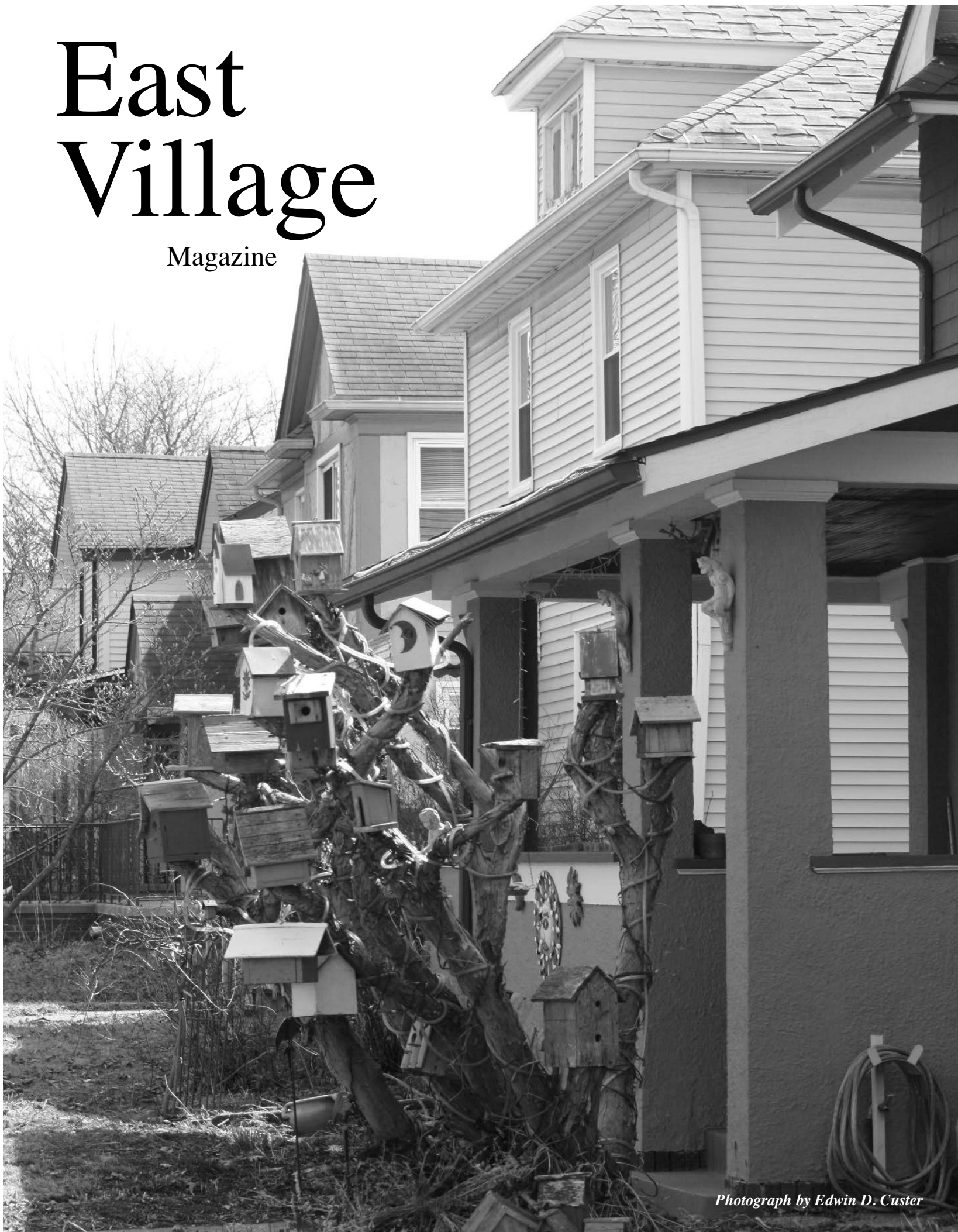


East Village

Magazine



Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

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East Village Magazine

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Essay *Could road proposal "win ugly"?*

By Paul Rozycki

Some years ago, the Chicago White Sox were having a miserable year. They weren't hitting, the pitching was poor and they seemed to be on the road to a losing season. Then halfway through the season, something changed. They started winning. Their playing didn't improve all that much but somehow they were coming out on top. Though they won games, it wasn't pretty to watch and fans and sports writers claimed they were 'winning ugly,' a phrase picked up by others over the years.

