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Magazine

May 2017

*Photograph by  
Edwin D. Custer*

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## Commentary

# Flint's water: Is the glass half full or half empty?

By Paul Rozycki

*Oh, what'll you do now, my blue-eyed son?  
Oh, what'll you do now, my darling young one?  
I'll walk to the depths of the deepest black forest  
Where the pellets of poison are flooding their water  
And it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard, it's a hard  
It's a hard rain's a-gonna fall.*

-Bob Dylan

It may be an omen that the most recent town hall meeting on Flint's water crisis, held at the House of Prayer Missionary Baptist Church, began in the midst of a torrential downpour, where many of those attending either dashed through sheets of rain, covered under umbrellas or huddled in their cars until the storm passed.

Mayor Karen Weaver convened the town hall meeting to hear citizens respond to her recommendation for Flint to stay with the Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA), and rely on the Karegnondi Pipeline (KWA) only as a backup. As the meeting unfolded, it highlighted the key conflicts and dilemmas surrounding the Flint water crisis.

After three frustrating and conflict-filled years, is Flint's water glass half full or half empty? Are we on the road to finally solving the problem or simply going in angry circles as we search for a solution?

The tenor of the meeting offered reasons to say yes to both possibilities.

### Is the glass half full?

Well, based on some aspects of the meeting you might think so — at least at the beginning.

Mayor Weaver and the panel of nine experts gave detailed, well-reasoned answers to most of the questions they faced from the audience. In response to questions about water chemistry, municipal finance and medicine, they laid out the case for staying with the GLWA and responded with specifics to questions from the audience. At the beginning of the forum, those responses were well-received and earned sporadic applause or cheers from the audience.

Also on the "half full" side of the equation, many of the questions from the audience showed an in-depth knowledge of the water issue in Flint. Many audience

members asked well-informed questions about water chemistry, the medical effects of lead and other chemicals, and the cost of the Mayor's decision for Flint taxpayers. For the most part, the responses from the panel were equally specific and respectful of the questioners. Many of the details of the recommendations are outlined in Jan Worth-Nelson's story in the online version of *EVM*.



Photo by Jan Worth Nelson

### The Flint conundrum

### Or is the glass half empty?

However, as the forum moved into its second hour, the "half empty" side bubbled up and things turned ugly.

The anger of Flint citizens burst out and revealed the depth of their distrust created by the ongoing crisis. More than a few responses were greeted with boos and cat-calls from the audience. One individual was led out after an angry exchange. By the end of the meeting, six individuals were arrested. Yet, most of the angry questioners brought with them solid knowledge of some aspect of Flint's water crisis. The water crisis may have destroyed trust, but it also has turned many citizens into pretty decent experts on water, pipes, plumbing, chemicals, water-related medical issues and urban finance.

In the end, it's doubtful that the forum restored trust or gave any final answers to

(Continued on Page 11.)

Cover: Central High School seen through flowering Bradford pear trees



*Photograph by Edwin D. Custer*

**Photo of the Month: Ceramic mosaic at Farmers' Market created by Guy Adamec and Marcy Yurk**

## *Trees are good, everybody agrees, but money is scarce*

*By Jan Worth-Nelson*

One thing everybody agreed on recently at the Flint Area Public Affairs Forum at the Flint Public Library: trees are good.

That was easy. But in matters of how to maintain them, how to assess them when they're in aging decline, how to communicate with residents about removals, and especially how to replace them, the discussion hit some walls.

The event, "City Trees: Pleasure or Peril?" featured panelists Angela Warren, administrator of the Genesee Conservation District (GCD); Adam Moore, a planner for the City of Flint; Emily Huff, an assistant professor of forestry at Michigan State University; and Kate Fields, Fourth Ward city councilwoman. ABC-12 meteorologist Kevin Goff moderated, taking questions from an audience of about 40.

The threats to city trees dissected were familiar to many in the audience, among them a cadre of College Cultural Neighborhood Association (CCNA) residents. CCNA president Mike Keeler, a trained wildlife biologist and Sierra Club activist, has been leading the way in sometimes rancorous exchanges with city officials to advocate for more deliberate decision-making about the trees and better management of the city's urban forest.



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

**Silver Maples on Linwood**

His efforts intensified last year, when 180 "street trees," among 30,000 in the parkways owned by the city between the street and the sidewalks, were cut down.

He and other CCNA residents, who highly value the tree canopies in their neighborhood, complained that some of the stumps appeared to show healthy trees and that residents had not been adequately informed about or included in tree removal decisions.

Those removals were part of a larger citywide plan attempting to respond to years of neglect, Warren said. A key vari-

able is the aging of city trees — 60 percent of them maples — many planted in the 1930s and reaching the end of their lifespan all at once.

The biggest obstacle to a happier arbo-real outcome, according to the three Flint presenters, is money. And it seemed from the evening's discussion that no matter how much people concur about the documented pleasures and benefits of trees, the city — and its urban forest's chances for flourishing have been decimated by staff and monetary cutbacks. Combatting the consequences of those continually declining resources — along with stresses on the city from the water crisis — has become increasingly challenging, they said.

A defense of trees emerged, but all panelists acknowledged sometimes the decisions are tricky: which priorities take precedence — sewer lines or trees? Sidewalks or trees? Residents' safety or trees? Water quality or trees?

"Our first goal," Huff said, "is the safety and happiness of our residents, which can be achieved while maintaining the urban canopy," but acknowledged, "obviously, there is no perfect answer."

