

# Clark Twp. To Revisit Boathouse Ordinance as Some Residents Say Changes Are Needed

By Amy Polk

For more than a century, boathouses have been a defining characteristic of the Les Cheneaux Islands. So when Bob Dunn and Joe Eger approached the Clark Township Planning Commission with new guidelines for building boathouses, they had one eye on the area's history and another on its future. They have proposed that boathouses be allowed to be up to 38% of the lot's lake frontage, that boathouses be allowed even on lots without homes there first, that boathouses look similar to the house on the lot, and that greater setbacks be used to distance boathouses from neighbors.

While the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) prefers upland structures to those built over the public waterway,

Messrs. Dunn and Eger say there is local support for larger boathouses on the water, and cite public hearings over the years as proof.

"We're trying to encourage, not discourage," Mr. Eger said at the April 8 planning commission meeting. "It is our opportunity to enhance the community."

After a two-hour discussion on the 28 construction guidelines proposed by the men for new structures, the planning commission made some changes and sent the proposals to Gourdie Fraser, the company working with the township to revise its master plan and zoning ordinance. The proposal may be adopted in some form in the new zoning ordinance. A new master plan and zoning ordinance will be adopted by Clark Township this year, following public hearings.

Mr. Dunn owns a dock company and his docks have served as foundations for boathouses. Mr. Eger is a member of the planning commission and operates a canvas business that serves boaters and cottagers.

Building guidelines for boathouses has been debated in Clark Township over the past decade as builders and landowners complained that the a 600-square-foot size limit was too restrictive. Revised guidelines were adopted in 2002, allowing graduated sizes based on the length of frontage, but a special land use permit has still been required for a boathouse more than 600 square feet. This gave the planning commission the ability to hear cases for larger structures, and neighbors had the opportunity to testify as to whether the structure would impact their views.

A number of other stipulations guide development and the planning commission's decision process. The graduated guidelines may give a lot owner with 50 to 200 feet of frontage a 600-square-foot structure, with 201 to 500 feet of frontage a 1,000-square-foot boathouse, and 501 or more feet of frontage a boathouse up to 1,500 square feet. Anything larger than the recommended maximum sizes must be approved by the planning commission, and also must have variance granted by the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Zoning Board of Appeals is growing weary of hearing boathouse variance cases, Mr. Eger suggests, and he believes it is time to take another look at the guidelines.

Boathouses are called "an integral part of our heritage and charac-

ter" and "unique to our area" in his proposed ordinance introduction. The new size regulations would govern the width of the boathouse, height, and sideyard setbacks. The distance a boathouse extends out onto the water is already regulated by the state DEQ, which checks that all boathouses do not interfere with navigation.

The proposed ordinance would allow structure width to be 38% of the lot's lake frontage. If a lot has 50 feet of frontage, the boathouse could be a maximum of 19 feet wide and 15 feet tall, with 10-foot setbacks. With 100 feet of frontage, the boathouse could be a maximum of 38 feet wide and 18 feet tall, with 20-foot setbacks. If the lot has 200 feet or more on the lake, a boathouse could be as much as 76 feet wide and 30 feet high, with 75-foot setbacks from the lot lines.

Setback requirements are now 10 feet from the lot line if the lot has up to 500 feet of frontage, and 15 feet for 500 or more feet of frontage. The reason for proposing greater setbacks, Mr. Eger said, is to center the boathouse more on the lot, and keep it further from neighbors, as space allows.

The regulations proposed by Messrs. Dunn and Eger retain much of the spirit of the current ordinance, still requiring the planning commission to hear boathouses as special land use cases, giving commissioners control over design

and landscaping, for instance.

Major differences between this and the current ordinance include allowing boathouses on lots without a principal structure there first. Clark Township zoning now considers boathouses an "accessory structure," and accessory structures like boathouses, garages, and bunkhouses can only be built after a "primary structure," or home, is there first.

Mr. Eger and Mr. Dunn propose eliminating that requirement for island residents who own a home on an island, but want only a garage and boathouse on the mainland to park cars and dock boats. Several commissioners agreed with the suggestion, but want to expand the allowance to everyone in the township. If the ordinance changes, people would be allowed to build garages on their property without first having a house.

Commissioners discussed screening requirements to hide the structure from public view and whether to require a special land use permit for accessory buildings on a lot without a house.

Second stories would be allowed by the township if they meet health department regulations, the men propose, and cupolas, dormers, and balconies would be allowed, but not considered part of the height requirement. Stairways would be allowed, but must be considered as part of the boathouse construction footprint.

## Park Commission Purchases Unbuildable Lots Near Mackinac Island Airport

By Karen Gould

Two lots at the end of the Mackinac Island Airport, condemned in 2006 over airport safety issues, have been purchased by the Mackinac Island State Park Commission, and a third lot should be purchased by early summer.

The three lots are in the Runway Protection Zone (RPZ) at the west end of the runway and, last summer, owners were prohibited by the state from building on them. The Mackinac Island State Park Commission, which operates the airport, said it would buy the unusable lots.