Right now Governor Snyder's road proposal might be facing the same fate. By all measures Proposal 1 faces an ugly future on May 5. Most polls show it losing. Voters are confused about it and feel it's too complex. And the public is angry at the legislature for putting it on the ballot in the first place. The Republicans, who should be expected to back their own governor are, at best, divided, with many bitterly opposed to it. Some Democrats are also reluctant to help a Republican governor, and the support for it seems lukewarm.

Proposal 1 is complicated enough for everyone to find something they don't like about it. But it's also big enough for everyone to find something they do like about it as well. The proposal is a combination of changes to the state Constitution and legislation tied to those Constitutional changes. Technically, the voters are only voting on the changes to the state Constitution, but the legislative changes won't take place unless the voters approve the ballot proposal.

There's not enough room here to discuss every detail of a complex proposal, but in a very basic outline here are the essentials. (For more details check out the Citizens Research Council-crcmich.org, or SafeRoadYes.com.)

Proposal 1 would:

- eliminate the sales tax on motor fuels.
- increase the sales tax on non-fuel goods from the current 6% to 7%.
- increase the portion of the use/sales tax that goes to the School Aid Fund.
- change the current 19 cents per gallon gas tax to an annually adjusted rate, 14.9% of the wholesale price of gasoline.
- restore the Earned Income Tax Credit for the working poor and increase the Homestead Property Tax Credit for low income seniors.
- assure that all fuel taxes would be used for roads and public transportation.
- increase the amount of sales tax revenues set aside for the School Aid Fund, with constitutional guarantees.
- increase the amount of tax revenues that go to local governments.
- require quality guarantees from those doing the road construction projects.

There's a lot more detail and mind-numbing numbers that are part of the full proposal and there are a lot of reasons not to like it. No one wants to pay more taxes, and this is a tax increase. Because of its complexity, it probably should have been handled in the legislature rather than being tossed into the voters' laps. Maybe one bill should have dealt with the roads and separate bills should have addressed the school issue, local government funding and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Even the Safe Roads campaign has turned some people off and is seen as a scare tactic.

Yes, all of that is probably true. But the complaints are also 'woulda, coulda, shoulda.' It didn't happen that way. (There's a reason politics is called the 'art of the possible.') What we have is Proposal 1 on the ballot on May 5th.

And after all doubts, confusion and complexity are done, Proposal 1 is much better than it seems at first glance.

First, it does guarantee a solid base of revenue to repair Michigan's roads, which everyone agrees are in terrible shape and getting worse daily. We spend less per capita on our roads than any other state and much less than other Midwestern states. Over time this proposal should generate about \$1.3 billion more annually for road repair. Proposal 1 assures a more rational and modern funding source for our roads.

Second, because the changes in the sales tax would impact schools and local units of government, the proposal would hold them harmless and generate additional funds, guaranteed in the state Constitution. Proposal 1 should generate about \$795 million more for public schools, local governments and the General Fund.

Third, because a sales tax tends to bear more heavily on the poor, the restoration of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Homestead Property Tax Credit will reduce that burden.

Fourth, the 7% sales tax would give Michigan a sales tax similar to, or lower than, most surrounding states.

And finally, if Proposal 1 fails, there is no plan B. At best we would have to wait for the legislature to put together another proposal and, if and when that ever happened, it would be at least another year or more of bouncing along Michigan's bad roads and bridges before we saw significant repairs.

In the end, the perfect shouldn't be the enemy of the good. Proposal 1 isn't perfect, but it's pretty good — a lot better than many things we've seen come out of Lansing in recent years — and it does deserve our support.

In spite of all the negative polls and press, maybe the voters will show they are smarter

(Continued on Page 7.)



Photograph by Edwin D. Custer

Central Park neighbors voice zoning concerns

By Ashley O'Brien

Two city officials responded to zoning concerns from members of the Central Park Neighborhood Association at their March meeting.

Denise Smith-Allen, Flint Planning Commissioner, and Megan Hunter, Director of Planning and Development, listened as residents voiced worries that violations might be occurring and that a proposed zoning designation would affect the character of the neighborhood just east of downtown.