*(Continued on Page 5.)*

# ... Trees

(Continued from Page 4.)

Warren, reading a prepared statement, reviewed the history of the Genesee Conservation District's relationship with the city and how it has been attempting to implement the findings and recommendations of a 2015 urban forestry inventory and how the city and the GCD attempt to respond to residents' tree-based concerns.

She noted for 17 years Flint has had a "Tree City USA" designation, and pledged to continue the forestry practices that have led to it.

Huff, whose research focuses on why people make decisions about their trees, teaches "human dimensions for forests" at Michigan State. She touted the importance of public participations of residents in crafting the decision making about trees.



**Emily Huff**

**Angela Warren**



**Adam Moore**

**Kate Fields**

Fields said though she represents the Fourth Ward, she had many friends in the Seventh Ward, where she affectionately said a band of "real conservationists" and "tree nuts" have been barraging her with concerns after representatives of the CCNA documented the removal of street trees last year. She said as she researched residents' complaints, questions emerged about how the Genesee Conservation District is assessing trees and deciding which ones need attention or removal and how to do it. The GCD originally contracted with the city in the emergency manager era to manage the so-called "urban forest."

"We really don't have a structure anymore to deal with trees," she said. "Adam is what's left of Forestry and Parks and Rec Department, which we no longer have,"

Fields said. Trees now fall under the auspices of Traffic, led by interim transportation director Betty Wideman, who "has no background in trees," she said.

Moore, a University of Illinois-Chicago trained urban planner who's been with the city for two years, cited the city's 2011 Master Plan and described the history of Flint's parks, designed in the 1920s so that every Flint resident would be within walking distance of "some publicly owned public space." The result now is 1800 acres of land, greater than the national average, but very little funding or staff to maintain them.

In fact, the city no longer has a traditional parks and recreation department, Moore explained. As recently as 2001, the city had over 100 employees working in four divisions, one of which was forestry. After years of emergency manager decisions slashing city staffs and budgets, he lamented, the city has "half of me" for parks and, he said, his proportion for parks is about to drop to one-quarter time. He said the 2015 parks millage approved by voters brought in \$312,000, 78 percent of which was spent mowing 500 acres of the city's 1800 public acres, with other partners helping maintain the rest.

CCNA representatives have met with the GCD board, their city councilwoman Monica Galloway, and appeared several times at city council meetings.

Warren has explained that the city and GCD have funds to replace only about 100 trees a year, yet more than 6,200 were tagged for removal by the 2015 plan.

"How could we call ourselves a City of Trees and yet take out almost 200 trees with no plan for replacement?" Fields said. "We don't feel that the program is being implemented correctly."

Fields summarized the recommendations she and the CCNA representatives have proposed: hiring an arborist, putting together a citizen oversight committee, defending every tree removal, putting out public bids, and increasing transparency about who gets money from lumber collected from downed trees.

"Removal is often touted as first line of defense," Huff said, "but when you remove you have to factor in the cost of replacement — getting another tree established in that spot."

After it became clear that the city did not have money to buy and plant replacement trees, residents of the CCNA raised \$4,000 and offered to do it themselves. City officials balked, citing legal and liability concerns. Fields said she was attempting to change city ordinances to

provide for homeowners to selectively maintain street trees at their addresses.

Seventh Ward Councilwoman Galloway, who arrived midway through the meeting, said she too was working on possibilities for legal protection for residents offering to maintain city trees — "juggling how we can do this so that everybody is happy," she said.

As the meeting concluded, Keeler called out, "What do you think about a city that doesn't plan on planting any trees for the future? That's very short sighted."

"We're going to work on that," Fields said.

In addition to the Flint Public Library, the Flint Area Public Affairs Forum is sponsored by Baker College, Flint Community Schools, M-Live Media Group/The Flint Journal, Genesee Intermediate School District, Kettering University, Mott Community College, The Flint Club, and the University of Michigan - Flint.

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

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# Residential/business complex planned at site of old YWCA

By Harold C. Ford

A new \$17 million residential development project called The Marketplace is being planned at the site of the old YWCA in downtown Flint, according to Kyle McCree, director of Core Initiatives for the Flint and Genesee County Chamber of Commerce (FGCC).

The project is spearheaded by the Uptown Reinvestment Corporation (URC), a nonprofit organization focused on the redevelopment and revitalization of downtown Flint. PK Housing and Management Company, based in Okemos, is slated to develop and manage what is being called The Marketplace, to be built at the old YW property bordered by Wallenberg, Third, Stevens and Fourth Streets. McCree said he is on loan to the URC from the Chamber for the project.

Connections between the two organizations — as well as the URC's for-profit partner Uptown Developments — can be hard to parse. The URC and the Chamber of Commerce (FGCC) are two separate legal entities, McCree stated. While Tim Herman is both chief executive officer of the FGCC and president of URC, McCree said there are no common board members between the FGCC operating board and the URC board.

The URC has played a key role in many recent downtown projects, including the Flint Farmers' Market, First Street Lofts, the Rowe Building, the Capitol Theater, and Blackstone's (see box at bottom of page 7).

"If all goes well, you will see this (project) sometime in 2018 or early 2019," McCree told members of Flint's Central Park Neighborhood Association (CPNA) at its April meeting. "This is not a done deal," he cautioned. "There are still plenty of pieces to come together, but it's certainly better than 50-50."

