



East Village

Magazine

March 2020

Photograph by
Ellen D. Carter



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Commentary

Making sense of the census: Be sure you are counted!

By Paul Rozycki

In a nation of 330 million people, one person doesn't make much of a difference, right?

Don't tell that to the 29,999 people in Burton. In the last census, they were one person short of the 30,000 level for federal programs, and it cost the city a significant amount of federal funds.

By now, if you haven't heard already, most local governments in Genesee County (and around the nation) are making a big pitch to make sure that everyone takes the time to get counted for the 2020 census. The cities of Flint and Burton, as well as Genesee County, have formed census committees to urge and assist local residents in responding to this month's census.

As reported in last month's *East Village Magazine*, the Mayoral Complete Count Committee is working with the Community Foundation of Greater Flint to make sure that every person in the city is counted. This is critically important because, according to the mayor's office, only about 79 percent of Flint residents participated in the 2010 census, and the prospects are that the turnout may be even lower this year. Each person not counted results in a loss of \$1,800 annually. In 2010, Flint's population was officially 102,400, but the expectations are that it will be significantly lower this year.

Why it is required

The census counts everyone living in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and five U.S. territories. The U.S. Constitution requires that the nation take a census at least once every 10 years to determine how many members of the U.S. House each state deserves. This is particularly important for

Michigan this year, since many fear that because our population hasn't grown much, we may lose one member of the U.S. House, leaving the state with only 13 House members. A few decades ago, Michigan had 19 members of the U.S. House.

Redistricting

In addition to determining how many U.S. House members a state deserves, the census is also used to draw new election districts for most other elected offices, from the state Senate, the state House of Representatives, as well as city council districts and county commission districts. By law, each election district must be nearly equal in population, and the census measures what changes have taken place in the last 10 years. The census numbers are used to redraw every election district, and as Michigan begins to use its non-partisan redistricting committees next year, the results will be even more important.

Government funds

While apportioning congressional seats is the only constitutionally required reason for the census, over the years it has grown to serve many other significant purposes. Not only are members of the U.S. House based on population, but so is the allocation of government funds. The federal government allocates about \$675 billion dollars nationwide, based on census numbers. The census determines how over 100 federal programs are funded, including Medicaid, Head Start, block grants for mental health, road funds, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

(Continued on Page 14.)

Cover: Early Spring?



Photo of the Month: Almost ready for downtown life on Fourth Street (by Edwin D. Custer)

Poverty still the story: New report highlights progress and perils of Flint kids

By Coner Segren

The story of Flint in the past decade has largely been a tale of two cities. While the unemployment rate has fallen by more than half since 2010, 69 percent of Flint children under the age of 5 are living in poverty. And that is just one of the many challenges facing families in Genesee County in the wake of the Flint water crisis, per a report presented by the Greater Flint Health Coalition at the first “State of Flint Kids” event Feb. 14.

“We’ve heard the State of the State, and we’ve heard the State of the Union,” said Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, one of the main speakers at the event, in a press release. “Now it’s time to hear about the State of Flint Kids.”

Hanna-Attisha, a Hurley Medical Center pediatrician who played a key role in exposing lead levels of her young patients in the water crisis, said she intended for the event to

showcase both the progress that has been made in the last few years, as well as some of the obstacles that remain for the health and well-being of Flint kids.



Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha
(Photo by Mike Naddeo)

And indeed, the state of Flint kids is not all doom and gloom.

According to the data provided, 98 percent of Flint kids have health insurance, and 71 percent of Genesee County children under 3 have had all of their standard immunizations through 2019. More mothers started breastfeeding, 42 percent in 2016, up from 28 percent in 2014. The rate of children placed in foster care due to abuse and neglect in 2018 was less than half the rate in 2009, down to 8.6 per 1,000 children from 19.4 per 1,000.

The report highlights several programs that have had success bringing a higher standard of living to families around Genesee County, including the Flint Kids Read program, which mails books to children to promote literacy, and has mailed out over 135,000 books to Flint area kids since 2017.

The Health Coalition found that 93 percent of Flint children do not have access to a grocery story

(Continued on Page 15.)

Library staff synchronizing complex moves, “working our hearts out”

By Zach Neithercut

“Is my hair on fire?”

That’s what Flint Public Library (FPL) Director Kay Schwartz says she blurts out these days to anybody asking how things are going.

Schwartz is at the helm of a complicated — and extremely rewarding — set of maneuvers as the 60-year-old library on Kearsley Street begins preparations for its massive makeover — a \$27.6 million project to transform the aging facility from the inside out and create 16,000 of additional square feet.

“It will be a ‘like new’ library,” Schwartz has declared.

To make way for construction work on the upgrade, the library is moving to temporary quarters — at Courtland Center, 4190 E Court St., Burton. Friday, Feb. 29, was the last day of service for now at Kearsley Street until August 2021 — a milestone observed with a renovation kick-off party that day.

The library will be closed for two months, with the Courtland Center location scheduled to open in May and renovation at Kearsley Street getting underway continuing through August 2021, according to *yournewFPL.org*.

Courtland Center will offer the same services as Kearsley Street (getting/renewing a library card, children’s section, computer access, printer and photocopying, checking out material, and genealogy). Parking will be available on either the north or south sides of the mall; public transportation includes MTA Bus #10, and hours and contact information will remain unchanged.