In particular, CPNA members said they feared the new zoning language as part of the new Flint Master Plan could open the door to rooming houses and social fraternities.

Some residents reported there are already rooming houses operating in the neighborhood.

"Zoning in the neighborhood prevents single family homes from being further divided," Central Park resident Ingrid Halling said, meaning that a single family home could not be converted into multi-unit residences. But people have gotten around that by renting out rooms to individual tenants, she said, who then share common areas, like bathrooms and kitchens.

Halling said rooming houses destabilize

the neighborhood. According to Halling, also a member of the CPNA's Beautification Committee, an additional concern is the lack of parking at a single family home to accommodate unrelated adult roomers.

In the Master Plan zoning language being considered, Central Park Neighborhood is classified as MR1 (Mixed Residential one), explained Hunter. MR1 is considered low density. Hunter said if these homes are being rented by the room they "could be operating illegally," and added that the issue is with enforcement, not zoning. Hunter suggested the CPNA could provide a list of houses that meet this condition, and the city will follow up as quickly as possible.

Prior to making a list of homes that could be in violation, Ed Custer, CPNA president, requested information from Hunter regarding the zoning and definition of rooming houses.

Custer added he is concerned about social fraternities and sororities buying a house in the neighborhood. He said fraternities in the past have been problematic for the neighborhood because of late night parties.

Hunter said fraternities and sororities have been disallowed in MR1 neighbor-

hoods in the current proposed zoning districts though, she added, "we do not know what will happen during the approval process." The approval process is headed to the planning commission and eventually the city council.

The proposed zoning aims to preserve the character of the neighborhood, Hunter said. She added she was hopeful to create conditions where neighborhoods could have some say in those regulations.

"In the future, if you wanted to impose more specific design regulations in a neighborhood, you would have the ability to work with the city to determine what you want your neighborhood to look like," Hunter said.

The association also heard from committees on blight and beautification.

A house at 606 Crapo has been scheduled for demolition May 8, according to the Blight Committee. The house is currently boarded up.

The Beautification Committee established criteria for the upcoming neighborhood cleanup taking place Saturday, April 25 at 9 a.m. Street litter will be the priority. Volunteers will meet at the Court Street Village Non-Profit Corporation, 727 East St. May 2 is the backup date.

City water, sports fields, parkway trees topics at CCNA

By Nic Custer

Mayor Dayne Walling shared updates about the city's drinking water at the College Cultural Neighborhood Association meeting in March.

The group also discussed Mott Community College's use of athletic fields at Central High School and Kearsley Park, and assessment of high-risk parkway trees.

Walling told residents the city was working to improve its water treatment system based on recommendations made by consultant, Veolia North America. These changes will include the installation of a carbon filtration system that removes organic material before the water reaches the chemical treatment stage. He said there was no construction timeline but the installation would probably take place within a few months. The filter would cost around \$800,000 to \$1.5 million. He said it is not something the city would need when they source water from Lake Huron but the city recognizes the need of having a safe water source during the limited time left that it will use the Flint River.

The Karegnondi Water Authority (KWA) pipeline is expected to be completed several months earlier than its projected June 2016 completion date. He also said the city has paid back more than \$20 million toward the principal amount of a series of state Drinking Water Revolving Loan Funds since completing a \$48 million upgrade of the water treatment plant

in 2004. This upgrade was required by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for the river to be used as a back-up drinking water source. The city has paid back \$3 – 4 million per year.

Walling asked Governor Snyder to forgive the remainder of the debt but Snyder refused. Instead, he agreed to shift a \$2.2 million April payment to the end of the loan's payment schedule. This allows the city to use the funds they would have paid the state to make improvements to the system this year without requiring a major budget amendment.

Architect and MCC Physical Plant Executive Director Larry Koehler, and Al Perry, associate athletic director, spoke to the group about MCC's use of area athletic fields. Koehler said the college has signed a use agreement with Flint Community Schools (FCS) to use the baseball, softball, track and football fields at the former Central High School. Mott agreed to maintain the properties in exchange for using them. The college will repave the driveway behind Central off Court Street, repair fences, upgrade softball and baseball fields and repair the track.