## Aiming for "mixed-income housing"

URC's goal is to provide 92 units of "mixed income housing", with 51 percent of the units designated as "affordable" housing, while 49 percent of the units will be designated as "market" housing. "Affordable" does not mean free," McCree said. "It's designed for an indi-



Photo courtesy of URC

## Rendering of "The Marketplace" at Fourth and Wallenberg provided by Kyle McCree

vidual or family that is roughly at 60% of the area median income." He estimated that an annual median income for a family of four in Genesee County is approximately \$50,000-\$60,000. He projected that a family of four would qualify for the "affordable" housing with an income that is in the low \$30,000 range. A single person might qualify with an income in the high \$20,000 range.

The Marketplace would include a variety of one-, two- and three-bedroom units. A one-bedroom unit would run about \$575 a month with utilities. One unit would be designated for an on-site manager, with 46 units intended for "affordable" housing tenants, and 45 units for "market" housing occupants. McCree stressed there would be no visible differences between the "affordable" and "market" units. "The units are completely indistinguishable," he said.

McCree contrasted URC's approach to The Marketplace with projects elsewhere that segregate "affordable" and "market" units even to the extent of requiring separate entrances. The Marketplace project will include a "turnover" feature that might result in new "affordable" tenants moving into a unit that had been occupied by "market" tenants the year before and vice versa.

The project will include 4,600 square feet for small businesses such as a coffee shop or flower shop. McCree noted that the nearby Flint Farmers' Market demonstrates the demand for smaller spaces for smaller businesses. The Marketplace will also include a community room, a pavilion and barbecue area, and parking inside the rectangular-shaped complex.

Okemos-based PK Housing and Management Company will develop and

manage The Marketplace. According to its website, PK's 65 communities are located throughout Texas and Michigan, including the Upper Peninsula. McCree noted PK Housing currently manages over 2,000 units.

URC has pioneered several successful downtown Flint initiatives, but sought out PK Housing for The Marketplace project because of its experience in "affordable" housing projects. "Affordable" housing projects are very complicated, very unique," McCree said. "URC has never, never done one this large."

## Tax Relief assured by city, state

Tax relief has already been assured by city and state governments to help finance The Marketplace project, according to McCree. "We've been awarded low-income housing tax credits through MSHDA (Michigan State Housing Development Authority)," he said. MSHDA "provides financial and technical assistance through public and private partnerships to create and preserve safe and decent affordable housing," according to its website. "MSHDA's loans and operating expenses are financed through the sale of tax-exempt and taxable bonds and notes to private investors, not from state tax revenues. Proceeds of the bonds and notes are loaned at below-market interest rates to developers of rental housing ..."

"Developers of 'affordable' housing developments are able to claim tax credits through MSHDA at the State for eligible investments in the project," McCree explained to *East Village Magazine* in a follow-up email. "Those tax credits are then sold to investors, generating capital for the project."

Tax relief also has been assured by the city of Flint, according to McCree. "Affordable Housing" projects aren't subject to traditional property taxes under state law. Instead, communities are allowed to charge a Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) to help pay for city services. The city granted a 6 percent PILOT for this development in November 2016. The development will pay 6 percent of the rent, plus full property taxes on the (approximate)

(Continued on Page 7.)

(Continued from Page 6.)

4,600 square feet of commercial (space) in the building,” he explained.

PK Housing’s expertise in arranging “affordable” housing developments that benefited from similarly complicated tax relief schemes were evidenced in at least two instances in 2016, according to MLive reports, at Diamond Place and Leo and Alpine, both in Grand Rapids.

**Citizens voice concerns**

No matter the expertise of PK Housing or the success of URC projects in Flint, those gathered at the CPNA meeting expressed some concerns about the project.

“Our experience with River Village was that they (the developers) reinvested throughout the 20-year time frame when the tax credits were running,” observed CPNA vice president Ed Custer. “Then they pulled out at the end of 20 years; then what we saw was declining property up there ... ”

“PK stays on the project for a long time,” McCree responded. “This is not a company (PK) that comes into town, gets the project going and then abandons the project to another management company that evolves into an ‘absentee landlord’ scenario.”

Developers are lawfully required to maintain the property beyond the 20-year period of tax credits, according to McCree. “The compliance period is more like 40 (years). (Additionally) URC is maintaining, through our partnership, controls where they can’t exit the project without our consent,” he said. “There’s a lot that has been done to make this not just a good project in this decade it opens, but in the next decade as well.”

**Overbuilding worries aired**

Norma Sain, executive director of the Court Street Village Nonprofit Housing Corporation, voiced concern about overbuilding in Flint. She cited other residential projects in Flint that are not at capacity. “We’re setting up competition and failure for somebody ... when you overbuild,” she warned.

McCree cited new employment in his response to Sain’s concerns, including Flint’s recently announced plans to hire 30 additional firefighters. He estimated the annual income of a new firefighter to be about \$28,000 a year. “A one-bedroom unit would be ideal for a person like this,” he reasoned.

McCree also noted the C3 Venture Flint LLC investment of \$9.68 million to acquire a 17-acre site in the industrial park on James P. Cole Boulevard where it will manufacture plastic parts for Tesla Motors. The business venture is expected to employ nearly 400 as operations expand at the site. C3 Venture chose Flint after considering sites in Indiana and California, he said.