From construction projects for both buildings, to two additional storage locations, to final design decisions, even to the kind of paper towel holders planned for remodeled rooms, Schwartz is handling something like three-dimensional chess.

Public support for library renovation made it happen

The project is going forward thanks

to receiving a \$12.6 million millage approval from Flint voters last year as part of the total \$27.6 million plan.

Schwartz said she, the library staff and library board are “overwhelmed and humbled” and inspired to “keep working our hearts out for the people we serve.” (As detailed in a January overview in *EVM*)

The project received major boosts from the C.S. Mott Foundation. In 2017, the foundation awarded the library \$500,000 to work with an architect and develop the renovation design.

Later, the library announced an additional \$1.2 million from the foundation to support the renovation effort. And in December, they contributed an additional \$13.8 million, with the Ruth Mott Foundation giving a \$1 million grant and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint granting \$50,000.

Leaning over a design for the Courtland Center layout in a recent interview, and in a rush to get to a meeting with the architects, Schwartz took a deep breath and said, “Timing is everything.”

Setup at Courtland Center had to be completed, as well as the certificate of occupancy from all inspectors before the moving in to the mall. Schwartz said, “Construction at Courtland is going very well,” so the library’s opening at its temporary lodging there is still expected in May.

Architect and construction manager OPN from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, a nationally known architecture firm specializing in libraries, is handling construction at both the renovation project on Kearsley Street and Courtland Center.

Two other sites providing storage space

But the challenge does not just involve those two locations. In addition, the library will be making use of two additional temporary storage spaces,

complicating Schwartz’s task now of deciding what goes where — and when.

Some materials are being temporarily relocated to a General Motors (GM) warehouse in Grand Blanc, located behind Kohl’s on Saginaw Street, and to the basement of the nearby Flint Cultural Center (FCC) Academy Charter School, Schwartz explained.

Space at the warehouse — about 15,000 square feet — was donated by GM.

The challenge, Schwartz added, is choosing what to bring to Courtland Center and what to leave in storage at GM. She said all “visible” children’s books from the children’s section at Kearsley Street will fit at Courtland Center. Other children’s books from Kearsley Street will likely be stored in a section of the FCC Academy’s basement. She noted children’s services will be provided for FCC Academy students, and FPL librarians will physically go to the school under a fee-for-services arrangement with the academy.

Schwartz said books in storage at GM or FCC Academy that are not available at Courtland Center can be brought out of storage in a few days, if requested. Schwartz explained the Courtland Center location can be thought of as “a smaller version” of the FPL.

Digital age changing library’s collection

Schwartz said as a result of the growth of the digital world, FPL, like other libraries around the country, has reduced its physical non-fiction collection and increased its digital collections. This includes e-books, downloadable audiobooks and streaming music.

Preparing to fulfill its key roles

Key roles that the library must fulfill
(Continued on Page 8.)

Education Beat

FCS moves toward March 10 millage renewal, Lopez declares school closures off the table

By Harold C. Ford

At the Feb. 19 meeting of the Flint Community Schools' (FCS) Board of Education, Superintendent Derrick Lopez announced a public information campaign that seeks voter approval for a March 10 millage restructuring proposal. Lopez emphasized that the proposal is not a millage increase. Rather, it's a restructuring of a 4.0 mill currently assessed property owners.

However, for the moment, the FCS board is setting aside any action on a consolidation plan critical to the success of any debt elimination strategy. A consolidation plan would likely include the closure of some school buildings.

In a statement issued in late February, Supt. Lopez confirmed, "While the consolidation plan is still in working form, one option is off the table: the closure of elementary school buildings. We heard loud and clear from our residents that closing elementary schools would not be a viable path forward. We listened to that feedback and, as a result, are removing that element of the plan."

The announcement of potential building closures turned out representatives of individual school communities — especially Brownell, Holmes, Eisenhower, and Pierce partisans — at the November, December, and January meetings of the board to passionately advocate against closure of their buildings.

Earlier retirement of debt

The goal of the March 10 millage proposal is an earlier retirement of FCS' massive debt caused by multiple factors, including declining student enrollment and resultant loss of state aid, underutilized school buildings, legacy debt from a 2014 loan totaling nearly \$20 million, and alleged underfunding of special needs programming

by the Genesee Intermediate School District (GISD).

"The issue at hand is this:" said Lopez at a January meeting, "the district has a budget deficit of \$5.7 million a year resulting from a legacy debt (loan) of \$2.1 million a year and an additional \$3.6 million annually in special education services."

According to financial information posted at the FCS website, the projected annual deficit by 2026-27 is expected to grow to a whopping \$25,952,246. FCS debt would not be retired until the 2035-36 school year, 16 years into the future.

If the March 10 millage proposal is passed by Flint voters, FCS officials predict that the district's debt can be retired in seven years and still provide funds for infrastructure upgrades.

The proposal calls for a restructuring of the 4.0-mill rate that is currently assessed district taxpayers. "(The proposal) would keep the bonding at the same amount of 4 mills, but 2.82 of those mills (an increased amount) would actually be put towards debt elimination and 1.18 of those mills (an equivalent decreased amount) would be for the sinking fund.

Sinking fund millage is applied to business/commercial properties only, said Lopez. "The sinking fund is actually for infrastructure ... boilers, technology." Some of that work has already been completed by the district, he said.

