

Village of Mackinaw City Mulls Buying Two Blighted Properties

Blight: From page 1

continued to push Council to purchase two blighted properties and suggested a four-year millage that would levy 0.25 mill a year would pay for the acquisitions. One mill generates about \$140,000 in revenue, which he said was about the cost for both properties he has in mind.

Properties under consideration for purchase by the village are at 305 East Etherington Street and 719 West Central Avenue. Both are listed for sale and the proposal now will be sent to the finance committee for further discussion.

Mr. Wallin said he believes it is the Village's obligation to make Mackinaw City a great place to live and for tourists to visit.

Audience member Chris Brown, a local builder, suggested Council follow the lead of other downstate communities and offer tax abatements to those who seek to redevelop their property.

Mr. Wallin said applying for and getting funding for the program would not be easy and the city could quickly take care of the blighted sites, which he said have been a village problem for about 30 years. He questioned the courage of council members to act on the matter.

"I think we can do better than doing nothing," he said. "Doing nothing is what has been done for a long time."

He continued, "People should be on notice that we are going to toughen up our blight ordinance and we will be aggressive in alleviating some of these concerns."

Mr. Hingston said there are other neglected properties in the community, although they are not for sale, and questioned how the village should handle those situations.

With the possibility of using one of the parcels for a fire hall, Mr. Hingston requested the matter be sent to the finance committee for further consideration.

Council member Jim Alford agreed with Mr. Wallin's idea to purchase the properties, however, he said the city needs to prioritize its projects. The city still has not built a new fire hall or finished work at the Village Hall and has streets in disrepair, all of which he said should be done before the city considers buying blighted property.

He also is concerned about the loss of revenue. The properties would be taken off the tax roll if the city purchased them, and there would be additional cost to bulldoze the structures, remove the debris, and keep the sites mowed.

Council member Belinda Mollen did not agree that the village

should purchase the property, rather she supported making the blight ordinance stricter, which would allow the city to correct the problem without buying land.

In other business, the board approved a senior millage appropriation agreement with Cheboygan County. The millage already was approved by voters and requires the village appropriate \$30,000 for senior citizen services, which includes Meals on Wheels. The village gives the funds to the Wawatam Area Senior Center, a nonprofit group that provides senior services and runs the senior center.

The council approved an ambulance millage appropriation agreement with Cheboygan County. The village provides ambulance service for the residents of Hebron and Mackinaw townships and will receive about \$34,000 a year to pay for the service.

The board decided it will allow the Mackinac Bridge Authority to use Conkling Heritage Entertainment Park as a staging area for the annual Mackinac Bridge Walk.

The board approved a contract with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Division to use the state's reservation system for transient boat slips. This agreement is for the village marina. The village is paid a portion of each reservation. The agreement is in effect until October 31, 2016.

The Mackinaw Trolley Company received council approval to operate two trolleys from May to November. The company provides guided tours of various sites in the Straits area and has had an agreement with the village in past years.

The following 10 special events were approved by council:

May 2: Fishing Expo requested by Mackinaw Crossings.

May 21 through May 25: Memorial Day Pageant and Encampment requested by Michilimackinac Voyageurs.

June 5 through June 9: Taste of Summer requested by Mackinaw Crossings.

July 4: Strawberry Social requested by the Mackinaw Woman's Club on the marina lawn.

July 18 and July 19: AMBUCS fundraiser for handicapped children requested by Mackinaw Crossings.

August 1 through August 9: Shoreline West Bicycle Tour requested by Michigan Bicyclist. They will use parking near the recreation center.

August 4: Annual Antique Show requested by the Mackinaw Woman's Club for signs announcing the event.

August 14 and August 15: Car Show requested by Mackinaw Crossings.

September 4 and September 5: Hoops of Fun requested by Mackinaw Crossings.

November 15 through November 30: Mackinaw Outfitters Buck Pole.

More information is needed, say council members, before a decision can be made on a request for a Farmers Market at Mackinaw Crossings. Consideration of the matter was postponed until its next meeting.

During public comment, Mr.

Brown objected to the business license ordinance. He had voiced his disapproval for the regulation during the public hearing in January. Businesses, he said, do not want the ordinance and the village would be better to spend the money on fireworks.