“We have to grow; we have to grow as a community,” McCree said. “We have to add the type of housing that people — that families — that young professionals want to get, that they want to have. We know often times those people come into our community and they don’t want to buy. They want to rent a nice place.” McCree claimed there has not been a substantial housing initiative in Flint since the opening of the Oak Street Senior Apartments in 2014.

McCree assured the CPNA that attendees at the Marketplace project would provide quality housing. He declared the project will not provide “transitional housing” for those enrolled in drug and alcohol treatment programs. “There is really, really high quality that we’re seeking to do,” he said. He likened the project to housing developments that you might find along main streets in Clarkston or midtown Detroit. “We want to see that in Flint as well,” he said.

**YW already has moved**

The YWCA has already moved from the old building. Its new address is 801 Saginaw St., across Fourth Street from the Masonic Temple.

“The building had become a financial drain on the organization,” CEO Heidi McAra told MLive’s Molly Young in November. “When we moved out, the building was maybe 80 percent vacant, so on a 100,000-square-foot building, you can imagine what our energy bills looked like. I mean, just the cost of the constant maintenance of a building that size and that age.”

According to McCree, the YWCA building will be razed soon to avoid it slipping into blight.

*EVM staff writer Harold Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.*

**Uptown Reinvestment’s Flint achievements so far**

Uptown Reinvestment Corporation’s track record of successful Flint developments, along with its for-profit partner Uptown 6, might serve to inspire citizen confidence in The Marketplace project. They include, but are not limited to:

- **Flint Farmers’ Market:** The market has been owned and operated by URC since 2002 when it saved the market from closing. URC facilitated the market’s successful move to the former Flint Journal Property at 300 East First Street.
- **Riverfront Center:** The Riverfront Residence Hall opened in 2009 after undergoing a \$20 million renovation to transform the former Hyatt Regency Hotel into student housing and classroom space for U of M-Flint, Kettering, Baker, and Mott CC students.
- **MSU College of Human Medicine:** Michigan State University’s College of Human Medicine occupied the renovated former Flint Journal building providing 40,000 square feet for 100 third- and fourth-year medical students.
- **First Street Lofts Building:** A \$7million dollar renovation created 16 new residential loft units.
- **Rowe Building:** An 83,000-square-foot construction now houses Rowe Professional Services and MLive/The Flint Journal offices.
- **Wade-Trim Building:** The 30,000-square-foot renovation now provides space for Wade-Trim, a national engineering firm, in addition to loft apartments on the third floor.
- **Blackstone’s:** Blackstone’s Pub and Grill, a popular 6,000-square-foot restaurant, opened in 2008.

# Flint's dual storylines emerge on Michigan Radio

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Is Flint a city rich with art, a beautiful recuperating river and a school district offering first-rate primary school education, or is it a traumatized community rife with fear, anger and damage, where nobody drinks the water?

It turns out it's both, according to presenters at a recent taping in front of a live audience for Michigan Radio at the Flint Institute of Arts.

The schizophrenia of that poignant dichotomy — a set of exasperations and hopeful omens familiar to anyone who's lived in Flint recently — was in full display as the audience of about 100 mostly white residents heard from Flint Community Schools Superintendent Bilal Tawwab, Flint Institute of Arts director John Henry, Flint River Watershed Coalition Executive Director Rebecca Fedewa, State Senator Jim Ananich and Flint water crisis voices Laura McIntire and Camryn Banks.

The event was recorded for Cynthia Canty's Michigan Radio show "Stateside." The one-hour recording aired in segments the last week of April.

School superintendent Bilal Tawwab kicked things off by citing several promising recent accomplishments in the city's public schools. He said a combination of state support, along with local foundations and universities, had helped the district create new educational opportunities. One example, he said, is the reopening and repurposing last year of Cummings Elementary as an early childhood education center, citing it as a "wonderful partnership" with the C.S. Mott Foundation and UM-Flint.

He noted Walmart has kept the district in bottled water with "huge donations" of weekly deliveries to each school, and Sodexo has provided school lunches prepared with safe water.

Noting that while there are 15,000 school-age children in Flint, only 5,000 of them are in the public school system — the others opting for charters and open enrollment. He said one challenge is winning back more of those students by convincing them the district is a quality choice.

Expanding athletic and art opportunities and "a laser-like focus on academics" are key, he said.

"We're going to be number one," he said. "We're awakening a sleeping giant."

Flint Institute of Arts Executive Director John Henry described how the museum, the state's second largest, is "a scrapbook reflecting the intellect and taste of those who lived here before and those who continue to give today." He explained that the FIA stands on land originally farmed by C.S. Mott and that the Cultural Center represented the vision of the "captains of industry" in the 1950s.

Also in hopeful news for the FIA is construction of a contemporary craft wing, a glass studio "maker space" created in part and in connection with the recent receipt of two major collections of contemporary ceramics and glass.



Photo by Brian DiBlassio

**UM-Flint jazz combo (from left) Antonio Caballero, Michael Abbasspour, Warren Lissner, Austin Trip, Jordan Pavlica and Peter Conigliaro with Stateside's Cynthia Canty**

He also noted an exhibit of works by the sculptor Auguste Rodin will open in the museum May 6.

## Challenging the Flint River's "bad rap"

Canty asked Rebecca Fedewa about how the Flint River had been tagged "a nonhuman culprit" in the water crisis.

"Did the Flint River get a bad rap?" Canty asked.