A mill is one-thousandth of a dollar, and in property tax terms is equal to \$1 of tax for each \$1,000 of assessment. Thus, 2.82 mills is equal to \$2.82 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value; 1.18 mills is equal to \$1.18 for every \$1,000 of assessed property value.

So, 2.82 mills assessed on a \$20,000 home would be \$56.40; 1.18

mills assessed on a \$20,000 home would be \$23.60. Four mills on a \$20,000 home is \$80. The current median price of a home in Flint is \$24,920 according to Zillow.com.

Building consolidation likely needed to reduce debt

Lopez has described the options for building consolidation as the most reachable goals to trim the massive FCS debt. "The low-hanging fruit ... is the underutilization of space we use in the district ..."

Lopez cited the Northwestern building, which has seating capacity for 1,551 students but currently houses about 400 junior high students.

(Continued on Page 7.)

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**Members meet Thurs., Mar. 19, 2020
7-9 pm in MCC's RTC Auditorium**
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Lead/galvanized tainted pipes replaced so far in Flint:

9,516

Numbers provided by the city are posted at cityofflint.com under **Fast Start Replacement Program**. Totals as of Feb. 21 were **9,516 lead or galvanized pipes replaced, 25,042 pipes excavated**. A total of **15,526 pipes** have been discovered to be copper service lines.

The City aims to have all of Flint's lead-tainted service lines replaced by 2020.

... Education

(Continued from Page 6.)

Cleaning and electricity for the building respectively cost FCS \$141,500 and \$328,000 annually.

“To not make a decision about one school being closed, you are now saying that instead of putting the money in the pocket of a teacher,” observed Lopez, “it’s OK to put money into a space.”

Nothing, however, generated more community interest and controversy than five consolidation options floated to the public. The options revealed deep divisions along geographic and racial lines as various school communities packed board meetings in November, December, and January, imploring FCS board members to keep their schools open. Spokespersons predicted further abandonment of Flint’s public schools by its students and parents unless schools remained open.

“We have too much infrastructure for the number of students we’re trying to educate,” warned Lopez. “We have to get to a number that will allow us to be a viable district.”

FCS backs off consolidation efforts

For the time being, FCS officials have backed off any decisions about building consolidation. A planned public meeting on Jan. 30 to announce a consolidation plan was called off. In a vaguely worded “Consolidation Plan Update” posted at the FCS website, the FCS board conceded, “This process will take more time than has been allotted for the Board to make an informed decision.”

Lopez warned board members about the consequences of not moving affirmatively on reducing the district’s debt. “We are in a space of self-determination right now,” he said in January. “People are looking to see if we are willing to make decisions that are fiscally responsible.”

The “people” referred to by Lopez are obviously State of Michigan officials at the Departments of Treasury and Education who are closely monitoring the district in terms of meeting substantial academic and financial goals.

\$20,000 voter education campaign

At its Jan. 23 meeting, the FCS board allocated \$20,000 for a voter education campaign, in hopes of passing the March 10 ballot proposal. The campaign includes an information blitz on social media platforms and paper fliers to be sent home with every student in the district.

The flier states, in part, that “FCS is working to consolidate school buildings to invest in the future of our students and our community while strengthening our district.”

Public information meetings were scheduled at four sites on four separate dates in late February and early March.

Flint’s millage proposal will share the March 10 ballot with presidential candidates and a county-wide millage proposal by Flint-based Mott Community College (MCC), which asks for approval of a .79 millage assessment. The impact of a competing millage on Flint’s chances is uncertain. MCC millage proponents have been conducting a visible voter information campaign since December.

Flint proponents claim underfunding by GISD

FCS has lodged a formal complaint with the GISD about its formula for allotting special education funding to member school districts. “We don’t get what we should be getting in terms of

our special needs students, in my opinion,” Lopez told the FCS board in November.

A report by Michigan Public Radio showed that, among Genesee County’s five largest districts, Flint received the lowest per-pupil funding for special needs students (see chart below).

The formal complaint by FCS will trigger a process, according to Lopez, that will play out over the next 30 to 90 days and involve the Michigan Department of Education as well as the GISD. “The board is fully aware of and supportive of the petition that was filed,” said Lopez.

Staff attrition continues into 2020

Steady attrition of FCS education staff continued into 2020 as six more educators with over 75 years of experience in Flint schools retired or resigned in January. In 13 months, from Jan. 2019 to Jan. 2020, 84 educators have departed the district, taking with them 1,089 years of experience.

Short and free of controversy — a rarity

The Jan. 19 meeting of the FCS board was a rarity in that it was short—less than an hour—and virtually free of controversy. With consolidation plans off the table at present, there were very few audience members and no speakers.

The relative peace of the Jan. 19 meeting stood in sharp contrast to several meetings in November December, and earlier in January which featured plentiful audience members, an abundance of speakers, and an emotionally charged atmosphere.

Casey Lester, board president, expressed chagrin that more members of the Flint community were not there to observe a “cohesive, functioning group.”

EVM Education Beat reporter Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

District	SpEd Pop.	\$ Allocated	Per-Pupil Amt.
Grand Blanc	956	\$483,762	\$506
Davison	615	\$335,735	\$546
Carman-Ainsworth	617	\$280,307	\$454
Flint	874	\$279,747	\$320
Flushing	544	\$250,791	\$461

... Library

(Continued from Page 5.)

fill for Flint and beyond are early childhood literacy, opportunities for digital learning and evolving ever more robustly into being a “community hub.”