Perry added Mott would like to let the community still use the fields and will encourage area college students to play intramural sports there.

MCC also signed an agreement with FCS to assess the condition of Central's

Napoleon Levoy Fieldhouse. Koehler said the building will be assessed during the spring and summer and the findings will be presented to FCS. Koehler said the school buildings have been damaged by vandalism and are missing wiring, copper and other metal items.

The college also will continue to use Kearsley Park's softball and baseball fields through a renewed agreement with the city. Perry said the softball field will be upgraded. He said since there are only eight home softball games this year, there will be lots of downtime on the field. Although the team will use the field for practice he would also like to see the community use it.

In other news, the Genesee Conservation District will work with the city of Flint to remove 80 highest-risk street trees from city parkways before May. Another 90 trees that have limbs at risk of falling will be trimmed. In the north end of Flint, around 300 trees that are rated as "critical" will be removed as well. The group's plan calls for removing an additional 280 trees from the central region of the city between June and September. Between October 2015 and September 2016, 700 critical trees will be moved from the central regions and 340 critical trees will be removed from the south side of the city. These removals are contingent on funding from the city of Flint and the Anna Paulina Foundation.

Spencer's Art House, Carriage Town forging new lease

By Nic Custer

After a month of discussion and an apparent agreement to collaborate, Spencer's Art House in Carriage Town may have a new lease on life after all.

The agreement to draft a new lease-purchase agreement for the controversial project at Stone Street and University Avenue was a turnaround that developed after the March 25 meeting of the Carriage Town Neighborhood Association.

At that meeting, Vice President Michael Freeman announced the board had voted to end the lease for the former mortuary with the Flint Public Art Project (FPAP).

Immediately following the meeting, Freeman said although the board had ended

the lease, they hoped the conversation with FPAP would not be over.

"If they gave us a new proposal we would be more than happy to work with them. We think it's a great concept, we just need some assurances before we feel comfortable," he said.

Several days later, the two parties came up with a work plan and are drafting a new lease but he said the details are not finalized yet. Freeman said going forward they will assist FPAP in finding financing for the project and hope to have monthly meetings to discuss progress with representatives from the community involved as well as from the two organizations.

Freeman said the original lease-purchase agreement was out of date and required Spencer's be awarded a Certificate of Occupancy by July. He said that was not practical and Spencer's didn't even have building permits yet.

The original vote to rescind the lease came during an executive session at the February meeting. Freeman, whose comments at the February meeting had elicited criticism from other neighborhood residents, was the board member who had made the motion to go into executive session. After the March meeting, he explained that according to Robert's Rules of Order a board can go into executive session when discussing a possible lawsuit.

(Continued on Page 7.)

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May 3 *

11:00 *Expressive Reading of Sacred Texts.* Professional actors Kay and Michael Kelly will lead this demonstration/workshop in techniques of analyzing texts to emphasize dramatic moments and emotional emphasis.

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May 6

Musical Passports for Children. Grades 1- 8 will be introduced to the Pipe Organ, other musical instruments and various performing ensembles. 4:30 - 6:00.

Jesus in Film FIA Associate Curator of Film Edwin Bradley will explore how film makers have endeavored to represent Jesus in cinema. 6:00pm dinner. 6:45 presentation in FPCF Chapel

May 8

Second Friday Art Walk 5:00 - 8:00. *The Rains Came Down: Noah and the Ark.*

This great exhibit features artistic expression beginning in 1649 and continues through the 20th century with Chagall, Bowden and Ben Zion, as well as several of Arthur Geiserts wonderful etchings. This exhibit will remain on display through July.

May 9

Art exhibit remains open 10:00am - 4:00pm

746 S. Saginaw St., Flint
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May 9

Family Activity, *Origami Peace Cranes.* FIA artist Rebecca Andrus will lead children, teens and adults in the art of Origami. Peace cranes made by the families will be sculpted into an exhibit to be hung in the Sanctuary on May 24! The names of all participants will be listed in the printed material of that morning.