"It sure did," Fedewa said. "We saw a whole lot of blame at the local, state and national level, that it was such a folly of a decision to switch (to Flint River water in 2014) but we know from the data we have collected over the years that we have a fantastic river system and we were confident that the river could serve as a quality water source."

Acknowledging that "the river doesn't look that great flowing through downtown Flint" and still is recovering from a legacy of industry and pollution, she said the bad reputation just kind of "stuck." It was easy, she suggested, to wrongly include

the river itself in an indictment of what went wrong.

"Maybe it was a bad decision because they weren't ready to treat river water, but the river was fully capable of serving as that source," she said.

She described recent initiatives to dredge coal tar out of the Consumers' Energy part of the river at East Boulevard Drive and plans for removing the crumbling Hamilton Dam as evidence that the downtown portion of the river is dramatically improving.

She said a two-and-a-half hour long kayak stretch of the river today routinely offers sightings of eagles, osprey, ducks, deer and other fauna. "You don't have to go up north for that wonderful river," she said, noting the Flint River flows 142 miles through five counties.

Themes of the evening took a darker turn when State Senator Jim Ananich, a longtime Flint resident and former Flint city councilman, took the stage.

Asked what he thinks about the recently announced recommendation by Mayor Karen Weaver to stay on Great Lakes Water Authority water instead of switching to the new pipeline of the Karegnondi Water Authority, Ananich said, "The citizens of Flint want to make sure we have a long-term, reliable water source. Questions still need to be answered — we still have one of the highest rates for our water in the country and that needs to be addressed. And we need to have representation on this [BLWA] board, when we're going to be the second largest customer."

"It's inhumane to expect people to have to choose between paying their water bill and other necessities. Water is a right," he said to applause.

When Canty asked if Ananich is drinking the water, he slowly replied, "No, I'm not going to lie to you, no," adding that he and his wife and infant son use filtered and bottled water. Reflecting on the ongoing lack of trust of what residents are being told, he said, "I've been lied to like everybody else in Flint.

"Our city is a stressful city, and it shouldn't be — we did nothing wrong. That needs to be acknowledged."

*(Continued on Page 9.)*

## ... Radio

(Continued from Page 8.)

### “These are people’s lives”

“If we don’t make changes,” he said, referring to state legislative considerations based on the Flint situation, “shame on anybody who doesn’t learn from this tragedy. Michigan could have the best standards of any place in the country, and it should start here in Flint,” he said.

“I don’t care what the costs are,” Ananich said, “These are people’s lives.”

Asked why the state legislature seems to be dragging its feet on policy proposals

would take more to replace the pipes and put in a filtration system than the home is worth. We’re just going to have to walk away from it. Plus it damages anything the water has touched — we’re on our third or fourth washing machine. It’s just disgusting. The water is terrible.”

“It’s absolutely enraging,” McIntire said, adding she believes Governor Snyder should be in jail and the emergency manager law repealed.

She said “we’re still being told it’s safe to take showers — that is not true. We are still being told that the water is safe to drink with filters, which is not true. Not all houses have been tested, and some places the water is worse because of bac-



Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson

### Flint audience for Michigan Radio’s Stateside at the FIA

to address the water crisis, Ananich said, “There’s a term that’s really offensive: a term called ‘Flint fatigue.’”

“When people say that to me I say, ‘I’m sorry you had to push a button (to vote in the legislature).’ If that’s too much for you, well, you shouldn’t have put into place an emergency manager law that took our democracy away,” he said, to another round of applause. “This was 100 percent avoidable.”

Flint resident Laura McIntire and former Flint resident Camryn Banks concluded the evening with a bleak picture of the consequences of the crisis.

McIntire described severe effects her family experienced in their home and said she and her family have continued to refuse to pay \$200 monthly water bills for “water we really can’t use.” She said they are on the shutoff list and are receiving “outright abusive” letters from the city.

Her Mott Park home, she said, is “pretty much destroyed,” the pipes disintegrated and the walls streaming water. “At this point it

teria in the filters.”

“We demand to be made whole again,” she said, tearfully. “People are dying, people are sick, people are suffering, and it’s not getting addressed.”

### “Tired of being lied to”

Alluding to the recent town hall where Mayor Karen Weaver served as host and where six people were arrested, she said, “We’re still wondering why nothing is getting done except a lot of public relations spin. We’re sick and tired of being lied to.”

Banks’ family took advantage of a graduate school opportunity for her father to leave Flint and move to Ann Arbor. “It was the best choice for our family,” she said. “My sisters and I tested high for lead in our hair and bodies. Emotionally, it was very difficult.” Going into her senior year, Banks said she felt like a refugee.

On the other hand, she said, “It has been such a pleasure; it’s been a break.”

“There is no such thing as ‘Flint fatigue’ in Ann Arbor,” she said. “Everything is very clean — there’s a general vibe of health and happiness — it’s a luxury. It’s so nice.

“In Ann Arbor we don’t have to worry about simple basic rights like water, not always the urge keep your guard up, and feel like somebody’s trying to come after you or harm you, which is very fatiguing.”

“In my mind, I feel like there is nothing left for Flint,” Banks said. “It’s really heartbreaking, because you don’t want to think of your home as a place that cannot be repaired. You don’t want to think of your home as a wasteland, but it seems like that’s what it’s turning into.”

But as a last thought, Banks managed to suggest, “People in Flint are resilient — this is not the first catastrophe that Flint has had. Don’t ignore us — nobody is going to roll over while there is poison water coming from the tap.”