Plans to expand on those roles for the renovated library include many additional meeting rooms — 19, compared to the present four — along with a digital learning hub, and “Children’s Learning Place.” Services and materials at both the renovated library and Courtland Center will remain free or “as close to free as we can get them,” Schwartz stated.

“I will be so excited to see the new Children’s Learning Place!” Schwartz said. The space “will provide a separate room for story times and other programs, more space for early learning toys and activities, as well as the Activity Wall, the Lite Brite Wall, and the Aquarium.”

There will be a 24/7 drop box at

Courtland Center. The existing drop box on Crapo Street at the north entrance to the library will also remain in use until construction on the renovated library begins.

Schwartz said the scheduled opening date and other information for Courtland Center will be updated on yournewfpl.org and FPL’s social media pages, along with construction updates on the renovated library on Kearsley Street.

In the meantime, Schwartz stated library patrons can continue to check out books, audiobooks, magazines and music in digital form while the library is closed and moving in March and April. Schwartz encouraged the many patrons who read only printed books to try out the library’s collection of e-books or downloadable audio during this time.

After the renovated library is completed — estimated for August 2021 — Schwartz stated if the library were to add another branch, it would act as

a mobile branch, likely aiming to serve children. Schwartz said there is a plan laid out for this, but the focus now is on the new FPL location on Kearsley Street.

A little history: it started for women only — until men complained

FPL opened as a subscription library in downtown Flint in 1851, when only women would pay dues and be allowed access, Schwartz recalled. Dues paid by subscribers were then used to buy the books. After husbands complained, men were also allowed to use the library, but not check out books, Schwartz said.

Later, opening its Kearsley Street location in 1958, the FPL became a regional reference library to serve the state of Michigan, providing library cards to anyone living in Michigan — a privilege continuing to this day for anyone with a Michigan address.

EVM Staff Writer Zach Neithercut can be reached at zneithercut@gmail.com.

SHEPPY DOG FUND LECTURES

To the House Without Exit

Explore the simultaneously fascinating and arcane dimensions of the afterlife! It’s thought that there is no more fundamentally religious idea than the afterlife. While ubiquitous in the western world, this concept is both historically and philosophically complicated: How old is this concept?

PART One

3.25.20 @ 6:00p

The Origins of the Afterlife

PART Two

4.1.20 @ 6:00p

The Flowering of the Afterlife

Both lectures stand alone, so attending each is not mandatory for understanding this intriguing religious subject. Additionally, both parts will be available for viewing on the FIA website.



Dr. Justin Sledge
Guest Lecturer



The Sheppy Dog Fund Lecture has been established to address topics of art, religion, and history, and is funded annually by The Sheppy Dog Fund, Dr. Alan Klein, advisor.



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For information, please contact 810.234.1695 or visit flintarts.org

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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers— beginning after our publication date of Mar. 5. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our April issue, email your event to us by Mar. 24 to pisenber@gmail.com.

DLUX Puppets' Alice in Wonderland

Mar. 6

7-9 p.m. Friday

"A fun musical adaptation with actors, high-quality puppetry and digitally projected scenery the whole family will enjoy!"

The Whiting

1231 E. Kearsley St., Flint

For more info visit thewhiting.com/detail/dlux-puppets-alice-in-wonderland.

Tickets: \$18.50-\$33.50

African American Artists of Michigan

Through Mar. 6

7-9 p.m. Friday

"An exhibition of artwork by some of Michigan's most talented African American Artists."

Greater Flint Arts Council

816 Saginaw St., Flint

For more info call 810-238-2787 or email greg@greaterflintartscouncil.org.

Free Admission

Eros & Thanatos

Through Mar. 7

7-9 p.m. Friday

This is a national juried exhibition "established to explore the Greek words for Love and Death."

Buckham Gallery

121 W. Second St., Flint

For more info call 810-239-6233 or email manager@buckhamgallery.org.

Free Admission

OHL Flint Firebirds Hockey Game

Mar. 7, 14, and 18

7-10 p.m. Saturdays and Wednesday

Flint Firebirds battle it out against

Windsor Spitfires on Sat., Mar. 7.

the Erie Otters on Sat., Mar. 14, and

Saginaw Spirit on Wed., Mar. 18.

Dort Federal Credit Union Event Center

3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint

For more info visit flintandgenesee.org or flintfirebirds.com.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest

Mar. 13-22

Friday at 8 p.m., Saturday at 2 p.m., and 8 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m.

From the book by the same name adapted by Dale Wasserman. This one is directed by The Rep's artistic director, Michael Lluberes. It's being called an "edge-of-your-seat drama" and The New York Times says it's "scary and powerful."

The Rep's Elgood Theatre

1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Visit tickets.thewhiting.com/8345/8395

or call 810-237-1530 for more info.

Tickets: Regular \$20, Senior (60+) \$18, Teen \$18, and Children (12 and under) \$16.

Genesee County residents: Enjoy a 30 percent discount on public performances and subscriptions.

St. Patrick's Day Party from Beats Beers

Mar. 14

2 p.m.-8 p.m. Saturday

DJs, food, drinks, art, etc. will be there, including heated tents.

Downtown Flint in the Flat Lot

125 E. Kearsley St., Flint

No cost to attend

FSPA Bon Voyage Concert

Mar. 15

3 p.m.-5 p.m. Sunday

The Flint Youth Symphony will share the music from their upcoming tour of France and Germany.