May 10

Art in Religion - UM-Flint art professor Fred Wagonlander will offer a presentation of the role of visual art in religious practice. FPC Chapel. 11:00am

May 15

Holy Grounds - a coffee shop experience for college age young adults. Contemporary sounds by musician, Eddie Kobayashi and coffee in The Pipe (FPCF). 7:00pm

May 16

Sacred Masterworks - The Choirs of First Presbyterian Church and Court Street United Methodist Church combine with the FPCF Festival Orchestra to present favorite anthems for chorus and orchestra, concluding with a performance of Mozart's charming Coronation Mass. 7:30pm

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Flint after emergency manager discussed

By Connor Coyne

City officials discussed Flint's anticipated transition to local control at a March 31 public forum titled "After the Emergency Manager." The event was sponsored by the Flint Area Public Affairs Forum and the League of Women Voters and hosted by the Flint Public Library.

Panelists included Flint Mayor Dayne Walling, City Council President Joshua Freeman, City Council Vice President Wantwaz Davis, and Flint City Administrator Natasha Henderson. The forum was moderated by Rafael Turner, senior consultant of the Flint Area Reinvestment Office.

The first stage of the transition process, Freeman explained, consists of local leadership overseen by a Transition Advisory Board (TAB). According to Freeman, the

governor appoints at least three individuals to the board. "My goal," said Freeman, "is that we would pass a financially responsible budget that wouldn't require them to take any action." He added that, "they are essentially irrelevant but standing in the background with a big stick to beat us if we fall back into some old habits."

Asked whether a possible charter revision expected in the next year could affect the process, panelists agreed that it would depend upon the specific revisions, but that these would consist of their own transition plan, if Flint were to reject its current Strong Mayor form of government.

Full coverage of this event available at www.eastvillagemagazine.org.

... Carriage Town

(Continued from Page 5.)

At the time, the group did discuss a possible lawsuit against them. The minutes from the previous meeting confirmed the board had been threatened with both an injunction and potential lawsuit for \$100,000 by FPAP Director Stephen Zacks, of New York City, a former Flint resident.

The record of what occurred in the executive session is held by the CTHNA Secretary and available to Board members in good standing. These minutes are supposed to be publically available after the threat of legal action is no longer an issue.

Zacks attended the March meeting. He said afterward he had not yet received the group's notice of termination and FPAP was still planning to develop the property.

Zacks has a development team put together and the group has identified grant opportunities. He said he has already invested three years in restoring the building, including raising around \$40,000 in grant dollars and at least \$70,000 in donated labor. He said the project is very close to being realized. Architectural drawings are currently being reviewed by the city and the organization is looking for a contractor to do the work.

"We will continue to plant around the Spencer property and continue to work towards improving our part of Carriage Town," Zacks said. "I would hope no one would try to stand in the way of progress."

Paul Herring, who was not reelected to the Board, questioned the decision to terminate the lease.

"I think it's one of stupidest things we've done especially if there is not an alternate plan," he said. He did not understand what the long-term goal of ending the lease would be for the neighborhood association. He said that with the house, the neighborhood association also inherited the structure's liability.

"Everybody has issues. Stephen is not an angel but he is an angel as far as Spencer's is concerned, he saved that building," Herring said. "That building was on the verge of being demolished and he swooped in and said, 'I'll take it on' and we were giddy to have him."

In other news, members voted on six board positions. President Leanne Barkus, Freeman and Janet Van de Winkle were re-elected to the board. David White, Ray Sinclair and Bill Gainey were also elected.

... Ugly

(Continued from Page 3.)

than the pollsters and the pundits and pass Proposal 1 on May 5th. After all, 'winning ugly' is still winning. And, ugly or not, it would be a big win for Michigan.

Paul Rozycki is a professor of political science at Mott Community College. He has lived in Flint since 1969 and has been involved with and observed Flint politics for many years. He is author of Politics and Government in Michigan (with Jim Hanley) and A Clearer Image: The History of Mott Community College.




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Village Life

Rediscovered recording brings back parents' lost music

By Jan Worth-Nelson

In my utopia, there would be live music on every street corner. In my ideal world, we'd all sing in harmony once or twice a day. In my dreams, my fingers would remember how to play the mazurkas and sonatas I once memorized for piano recitals. And in my perfect life I'd be magically transformed into a player who could improvise, both hands rolling over the 88s to make cool chords of my own design.