Council went into closed session to discuss a legal opinion from Mr. Evashevski regarding its proposed business license ordinance. No decision was made following the closed session.

Council next meets Thursday, February 19, at 7 p.m. in Mackinaw City Village Hall.

Northern Michigan News Roundup

The news in brief from communities around the U.P. and northern Michigan

Compiled using information published in various community newspapers.

Sulfide Mining Project Put on Hold at Marquette

Development of a nickel and copper mine using sulfide mining techniques on the Yellow Dog Plains at Marquette has been deferred "until market conditions recover," the Kennecott Eagle Minerals Company announced Wednesday, February 11.

But Kennecott Eagle Project Manager Jon Cherry said the news will not change the company's immediate plans for the mine. Officials will still work on permitting and litigation issues surrounding the project.

Parent company Rio Tinto made the decision after reporting net earnings of \$3.7 billion, half what they were the previous year, according to the company. In December, Rio Tinto announced it would eliminate 14,000 jobs, cut capital spending for the coming year, and expand its assets targeted for divestment, in response to the global economic downturn.

The company had sought state permits for sulfide mining of an ore body at Marquette, and the permits were legally challenged by U.P. environmental groups.

In December, Mr. Cherry said despite Rio Tinto's steep cutbacks, efforts to develop the company's proposed mine on the Yellow Dog Plains were continuing, with additional exploration and development slated for the future.

Even if legal challenges were soon resolved in the company's favor, construction of the mine would take two years to complete before operations would begin. That could mean the project deferral may not end up having much of an impact on the company's plans for the Eagle Mine, depending on how long it takes for the markets to rebound.

— *The Mining Journal, Marquette*

Cheboygan Mulls Cutting Costs by Giving Police Duties to Sheriff

Police duties in Cheboygan may be handed over to the Cheboygan County Sheriff's Department as a cost-saving measure for the city, and a committee was formed at a City Council meeting Tuesday, February 10, to study the concept. The idea is in its preliminary stages, council members stressed.

The move could mean the end of the city's Department of Public Safety. The budget for the city police department is \$818,000.

Mayor Les Tebo pointed out that the city of Mount Clemens and some townships in the southern part of the state have made similar moves, and the measure could help the city pay for "better water and better sidewalks" that citizens have called for.

Former Mayor James Muschell reminded Council the idea was also studied in 1964, and after the study, city leaders decided it would not be best to pursue it. He cautioned city leaders not to make any decisions that could jeopardize federal stimulus funds.

In 60 days, the committee is expected to make a presentation to the council. Public hearings on the matter would follow.

— *Cheboygan Daily Tribune*

Strickland Elected to Board of Directors

Newton Township Treasurer Marilyn Strickland was elected to the Michigan Townships Association Board of Directors Friday, January 30, at the Association's 56th Annual Educational Conference at the Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center.

"It is a privilege to be elected to the Michigan Townships Association Board of Directors," Mrs. Strickland said. "Having dedicated my life to service through township

government, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to be the voice of our region in Lansing."

Ms. Strickland has been involved with township government since 1976. From 1979 to 1984, she served as the Newton Township Building Inspector. She was a Newton Township firefighter and secretary from 1982 through 1988. From 1982 through 1984, she was a member of the board of review.

St. Ignace News Policies

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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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Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Transparency Gets Cloudy in Capitols

It all too often is a struggle to apply the bright light of public scrutiny that is a tonic for the stealth that ails government in Washington, Lansing, and all levels of local government.

Last week, two Michigan politicians trumpeted the need for transparency on the state and national fronts.

• Attorney General Mike Cox toured both peninsulas last week (including Marquette, Sault Ste. Marie, Traverse City, and Big Rapids) to push his call for Governor Jennifer Granholm to follow the lead of 16 other states and the federal government that have "created a searchable Web site where citizens can keep track of their taxes and see how their dollars are being spent."

• U.S. Representative Dave Camp (R-Midland), ranking Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee and a member of the conference committee appointed to resolve House-Senate differences in the massive economic stimulus package, railed on the House floor Friday that most House members and "the American people were frozen" out of the process because of lack of transparency about details in the 1,100-page bill.

I always welcome talking to politicians who champion transparency, as I did last week by phone with Cox and Camp. Both of them played off what President Barack Obama has said about importance of transparency.