The Whiting

1241 E. Kearsley St., Flint

Visit tickets.thewhiting.com/8283

or call 810-237-7337

for more info.

Tickets: \$6-\$12

St. Patrick's Celebration with the Ancient Order of Hibernians

Mar. 17

11:30 a.m.-6 p.m. Tuesday

The day starts with an awards program at 11:30 and mass at 12:02 (because Irish people are "always late") at St. Michael's Church on Saginaw St. and 5th Ave. Then there will be a Family Walk to the McFarlan Veterans Memorial Park to raise the Irish flag followed by a celebration at St. Matthew's Church at 706 Beach St. with music, traditional food, Irish dancers and beverages.

All locations are in downtown Flint.

Call Complete Runner at 810-233-8851 for more info.

Donations accepted for the celebration at St. Matthew's Church.

PTAC: Contracting with the State of Michigan

Mar. 26

9-11 a.m. Thursday

Learn about contracting opportunities specifically with the state of Michigan by attending this workshop.

Flint & Genesee Chamber of Commerce
519 S. Saginaw St., Suite 200, Flint

Register by visiting

center-gateway.com/103000/index.php?EVT=54609.



City Council Beat *Analysis: Citizens speak up and votes are swayed, as City Council turns down tax abatement in Carriage Town*

By Tom Travis

On Feb. 24, the Flint City Council voted 5 to 4 against a proposed tax abatement for a property development in the neighborhood that birthed General Motors.

The decision may mean the end of the project, which has been vigorously protested by a group of its neighbors.

The property, formerly a Hamady grocery store now owned by the Farah family with Troy Farah as a trustee, is at the corner of University Avenue and Grand Traverse Boulevard, a few blocks northwest of downtown, in the Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood (CTHN).



University Square
(Photo by Tom Travis)

It has been developed through an agreement between Farah and Carriage Town Ministries over the years as a green space known as University Square. The president and CEO of Communities First, Inc., Glenn Wilson, a developer of many Flint projects, has proposed to redevelop the property into a 48-unit complex of affordable housing.

Contacted after the meeting, property owner Farah did not say whether he would continue with Communities First, but added, “My desire is that the property contributes to the improvement of University Corridor and that any use or development of the property would fit within the vision and master

plan of the area.”

In a statement provided to *EVM* after the meeting, Wilson stated, “It is unfortunate that not everyone can see the bigger pictures around safe, accessible, quality affordable housing in our community. We met with many stakeholders and members of the community, addressing concerns and integrating feedback along the way. Flint was the birthplace of fair housing and this feels like a step backwards not a step forward.”

But for Carriage Town residents who opposed the project, the decision was a major victory. Their arguments included an objection to the 50-year tax abatement, along with worries about the mass, scale and density of the project. They also voiced love of the small park, which had been developed with community donations and volunteer efforts.

For Communities First, the goal was to build affordable units for a community greatly lacking such housing.

Ultimately, the tax abatement, across the board, became the sticking point.

How the decision played out:

In the 5 to 4 vote, Councilpersons Eva Worthing (9th Ward), Allan Griggs (8th Ward), Council President Monica Galloway (7th Ward), Jerri Winfrey-Carter (5th Ward) and Kate Fields (4th Ward) voted against what is called a PILOT ordinance.

Eric Mays (1st Ward), Maurice Davis (2nd Ward), Santino Guerra (3rd Ward) and Herb Winfrey (6th Ward) voted in favor.

The property had been targeted by Communities First to be developed as a 48-unit affordable housing plan consisting of four buildings.

Wilson was attempting to build the project under a PILOT agreement (payment in lieu of taxes) in one of Flint’s Opportunity Zones. In 2016, the U.S. Treasury Department and the Internal Revenue Service announced Opportunity Zones for development across the country; they offer a tax deferral of 10 years for investors. More information and a map of all Opportunity Zones in Flint can be found at The City Flint’s website.

Early in 2019, residents of the CTHN learned about plans to develop the property by Communities First, and some began to register frustrations and objections to it.

Nick Kedovary, president of The Carriage Town Historic Neighborhood Association stated, “Our biggest frustration with this whole thing has been the overall lack of transparency with Communities First. They’ve told us a



Nick Kedovary
(Photo by Tom Travis)

lot of things to sway us to be on board. They told us they planned to work on Georgia Manor.”

Georgia Manor is an already existing abandoned apartment complex in Carriage Town. CTHN residents said they preferred the idea of Communities First developing an already existing property, rather than filling up University Square.

(Continued on Page 11.)

... City Council

(Continued from Page 10.)

Kedovary continued, “CTHNA has always been on board for the redevelopment of Georgia Manor. It’s an existing property, it’s empty and it needs to be occupied. If Communities First wants to pursue Georgia Manor redevelopment, we would work with them.”

Kedovary said he was frustrated that their original commitment to redevelop Georgia Manor still to this day has never



Glenn Wilson and Michael Wright
(Photo by Tom Travis)

come to be.

Both residents of CTHN and members of city council praised Communities First for its work, pointing out that it has established itself as a viable and successful developer for affordable housing in the Flint and Detroit area, including rebuilds of Oak Street School, Swayze Apartments, and most recently, the renovation of Coolidge Elementary School into apartments for seniors.