*EVM editor Jan Worth-Nelson can be reached at [janworth1118@gmail.com](mailto:janworth1118@gmail.com).*

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# Central Park Neighborhood residents still waiting for meeting with Flint schools chief Tawwab

By Harold C. Ford

Residents of Flint's Central Park Neighborhood Association (CPNA) are seeking to meet with Flint Schools Superintendent Bilal Tawwab about the district's plan to open a new Flint high school at the location of the now-abandoned Flint Central High School campus.

In an interview in March with *East Village Magazine*, Tawwab indicated 2020 is the target date for opening a new school that would consolidate Flint's secondary students.

Tawwab told *EVM* that he had already begun to meet with neighborhood residents about the plans for the Flint Central site. "I do plan to sit down with people and engage in numerous conversations as we move closer, hopefully, to a 2020 opening," he said.

For some residents, conversations with Flint's superintendent are overdue. "He has not ... made contact with the neighborhood," according to CPNA past president Ingrid Halling. "There are concerns that we have that they could ameliorate just by giving us answers," she told *EVM*.

Halling delivered a list of residents' questions to the Flint Board of Education in March looking for answers. "First of all, my concern is this is a publicly tax-funded institution and the Flint school board are publicly elected officials," she said. "They have made no attempt to contact the neighborhood in which (the new school) will have the greatest impact on day-to-day life."

Central Park Neighborhood (CPN) is situated between downtown Flint and the Flint Cultural Center and includes the old Flint Central site. Roughly, CPN is a rectangular area bordered by Longway Boulevard on the north, East Court Street on the south, Gilkey Creek on the east, and north-bound Chavez Drive on the west.

Halling then delivered a list of 12 questions to Tawwab's office. A synthesized version of the list follows:

1. Why the old Flint Central site and not Flint Southwestern's 169-acre site at twice the size?

2. What is projected student enrollment in light of the water crisis and the current political trends that are unfavorable to public education?

3. What are the plans for vehicular transport of students into and away from the Flint Central site?

4. Why have Flint schools not reached out to neighborhoods that will most be

affected by the plan?

5. Are there provisions in place to save historical artifacts from the old campus?

6. Will environmental safeguards be in place during demolition?

7. How is a financially challenged district funding this project?

8. What plans are there for the Southwestern and Northwestern campuses?

9. Are plans in place to ensure good citizenship as students walk through the neighborhoods to and from school?

Halling recollected challenges that confronted Central Park Neighborhood before Central High School closed its doors on June 11, 2009. "The kids would walk five abreast down 2nd Street to go downtown and catch the buses from there and they intimidated people who were driving by," she recalled. "They were taking over the Riverside Playground during the day. I don't want to go through that again."

"We'll make sure we are good neighbors, for sure. All the necessary precautions will be taken," Tawwab told *EVM* in March. "It has to be a mind-set shift, not just in the schools, but in the community (as well)," he cautioned area residents.

Current CPNA president Karen Tipper told *EVM* she is worried about foot and vehicular traffic, litter, vandalism and other matters. "The direct route to the (MTA) bus station is



Photo by Harold C. Ford

## Karen Tipper & Ingrid Halling

through our neighborhood," she warned. "Our biggest concern is maintaining our sense of neighborhood and not being overrun by commercialism or an educational system."

"How do we get out when we have to go to work in the morning if there's buses lined up on Crapo Street from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m.?" asked Tipper. "How do we get out in the evening from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m.? We're going to be trapped."

Yet Tipper understands the need for fresh initiatives by Flint Community Schools (FCS). "Working with kids in schools on a regular basis, I also see the need for a place that is 21st century and

not what we have currently that is serving our kids, which is appalling," she said.

In its April issue, *EVM* documented dismal standardized test scores in all subject areas by FCS students. For example, only 4% of Flint students in grade 11 tested At or Above Proficiency in Mathematics on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in 2015-2016. Only 6.5% of Flint students in grade 11 tested At or Above Proficiency on the M-STEP Science test in 2015-2016.

In her interview with *EVM*, Tipper advocated for a "place that is pleasant to come to every day, a place that has technology, that is accessible by all the kids, a place that has recreational facilities ... " Recollecting the access that Flint Central students had to Flint's college and cultural center, Tawwab told *EVM*, "We're looking to be able to provide our kids with that same type of experience."

Evidence of a move to a new consolidated campus at the old Flint Central site is growing:

- **2009:** Flint Powers Catholic High School is rebuffed in its attempt to purchase the Flint Southwestern site. Any possibility of purchasing the Flint Central site is likely discouraged.

- **2013:** Flint's new Master Plan declares: "Flint Central High School would be a centrally located consolidation of existing Flint high schools."

- **June 2014-June 2016:** A \$22 million FCS deficit disappears.

- **April 2016:** Flint-based THA Architects Engineers are commissioned to draw up renderings of what a new building might look like at the old Flint Central site.

- **July 2016:** The Flint School Board begins to publicly discuss the possibility of a new campus at the old Flint Central site at a cost of nearly \$80 million.

- **March 2017:** Flint Schools Superintendent Tawwab indicates to *EVM* that 2020 is the target date for opening a new school at the old Flint Central site.

The two-year retirement of FCS debt and the source of funding for an \$80 million campus has fueled the curiosity of many Flint citizens, including CPNA's Ingrid Halling. "Explain to me," she said, "how a failing school system that (was) \$20 million in the hole can build an expensive new campus." Halling said she was told by a member of the Flint Board of Education, "There will be no public funds used to build that building. She

(Continued on Page 11.)