So far, Lots 6 and 8 in the Forest Brook subdivision have been purchased, while Lot 7, owned by Tom Dougherty of Erlanger, Kentucky, is pending.

Lot 8 was owned by Dale Ivey of Swartz Creek, who purchased the parcel for \$72,000 in 2003. He received \$149,300 from Park Commission.

Lot 6 was owned by Gary Childs of South Lyon, who purchased it for \$89,000 in 2004 and sold it to the commission for \$126,500.

The commission also paid closing costs and survey fees, and, in some cases, covered attorney bills.

But after several years of paying property taxes and the interest on a loan, Mr. Childs said he lost money on the sale.

"It's just a sad thing," he said. "What was a dream turned into a nightmare. It's unfortunate. I used to love Mackinac Island... now it's just a sore subject."

"I lost money on a dream," he added, "because of somebody's mistake."

The mistake was that the

Mackinac Island State Park Commission failed to warn the city and private developers that some of the property past the end of the runway, on the side of the bluff, was in the flight safety zone and could not be built on.

His property, Mr. Childs noted, was worth more money a few years ago, and the price offered should have been based on a good market, not a bad market. This year his taxes were increased on a piece of property that was not usable.

State Park Director Phil Porter said is his sympathetic.

"I understand and appreciate," he said, "the frustration and concern all these landowners have experienced in going through this long process."

In addition to the lot purchases, the Park Commission is seeking aviation easements on four other privately-owned parcels that are partially inside the boundaries of the protected area. Since September, the park has been negotiating with Josh and Cynthia Ivey-Abitz, Bert and Danielle Vescoloni, Phillip Olson of C.P.T. Partnership, and Robert and Catherine Brockman.

An aviation easement controls the airspace over a piece of property and regulates tree height. Landowners, who have the easements agree not to have upward shining lights that could impede night flights, or duck ponds which would attract waterfowl a could promote a potential flying hazard.

The Runway Protection Zone has not changed since 1963, said Mr. Porter, but the Park Commission only began notifying landowners two years ago that

their property was unbuildable or that airspace had to be controlled through aviation easements. Prior to that, according to Mr. Porter, detailed, three-dimensional maps of the RPZ were not available, so nobody understood the property restrictions on the bluff.

"The problem is," he said, "it hasn't been identified on a map so that builders and developers would be able to know that and to be able to work off that information."

With maps now available, airports across Michigan are facing a similar problem. In 2006, as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) detailed the airport zones, some communities were notified that land development near their airports violated FAA regulations.

According to Mr. Porter, "We have land development going on at

the same time the FAA, through the [Michigan] Bureau of Aeronautics, is doing a better job of identifying safety areas around airports. What we are finding now is that where people are platting building lots in areas that are being identified as being unbuildable, or are ones in which there have to be aviation easements."

The commission has been negotiating with the landowners since last September. Prior to the offers, the land was surveyed, appraised, review appraisals were conducted, a negotiator was hired, offers were sent, and negotiations began.

To cover the transactions and pay for fees and professional services, the commission has received \$1.2 million in state and federal funds.

## Les Cheneaux Community Foundation Grant Applications Taken Until May 9

The Les Cheneaux Community Foundation will take applications for grants through Friday, May 9.

The application period opened April 11. Grant application packages will be mailed to previous applicants, can be picked up at Les Cheneaux Community Library, or will be available online at the foundation's Web site: [www.uplccf.com](http://www.uplccf.com). Applications can be downloaded from the site, completed, and mailed to Les Cheneaux Community Foundation, P.O. Box 249, Cedarville Michigan 49719.

Applications will be reviewed and awarded in the spring.

This is the eighth year the Community Foundation will award grants to local organizations for projects that help the

community. Grant application packages can be ordered by sending e-mail to grant coordinator Joni Burger at [u.p.joni@gmail.com](mailto:u.p.joni@gmail.com).

Grants are not normally made for operating expenses, annual fundraising campaigns, political campaigns, loans, secretarial purposes, or deficit funding. Grants are not made directly to individuals, but rather to nonprofit organizations and schools.

Grant application assistance must be requested a week before the grant application deadline, and applications must be finished by Friday, May 2, for review. Request assistance by sending e-mail to Mrs. Burger, or calling Rick Shapero at 484-2415.

## Youth Art Sought for Stalwart Fair Book

Pictures depicting the meaning of fair days are being sought for the cover of the 103rd Stalwart Fair book.

The fair board is sponsoring a contest for the cover art, and is seeking submissions from young people ages 6 through 19. All entries will be displayed at the 2008 fair, and the winning entry will be on the cover of this year's book. The deadline for entries is June 1.

Art can be freehand or computer generated, and must be submitted as black and white graphics. Rules and entry forms can be obtained by contacting Terrie Kucharczyk at (906) 630-3578, or at 26635 South Toledo Drive, Goetzville, Michigan 49736. Send entries to Mrs. Kucharczyk at the same address.

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All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

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The St. Ignace News maintains a policy of not charging for obituaries and we do often add information or rewrite them for clarity and reader interest. Obituaries that the family wants published exactly as submitted can be placed in the newspaper for \$75. Photographs are welcome at no charge.