Councilperson Kate Fields (4th Ward) said, “Mr. Wilson, I believe that Communities First does good work. And I really believe that you could be an asset to this community because developing is intricate, it is complex. It’s hard to learn how to do all these layers of financing.

“What I’m not liking here is your stubbornness, your organization’s stubbornness in your insistence that it be on this site. There is no reason for it to be on this site. This Carriage Town Neighborhood, they don’t want it there. They do not want this project there.”

To applause and cheers from the audience, many of whom were from Carriage Town, Fields said, “What are we as council people? We are represen-

tatives. Ms. Winfrey-Carter is the ward person for that ward, but all of us are here representing the people. And the people are speaking very clearly: they don’t want this project there!”

Wilson responded, “May I explain why it needs to be there? We get funding from the state to build these projects. The projects have to be within a certain distance and parameter. This project is actually within that parameter and that’s why this site was selected. We can’t move it two blocks over because it will not be eligible for the funding we’d get for this site.”

But Fields called into question whether in fact Wilson had nailed down funding commitments for the project. In a final round of questioning between city council and Wilson, along with Michael Wright of Communities First, Fields specifically noted that there was no commitment of funding letter from the C.S. Mott Foundation, in fact noting there was “not one letter of commitment of financing” for the project.

Following the meeting, the Mott Foundation released a statement from President and CEO Ridgway White.

It said, “Communities First has sought support from the Mott Foundation for several development projects. We supported the Coolidge Park Apartments with \$750,000 in grants. We plan to support the redevelopment of Georgia

Manor in Carriage Town with an \$800,000 grant. However, we declined to support the University Square apartments project because we didn’t feel it had the support of the neighborhood.”

In a previous city council committee meeting, Communities First representatives Wilson, co-founder and chief strategy officer Essence Wilson, and real estate development officer Michael Wright, spoke in defense of the development plan.

Essence Wilson offered excerpts from a testimonial letter from an unnamed woman who now lives in the Swayze Court Apartments development, a Communities First development that opened in 2017. The letter shared how her life improved since finding secure, affordable housing through Communities First.

Essence Wilson ended, “I encourage you to vote to approve this project. It will keep rents low for members of this community. We also provide a variety of support for residents in our communities.”

Michael Wright pointed out, “This is not a public park —this is a privately held property,” owned by Troy Farah whose family’s grocery store used to sit there.

Responding to an email from EVM, Farah confirmed his family has owned the property since the late 1970s. Farah’s father bought the property from the Hamady Brothers and changed the name

(Continued on Page 12.)



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... City Council

(Continued from Page 11.)

to Farah Brothers.

Wright drew the council's attention to a packet of information and drawings describing the proposed development. In the packet were two examples of similar buildings in other areas of the Carriage Town neighborhood — Georgian Court and Georgian Manor. He pointed out those buildings are similar in style and size to the proposed buildings for the disputed University Square lot. He noted that those two present buildings are 25 feet high and the proposed building would be 30 feet high.

Wright further stated, quoting from a letter from the Planning Commission, "The project fits with the future mix land use identified with the property in the Flint Master Plan. The initial project design was revised based on input and suggestions from residents in the neighborhood. The Saginaw Chippewa tribe had no concerns about using this site."

Two 5th Ward residents voiced support for the development of the University Avenue and Grand Traverse Boulevard property. One resident, Frederick Jones, a resident of the Carriage Town neighborhood for 27 years, said, "All the demands have been met. Development is necessary. I urge you to say yes to this project. We need more people living there to pay taxes."

A second 5th Ward resident, Marsha Russell, stated, "What they're talking about on this property is affordable housing. This is a PILOT component which as I understand it, is for low income housing in addition to fair market value housing. This project could proceed without this component but it would price those most in need of this type of housing out of that market. The project meets all the standards."

One of the significant issues for the protesting residents of the CTHN is the size and time span of the tax break — particularly the fact that the tax abatement would last 50 years.

Ron Luczak, a CTHN home owner, stated, "If it was a 10-year tax abatement I might have felt different-

ly about it. I think that the 50-year tax abatement is not in the best interest of our city because we've lost so much tax base. If this development was three blocks to the north I would support it. There are two city blocks that are completely vacant consisting of three acres each."

City Council President, Monica Galloway (7th Ward) further defended the project in an impassioned plea before the council voted, saying, "You need to understand this is going to be high quality, and it's going to have to have a group of people that are probably not the people assessing in your minds.

"We're giving the PILOT (a tax break or tax abatement) to people who can afford to buy houses and pay property taxes."

Residents cite mass, density, scale issues

Nancy Sinclair, a CTHN resident since 1977, told the city council, "We feel strongly that destroying an historic district neighborhood by erecting a development in its midst that outsizes it in its mass, density, scale, and setbacks



Nancy Sinclair
(Photo by Tom Travis)

(while providing it a 50-year property tax abatement) is not in the best interest of our community."

Ken Van Wagoner, a CTHN home owner and longtime owner of The Good Beans Cafe, stated in a letter written to city officials and the city council, "Tax revenue collected is used to allow for police and fire departments, libraries, public transportation, education, pensions and many other amenities that are used by everybody."

"Original PILOT programs were set up for tax exempt organizations like churches, government buildings, schools, and the like. They could pay (in lieu of taxes) for a portion of those city amenities they knew they used. They voluntarily agreed to offset the burden on the system by paying something."