"Transparency breeds accountability and is very empowering" for citizens, said Cox, who puts his department's spending online and has a drug cost Web site that at one point was averaging 160,000 hits a month. "It is the FOIA [Freedom of Information Act] of the 21st century."

(The Midland-based Mackinac Center gave deserved cheers last week to rookie state Reps Tom McMillin, (R-Rochester) and Justin Amash (R-Grand Rapids) for setting "an example for all of state government by putting the names and salaries of their legislative staff online — the first state officials to be so publicly transparent regarding who is working for them and how much they make.")

Recalling that Obama as senator co-sponsored the federal transparency spending Web site to "achieve a very simple and powerful vision that rejects the idea that government actions and decisions should be kept secret," Cox called on Granholm in her budget last week to provide for such a single site. She did not.

(Granholm Press Secretary Liz Boyd said that in a budget that slashes \$670 million from current programs, the state still provides a wide range of online information and there was no room for the "millions" it would cost for converting the current system to the kind that Cox seeks. Subsequently, the administration did not provide promised cost specifics in time for this column.)

If, in fact, the system that Cox seeks would cost "millions" to install, I can see why Granholm did not include it in last week's tight budget.

There's no disputing Congressman Camp's complaint about lack of transparency in the stimulus package. As one of five House members on the conference committee, he said he walked past a press conference held by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid "announcing a final deal had been struck by senators, and only by senators. This is the first conference [committee] I have ever been on where the press conference announcing the results happened before the actual meeting."

The most valid of Camp's points was lack of transparency/lack of openness in what was in the bill before the vote. However, given the rush for decision on this biggest spending bill in U.S. history, the transparency problem is not so much that the public did not have access to what was in it but that their elected representatives did not have time to read the huge bill they voted on.

Camp said that the stimulus package writing was "a stunning reversal of a campaign pledge to end the practice of writing legislation behind closed doors" that as of late last week was still on an Obama Web site: www.change.gov/agenda/ethics_agenda.

Camp cited this Obama pledge: "As president, Barack Obama will restore the American people's trust in their government by making government more open and transparent. Obama will work to reform congressional rules to require all legislative sessions, including committee mark-ups and conference committees, to be conducted in public. By making these practices public, the American people will be able to hold their leaders accountable for wasteful spending and lawmakers won't be able to slip favors for lobbyists into bills at the last minute."

Camp correctly said the process "has been anything but public. It is backtracking on a campaign pledge. When you write legislation in secret, you get bad laws."

Bad also are decisions made in secret by county commissions, township boards, city councils, and other local bodies.

"Government more open and transparent." It's a presidential vow that should be kept — and trickle down to local governments.

Fair Enough

In her weekly radio address, Granholm said her proposed budget is a combination of spending cuts and government reforms necessary to address both the ongoing structural deficit in Michigan's budget and the cyclical challenges caused by the national recession.

Among specifics she cites is elimination of support for the two State Fairs. In her State of the State Address, she expressed hope that others would step forward to provide funding. It's a good bet that they will.

Options for the Michigan State Fair, if Metro Detroit lawmakers fail to defeat Granholm's proposal, include having a racetrack or other high-revenue producers.

In Escanaba last week, the *Daily Press* noted that at a well-attended public meeting on the Upper Peninsula State Fair there was agreement that "local control as opposed to state control could result in many potential benefits for the community."

Director Vickie Micheau of the Delta County Chamber of Commerce said: "We really want to assure people that if the state gets out of business that this community will band together and do everything we can to make sure there is a U.P. State Fair."

It's great for the economy, families, and a must-stop for touring politicians.

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.

Patent Law Workshop Set for Feb. 24

A workshop on Intellectual Property Rights will be Tuesday, February 24, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. in Sault Ste. Marie, on the campus of Lake Superior State University in the Center for Applied Sciences Building Room 123. The program is hosted by the Michigan Small Business and Technology Development Center.

The workshop will benefit local inventors and businesses with questions regarding patents and licensing. The cost is \$40 per person; scholarships are available through the Sault Ste. Marie Area Chamber of Commerce.

To register, contact Leisa Mansfield at 632-3301 or Sara Cole at (906) 789-0558, extension 203.

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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.