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and Les Cheneaux Islands Weekly Wave

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[www.SaintIgnaceNews.com](http://www.SaintIgnaceNews.com)

USPS Periodical Publication Number - 462-380

ESTABLISHED 1878

Published each Thursday at Saint Ignace, Mackinac County, Michigan

Entered in Saint Ignace, Michigan Post Office as Periodical Mail Matter, Act of March 3, 1879

Periodical Postage Paid at Saint Ignace, MI • Additional Postage Paid at Gaylord, MI

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to St. Ignace News, PO Box 277, St. Ignace, MI 49781

Volume 129, Number 2 Thursday, April 17, 2008

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Subscriptions: \$35 in Mackinac, Chippewa, Emmet, Luce, and Cheboygan counties.

\$42 elsewhere in the United States and military post offices.

\$30 for the Web edition at [www.saintignaceneews.com](http://www.saintignaceneews.com)

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The quotation under the flag of *The St. Ignace News* on Page 1 is from the 10 triads written by Dr. Fred Newton Scott, creator and teacher of the first continuous course in journalism in the United States at the University of Michigan in 1890. The 10 triads are chiseled on the parapet of the Detroit News Building at 615 Lafayette Boulevard, Detroit. They were headed "Ideals of the Press" or "The Newspaper in a Free Society," and serve as a reminder of what a free press means to us.

## Michigan Politics

By George Weeks



## Heston's Michigan Roots

The late Hollywood icon Charlton Heston was raised in northern Michigan, where he had his first acting stints.

Not so well known is that this film legend was deeply steeped in the political history of Michigan, which he fondly called "my home state" although he was born in Illinois and went back there for high school.

It was in the tiny Roscommon County hamlet of St. Helen where his father ran a lumber mill that Heston, as a boy in plays in a one-room school, began honing skills he displayed in playing what he called historical "formidable fellows"—Moses, John the Baptist, Julius Caesar, Michelangelo, and Andrew Jackson.

Before there was the booming voice of Moses, there was the squeaky voice of a kid with just one line playing Santa Claus, "crouching in a cardboard fireplace, so I could come out at the end and say, 'Merry Christmas.'"

"He cherished his Michigan roots and was supportive of preserving Michigan history," said ex-Governor William G. Milliken, who had a "Dear Chuck/Dear Bill" correspondence relationship with Heston, who was as far to the right in the GOP as Milliken has been to the left.

Although in earlier years he was president of the Screen Actors Guild and campaigned for such Democrats as John F. Kennedy, Heston became a conservative crusader and president of the National Rifle Association (NRA). He was vigorous on the trail for Republican President Ronald Reagan, including a 1984 rally in Detroit.

For movie buffs, the most enduring image of Heston might be as a bearded and robed Moses, coming off the mountain in "The Ten Commandments," or as a lean chariot-racing gladiator in "Ben-Hur," for which he won the 1959 best actor Oscar.

For gun buffs, the memorable image would be at the podium of an NRA convention, waving a rifle and famously vowing that the only way it would be taken away was "from my cold, dead hands."

In reporting on his April 7 death, the Associated Press recalled that Heston once delivered a job at then-President Bill Clinton, saying, "America doesn't trust you with our 21-year-old daughters, and we sure, Lord, don't trust you with our guns."

In the 1980s there was faint,

flickering talk of Heston running for the U.S. Senate from Michigan (Illinois-born Hillary Clinton, via Arkansas, became senator from New York), and, far more seriously, from California.

But Heston told *Parade* in 1986: "I'd rather play a Senator than be one." And, as he said in an old interview aired Friday night on Turner Classic Movies before showing of "Ben-Hur," if he ran and won, "I could never act again, and that's unacceptable to me."

Scott Craig, a former Chicago-based network producer now residing in Leland, directed Heston's narration of two films shown on public TV. One was about Northwestern University, where Heston had an acting scholarship. Craig recalls Heston being "formal, but polite," at one point telling Craig: "I'll re-read, as long as you tell me why."

Craig's other gig with Heston was for the 1982 narration of "Stewards of the State: The Governors of Michigan," a half-hour film that the now-defunct Milliken Foundation financed as a gift to what was then called the Michigan Division of History for viewing in schools, museums, and elsewhere.

As then a Milliken functionary and author of the script (later expanded as a book published by *The Detroit News* and the Historical Society of Michigan), I joined Craig for recording at Heston's rambling home on the rim of Coldwater Canyon in Beverly Hills.

Heston did more than read the script. He honed it, stopping periodically to suggest changes or reminisce about Michigan's early days.

The script said Stevens T. Mason, who was 26 when Michigan achieved statehood in 1837, was Michigan's youngest governor. After recording this, Heston paused to say he thought Mason was the youngest governor of any state. He said: "Let's record it both ways and you check it out."

Turns out he was right. Once Scott Craig's film was completed and scheduled for 1983 release on public TV, Heston wrote Milliken that he was "grateful for the chance to do something for my home state."

*George Weeks retired in 2006 after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.*