"Corporations figured out if they became non-profit they could become eligible for, and apply for, the tax savings to then pocket the difference. How does that help the city? And to ask for 50 years is just plain greedy.

"When the entire system in place to protect this Historic District has failed, the City of Flint should at the very least not have to then lose its tax revenue. Past, present and future City of Flint employees should not have to worry if there is a tax base to give them what they were promised.

"Communities First are said to make the statement they 'can do this project with or without the PILOT.' For the benefit of all those relying on tax revenue from the city of Flint, I will be asking the City of Flint council members to vote no on this PILOT request."

Grand Traverse neighborhood and 5th Ward resident Danny Moilanen, while supporting the Communities First project in Carriage Town, turned to the Carriage Town residents and thanked them for voicing their opinions. Moilanen stated, "I respect many of those I disagree with tonight."

Davis and Guerra, in favor of the project, had their say

Councilperson Maurice Davis (2nd Ward) eventually sided in favor of the PILOT program, but before the vote he said, "Historic districts are made to be preserved not modernized but preserved." Davis had stated that as a former Historic District Commissioner and current president of The Civic Park Historic District, he has grown to appreciate the rules and regulations established by the city to maintain their buildings and neighborhood designs.

(Continued on Page 13.)

... City Council

(Continued from Page 12.)

In a message to *EVM*, Councilperson Santino Guerra, who also voted in favor of the project, stated, "I believe that affordable housing should be available for residents. If we want the city to continue growing, we need to have nice places for families to live."



Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Winfrey-Carter sided with residents

In the final moments before the vote, 5th Ward Councilperson Jerri Winfrey-Carter, the councilperson representing the people of the CTHN implored, "This isn't about poor people. It's called affordable housing, which means it's affordable based on your monthly income. It's not about poor people.

"You still have to have a job to live in this apartment development. You still have to have an income; it's based on your income. That's what affordable housing means. I've lived in affordable housing. It was based on my income ... I'm not against affordable housing. I'm all for affordable housing.

"But what I am against, I'm against Communities First wanting to build a development, a project, in Carriage Town whereas the residents do not want. That's what I'm against and I'm gonna stand with the residents of Carriage Town. I'm gonna stand with them 100 percent."

Winfrey-Carter pleaded with her colleagues on council asking them to do the same thing. Winfrey-Carter asked them to vote with residents in their wards when they come to them.

Following the council decision, Glenn Wilson provided the following statement to *EVM*: "We are disappointed about the vote of the city council and their decision not to support a PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) to keep rents affordable for residents of this development. A PILOT is NOT a full tax abatement. We would still pay city assessments, fire, police and infrastructure service fees on the affordable units only.

"Additionally, we pay taxes on the commercial space and market rate units. We work hard to meet the needs of the Flint community, and most of the time there is overwhelming support."

As viewed by this reporter: a civil process occurred

In sharp contrast to many recent city council meetings, democracy and

civility were the tone of Monday's meeting. For many months Flint city council meetings have been characterized by a debacle of screaming, yelling, racial language and police officers escorting council members out of the council chambers.

Monday's meeting was a far cry from that. The American ideal of democracy and civility in legislative debate, accompanied by the wishes and opinions of its citizenry on both sides of the argument, rang true in Flint City Hall.

The authors of the First Amendment might have been pleased that their words were heeded in Monday's meeting, respecting "the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

EVM Assistant Editor Tom Travis can

Monday, April 20, 2020 7pm

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... Census

(Continued from Page 3.)

In the city of Flint, each person who is not counted will mean an \$1,800 loss of federal funds per year. Over the next decade, for every person missed, that will mean \$18,000 less for the city of Flint to pay police officers, firefighters or repair roads. In a recent press conference, Mayor Sheldon Neeley said more than 20 percent of Flint's population wasn't counted in the last census, and the prospects looked even more daunting this year. Similar challenges apply to each and every governmental unit in the county. As the city of Burton learned, those funds are often applied to specific population categories, i.e., cities of 10,000, 30,000, or 100,000. If you fall one person short, you qualify for fewer dollars.

Community and business planning

The data from the census is used by local governments as they plan for roads, schools, sewers, police, and fire protection. Businesses use the census to decide where to build shopping centers, hotels, factories, and restaurants. It is a snapshot of the local population and tells both governments and businesses if they need more kindergarten classrooms or more senior citizen housing. Is your city growing or shrinking? Do you need to plan on hiring more police officers and firefighters, or should you plan on downsizing the departments? Should ballots be printed in Spanish, Vietnamese, Italian, or some other language, in addition to English?

Other purposes

For those involved in social science research, the census is a vital source of community information. That research is often the basis for new innovations, business startups or government programs. For those putting together a family history, the historical census can give you an idea of when your great-grandfather got off the boat, and where he lived a century ago. After 72 years, census information is accessible for those doing genealogical

or historical research. The census reports from 1940 and earlier are now available to those researching their family histories.

Myths and misunderstandings

There are a lot of false rumors and misunderstandings about the census, and they have been more pronounced recently. All persons are to be counted, not just those who are citizens, and not just those who are here legally. Recent immigration controversies have caused many to hesitate about responding. Last year, the debate about including a citizenship question on this year's census caused many to fear that it might be used to deport the undocumented. There is no citizenship question on the census. The census information is confidential: by law it can't be reported to law enforcement, the Internal Revenue Service, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials, or other government agencies.