The result of all this would be, in my nonscientific imagining, that our brains would flood us with endorphins and we would love each other more. We'd be happy and relaxed at the end of the day, with music in our heads crowding out confusion, anger, grief and the fear of death.

Good luck with that last one, eh?

I've been led into this wistful rumination by a series of life events that reminded me

of the music that's in my blood and bones — powerful reminders of how music activates parts of our minds overwhelmed by words, how it soothes us with its patterns and melodies. Here's the story of one of those events.

Going through an old box from the attic recently I found something I thought had been long lost. In a tattered brown paper jacket was a thick black record. In blue ink handwriting, it said it was my parents, "Rev. & Mrs. E. Knight Worth," singing two hymns, recorded June 10, 1941.

That summer before the world changed. The summer before Pearl Harbor, the summer E.B. White wrote an essay called "Once More to the Lake," one of my favorite pieces of writing — a poignant and prescient essay in which he went back to a childhood haunt with his son and found there a reminder of his own mortality in a world so lovely it almost hurt to see it again.

That's how I feel about this record.

I remembered the old disc — we had listened to it from time to time as children on some now forgotten turntable. My dad liked mechanical things and would have had the best he could afford on his meager ministerial pay. I seem to recall we thought the record was quaint and vaguely embarrassing — our not always harmonious parents singing sweetly together before we were born, my father gently stroking a guitar with simple chords. The record was scratchy even then, something from far away, like outer space.

Both my parents have been dead for more than 20 years. I never thought I'd hear them again. I cradled the old record in my hands and wondered how I could unlock their voices. There's a dusty turntable in an upstairs closet, but it doesn't work.

I posted a message on Facebook and to my surprise several neighbors offered interest and help. Eventually I handed off the precious find to Tom Spademan, a philosophy professor at Mott Community College who's also a musician and a lover of music of all kinds. He was fascinated by my old record and thought he could transfer its sounds to a CD. A week later, our marvelous neighbor brought it back, with a remarkable CD in a flat plastic case. I immediately put it on.

Through all the scratches, I heard my parents' voices again for the first time in two decades. From 74 years ago, their harmony came through so innocently, so

purely: a moment of their pleasure in performing, a treat perhaps for them, to hear themselves, a little moment of secret pride.

The first song is "Follow Me," a frankly clear invocation and invitation into the Christian life. This was the essence of the world I grew up in, and in spite of all my quarrels with the dogma of my forefathers and foremothers, the fact of the moment of this recording, its meaning to me as a captured fragment from my parents when they were young — ah, I confess, my grownup tears flowed.

The second side, less well preserved, touched my heart even more. The song is "Jesus Took Away My Burden and Left Me With a Song." Thanks to the 21st Century, I found both the lyrics for this redemptive old hymn as well as a YouTube rendition of it by two evangelists who could have been right out of my childhood at Calvary Evangelical United Brethren Church in Canton, Ohio, 1956.

I have to tell you, I'm a heathen by life-long adult practice, but that song rang right into just about every fiber of my body. I don't think one ever sheds the effect of beautiful music absorbed from the womb onward. There is comfort in familiar songs that transcends a lot of the world's malarkey. I measured my heart rate on my iPhone: 10 points below my resting average. The body, the body and its ancient ways of knowing. I swear, it's almost spooky.

I have listened to that song many times now. Each time I do, I once again see my parents before I was born, still in love, leaning close in, faces almost touching over that mic, still unworped by the schisms and wear and tear to come. I'm so grateful to Tom Spademan for opening up my parents' voices to me again. And I'm grateful to Tom for listening into my deepest heart the music that comforts me even now beyond all reason.

As for that impossibly wonderful trade: a burden for a song. Well, that's a pretty good deal, if you ask me. So, a toast. Here's to songs instead of burdens.

Happy Spring!

Jan Worth-Nelson is the editor of East Village Magazine.

A row of finches

By Grayce Scholt

A row of finches, six
are sitting on our fence,
each yellow breast all
shimmering with sun, each
fluttering tail, each wing
awaiting somewhere
fine to fly

the feeders in the
yard pecked clean,
the earth still
cropped with snow,
the boughs are bare
as bones, and dry

but oh, the light
has come.

It's spring?

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