## ... Water

(Continued from Page 3.)

so many of the questions facing the citizens of Flint.

### What can we trust?

But of all the questions raised, perhaps the most important question is this: which explanations should we trust?

Yes, the mayor and those on the panel gave solid, logical and well-documented reasons for the decision to stay on the GLWA. And, if the numbers were correct, it all made sense. Their proposals seemed to assure us that we'd be getting safe, clean water in the most financially responsible manner.

However, there were equally logical and well-documented reasons offered for making the switch to the Flint River and the Karegnondi Pipeline a few years ago. The charts and numbers all showed how much money we would save with that decision. Not only would it save money, but it would guarantee a clean, dependable water supply for the people of Flint for years to come.

Several audience members asked to see the actual contract with the GLWA to attempt to make a judgment. What does the contract actually include? Are all the positive projections accurate?

### Different sides, real anger

Perhaps the best summaries of the forum were offered by individuals on opposite sides of the water crisis.

Richard Baird, senior advisor to Governor Snyder, who took much of the heat during the meeting, said the citizens of Flint "have no right to trust anyone at the state level until the water crisis is fixed. A lot of people hate Governor Snyder. Your anger is real."

In the same exchange Mayor Weaver said she had to deal with the problem "to prove it to the people and earn their trust."

Reflecting that distrust was frequent water protester Tony Palladeno, who is leading a 'Camp Promise' occupation of Kearsley Park to protest the water crisis. He said that claims the water was safe were a lie and "We're not taking this no more. I love Flint," as he left, surrounded by police. He and his wife were among those arrested.

In the end, give some credit to those who sat in front of an often angry crowd and took the heat, responded to questions, kept their composure and attempted to understand the anger directed at them.

Yet, also give credit to those who were

angry and used that anger to become informed, who channeled that energy into a movement that has mobilized Flint in a way that no other issue has. Let's hope that once the water issue is settled, that same fire and energy will be directed to rebuilding Flint in a hundred other ways.

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

## ... Jazz

(Continued from Page 12.)

has a non-stop teaching schedule and a family of four kids — one entering college, two teenagers, and a four-year-old. All except the youngest are involved with music. With his three eldest, Hill played in church at Holy Redeemer on Easter.

Big Band night takes place the last Tuesday every other month. Check the Events list on Soggy Bottom's Facebook page — other nights and special events are listed there.

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

## ... Tawwab

(Continued from Page 10.)

promised me that."

In his responses to *EVM*, Tawwab played it close to the vest. "I'm not at liberty at this point to speak on the financial side," he said. "I don't feel like I'm alone ... as I engage folks in the community and get to know a lot of the players here. Some folks want to see the district return. And that's good."

What would be good for Tipper and Halling, they said, is a meeting with Tawwab to work out the details of a new school in their neighborhood. "You have to have an opportunity for potential problems to be worked out and the best time is before they happen, not after," Tipper said.

Tipper indicated that Norma Sain, executive director of the Court Street Village Non Profit Housing Corporation, had extended an invitation to Tawwab to meet with CPNA residents, but that it hasn't happened yet. "He still has time to meet with us," she said. "We are not running out of time."

*EVM staff writer Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.*

## Council incumbents, 20 others vie for new terms

By Jan Worth-Nelson

Twenty-nine candidates — all nine incumbents and twenty challengers — have been certified by the Flint City Clerk's office to run for city council.

In three of the city's nine wards, only two candidates were certified, meaning no primary runoff is needed, so they will not appear on the Aug. 8 primary election ballot. All nine wards will have candidates on the ballot in the Nov. 8 election.

All seats are for four-year terms, with the next council election scheduled for 2021.

### The candidates, by ward, are as follows:

#### First Ward:

**Incumbent:** Eric Mays

**Challenger:** Anita L. Brown

#### Second Ward:

**Incumbent:** Jacqueline Poplar

**Challengers:** Valencia Bettle, David Davenport, Maurice D. Davis, Sharmain Nixon-Gatlin.

#### Third Ward:

**Incumbent:** Kerry L. Nelson (Council President)

**Challengers:** Linda K. Boose, Santino J. Guerra, Quincy Murphy

#### Fourth Ward:

**Incumbent:** Kate Fields

**Challenger:** Michael Doan

#### Fifth Ward:

**Incumbent:** Wantwaz Davis

**Challenger:** Jerri Winfrey Carter

#### Sixth Ward:

**Incumbent:** Herbert J. Winfrey

**Challengers:** Deltonya F. Burns, Chia C. Morgan

#### Seventh Ward:

**Incumbent:** Monica S. Galloway

**Challengers:** Loyce M. Driskell, Marcus Eubanks, Heather Morolla Kale, Mercedes Kinnee

#### Eighth Ward:

**Incumbent:** Vicki VanBuren

**Challengers:** Joyce Ellis-McNeal, Louis A. Griggs

#### Ninth Ward:

**Incumbent:** Scott Kincaid

**Challengers:** Erik Roebuck, Eva Worthing

# Village Life

## Jazz Night packing them in at Soggy Bottom

By Teddy Robertson

Tuesday night in downtown Flint and that means jazz at Soggy Bottom. On this cool April evening a gust of wind propels people through the front door just as the smiling drummer John Hill grabs the mic and announces, “We’re going to do some spring songs!” Together with Pat Cronley on keyboard and Jack McDonald on the bass, Hill opens the first set. The sticks go down and Hill looks radiantly happy. I think he is the happiest jazz drummer I’ve ever seen.

