see there and alternately want to turn away and can't take our eyes off of it, our moral consciousness roused and palpitating wildly like a heart taken out of a body and still alive on a metal tray.

And, also much on my mind lately, we have the Flint glass story, what's happening at the Flint Institute of Arts. You have to see it. The 140 pieces of the new Glass Glass collection (that is not a typo — look it up) are stunning. The new hot shop, where glass maestro Brent Swanson presides over the earth, air, fire and water dramas will shake up your whole view of the Flint you live in. You can go and see it free every Saturday.

These two stories stand in startling contrast to each other. But they are both our stories. And the tension between the two strands, the powerful narrative of ruin and violence, and the powerful narrative of "recovery," of Flint as heroic and resilient — that tension is much with us — challenging how we see ourselves.

I moderated a panel discussion at the

Flint Public Library last month at which five passionate Flint leaders plus 100 others in the audience tried to grapple with the hard truths of the "Flint Town" story, released on Netflix April 2. (For a full account of the forum, see Harold Ford's April 12 story in *EVM* online) The pain and anguish prompted by the series, a searing look at the Flint police department focusing on the lives of several officers, flew back and forth from the dais like exhaust fumes.

Isaiah Oliver, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, moaned at one point, "We can't compete with all of the negative things that existed in this series ... It's Roger and Me II. We can't share enough positive stuff to offset the negative."

He added, "Who decided this view was going to be shown? And as a resident of this community, I don't have control of the brand and I'm not sure who does."

I appreciate his angst. "Flint Town" is art by outsiders — brilliant and persuasive. It's infuriating when our truths are mediated by others. But trying to control the narrative is misdirected energy. Embracing our truths with a stout heart and faithful effort is the brave choice we make day after day.

Brian Willingham, a former Flint police officer, pastor and writer, countered that to reject the reality of Flint Town was disingenuous and a case of denial. "We might miss the opportunity to talk about the problem. Let's first talk about structural racism, about the decline of our neighborhoods, the lack of jobs, the failure of the school system, the drugs, and guns."

And in fact, Oliver is leading the foundation that recently reported \$18 million has been received in donations for the Flint Child Health and Development Fund from the Flint water crisis. In my mailbox recently was a report, detailing how those donations — 20,647 gifts from all 50 states and 15 countries — are benefiting Flint children. This is a Flint story.

And then there's the FIA. At the opening celebration for the new wing April 21, six representatives from Flint's religious communities were

(Continued on Page 9.)