Jazz Night at Soggy Bottom has been going for nearly three years. It was the brainchild of premier bartender Andy Sartuell. Sartuell was good friends with Jack McDonald (a Linden High School grad now studying music at Western) and the two played indie music around Flint. Sartuell pitched the jazz night idea to Soggy Bottom’s

bar manager Ken Laatz and he agreed. Sartuell called Pat Cronley and McDonald contacted Hill.

The Jack McDonald Jazz Trio was a go. According to Hill, the first couple of jazz nights the audience was thin; when he looked over to the raised seating area, he says, rolling his eyes in mock distress, hardly anyone was there. But attendance grew.

You’d never know there’d ever been a sparse attendance night now.

By the second set the bar is packed, standees clustered behind the stools; newcomers enter, heads pivoting in search of a place to sit. Sidling along the bar they glance into the backroom pool table. Barely visible through a



Photo by Dennis Brown

**House band recently at Soggy Bottom: Carlos Cafagna, sax; John Hill, drums; Jack McDonald, bass; Pat Cronley, keyboard; Gwen Hemphill, vocals.**

glass door is a patio where hardy smokers sit under the umbrella tables, overlooked by a Kevin Burdick mural on the building’s back wall. Climbing a couple of steps to the seating area overlooking the bar and band area, they will poke their heads round to the side room. Tables with club chairs (and a second pool table) — all full.

Soggy Bottom is packed. Some sigh and leave, but mostly they stand and eye the bar for departures.

Various horn players join the trio for Tuesday jazz. Two frequent crowd pleasers are trumpeters Walter White and Dwight Adams. Sax players from Detroit, Steve Wood and Carl Cafagna, sometimes drive up. A surprise one night was Ukrainian trumpeter Yakiv Tsvietinskyi, a music student from Western Michigan University. The Ukrainian had met McDonald at the WMU Union jazz jams and McDonald invited him to come to Flint.

Some nights Nick Calandro is on the bass. Calandro once took a class from me at UM-Flint (he remembers this better than I do). That’s how Soggy Bottom Jazz Night goes — you never know who you’ll run into. Former Mott Park neighbors who’ve moved to the peaceful glades of Flushing or Fenton return to the city for jazz.

The repertoire varies with the soloist, but standards like “Caravan,” “In a sentimental

Mood,” “Song for my Father,” “Nica’s Dream” and “Recorda Me” or “Along Came Betty” are frequent. Hill wields the mic — “We’re going to do a ballad,” he says. Or we’ll get some jazz trivia: “This was the only piece Charlie Parker ever wrote in a minor key. Do we know that?” he impishly queries Pat Cronley. Pre-break signature is a jazzy version of “The Flintstones” theme song.

Late on a full night, people take to the floor to dance or a vocalist emerges from the audience.

A music educator with 23 years of experience in public schools, Hill taught percussion for 6 years at UM-Flint and he’s also taught 10 years at Mott. Now he teaches music at Oxford High School, and all instruments —

piano, guitar, theory, jazz. But not band.

Maybe that’s why Hill started the bi-monthly blast known as Big Band Night. The idea grew out of a jam session music teachers do for their students on Honors Band Day each year in January, he said. The students practice all morning and in the afternoon the band directors get together and play for them.

For Big Band Night, Hill enlists his music educator colleagues as section leaders (trumpet, sax, trombone) and the section leaders assemble their players for a 20-piece band. Hill organizes the music and if he can get another drummer, he’s free to conduct; you’ll hear his instructions to the players, something about the measures or coda. Different musicians will take a solo, but it’s all pretty spontaneous — 90 percent of the time they have no rehearsals.

By 5 p.m. Soggy Bottom is packed. Cars fill the adjacent lots — the Local Grocer and the former Jag the Haberdasher spot. At 7 p.m. the trio opens a first set, allowing time for musicians to arrive. They gather in the side pool room where Hill has laid out music sheets on the pool table.

It’s all fun for Hill. He comes in smiling, even late or rushed, and heaves his drums around as he chats with everyone. Music fans cluster at the front end of the bar and friends hang over the railing from the table area. Hill radiates optimism, and a good thing too. He

(Continued on Page 11.)

### SUPER MOON: (May 25) By Grayce Scholt

These days it’s super everything from super-sized Big Macs to super-powers, and even super moons that interrupt the weather dance of pirouetting hands the weatherman on Channel 5 the weathergirl on 7 draw lovingly across the weather map. “Precipitation? Just a touch! But see what’s in the West! Then North Dakota’s next — and cool!”

“But look! A super moon tonight!  
*Cosmic event! Cosmic event!*”  
(A comet on its track  
to hit the earth?)

Cosmic event?  
Astronomers  
just shake their heads.  
It’s only when  
the media look up  
in proper wonder  
at the sight  
and see the  
always-super moon  
that lights the night.

*Grayce Scholt is a retired English professor from Mott College who wrote art reviews for the Flint Journal. Her book of poetry, Bang! Go All the Porch Swings, is available online from Amazon. A personal narrative of the poet’s life in Europe in the early 1950s, Vienna, Only You, is available at gscholt09@comcast.net. The author’s new book of poems, Night Song, is available from Friesen Press (www.friesenpress.com) and Amazon.*