Fraud and scams

Since, for the first time this year, much of the census will be conducted online, there are likely to be attempts by some to use the census as an excuse to gather personal information for fraudulent purposes. The census will never send unsolicited emails asking you to respond. The Census Bureau will never ask for your social security number, your bank account or credit card numbers, or ask you for money, and it won't contact you for any political party or cause. Anyone who visits your home for the census should have an ID from the Department of Commerce, with their photo. Those who have any questions about the legitimacy of a census worker or inquiry can contact the census at 800-923-8282 to speak to a local census official.

How it will be done

The census attempts to give an accurate count of the U.S. population

as of April 1, 2020. (A baby born on April 1 should be counted.) This year, there will be three ways to respond to the census. We will have the option of responding either online, by phone or mail. In mid-March, all households will receive mail from the Census Bureau outlining the options and how to respond to them. Census workers will also go into communities to count the homeless and others without permanent addresses. The census form can be completed in any of 13 languages, and it usually takes only 10 minutes to answer the questions.

If you'd like to work for the census

For the first census in 1790, the count was conducted by about 650 U.S. Marshalls. The population of the nation was then about 3,893,000 — less than half of Michigan's population today. Today, there are about 330 million of us in the country, and counting is a much larger job. The Department of Commerce expects to hire about 500,000 workers nationwide for temporary jobs. The 2020 census will require workers in every community and in every state of the nation. Hiring is now underway for this year's census, and several job fairs have already been held. The pay ranges from \$18 to \$25 per hour. Those who are interested in applying can visit 2020census.gov/jobs or call 1-855-JOB-2020 (562-2020) for more information.

For more information

For more information, answers to other questions, and to view a sample census form, visit 2020Census.gov or mivoicecounts.org.

Be sure you are counted!

But be sure you are counted. It doesn't take long. It's confidential, and it's critically important to you and your community.

Political columnist Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

... Flint kids

(Continued from Page 4.)

within one mile. More than 60 percent of Flint families with children received food benefits in 2017, about 33 percent in Genesee County.

Doctors have also provided over 34,000 prescriptions since 2016 for healthy foods like fruit and vegetables that can be redeemed at the Flint Farmer's Market. Good nutrition—specifically green vegetables—has been linked to reducing effects of lead exposure in children and others.

And, of course, more than 9,000 lead and galvanized water service lines have been replaced in infrastructure response to the water crisis.

There are certain numbers that may seem good on their face without telling the whole story, Hanna-Attisha suggested. While Flint's unemployment rate has fallen from 21 percent in 2010 to 9 percent in 2018, one of the biggest challenges for Flint families highlighted in the report is the 69 percent child poverty rate compared with 26 percent for the state of Michigan overall.

Asked what might be causing such disparate numbers, Hanna-Attisha said that while there may be a greater number of jobs in Flint now, they do not pay living wages. "This is why the blueprint given out at the event advocates specific policy changes like raising the minimum wage, paid family leave, and subsidized child care," she said.

Hanna-Attisha appealed specifically to Flint history when stressing the need for better paying jobs.

"This is what Flint is famous for. Flint is the birthplace of the middle class, and it was because of our workers in the auto industry. We are advocating for things like raising the minimum wage, so having a job, a living wage job comes with benefits and everything you need to support your family."

Sharon Swindell, M.D., gave the keynote address on "The State of Michigan's Kids: Blueprint for Children." She is the president of the Michigan

Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, a pediatrician at C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, and an advocate for children exposed to lead poisoning.

Swindell and others stressed the need for the state and federal governments to take action with specific policy goals. Besides the main presenters, the event was attended by several high-profile officials, including State Senate Minority Leader Jim Ananich and Mayor Sheldon Neeley, both of whom spoke, as well as representatives from the offices of U.S. Rep. Dan Kildee and U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow.

Sen. Ananich, who is also chair of the Greater Flint Health Coalition, pointed to the rise of low-paying service sector jobs as being a driver of poverty in Genesee County. One solution the senator promoted was increased funding for education in Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's budget, especially advocating for programs like universal pre-K.

"The governor's budget does a good job of providing services not just for Flint, but for all schools, making sure our schools are on a path to success. Instead of just tracking failure, we are promoting success, and I think a lot of that is giving people the skills and the preparation so that they go to a 2-year program or a training program or a 4-year program," Ananich said.

"If we get the governor's budget, something I have advocated for a long time is universal pre-K. Every kid in Flint will have access to quality universal pre-K programs. I think a lot of these things are bi-partisan — they're not really partisan issues."

Ananich also explained that another motivating factor in presenting this information to the public is transparency. He criticized the Snyder administration specifically for what he characterized as their lack of transparency in their handling of the water crisis, calling most of their outreach "a PR campaign, not a public health concern."

This emphasis on transparency and openness echoes the comments of

Hanna-Attisha on the lasting impact of the water crisis on public health. Both called it "a trauma."

"We have holistically looked at this water crisis as a trauma," she said, "a trauma in regards to lost trust and betrayal."

Both were asked if they believe the crisis to be "over," and if not, how the community might recognize when it is. While both Hanna-Attisha and Ananich were hesitant to say definitively what metric could be used to judge such a thing, they both cited the lost trust the community has in its leaders and feelings of betrayal surrounding it as a public health issue on its own. Ananich compared it to post-traumatic stress.

He ultimately concurred with a statement by Hanna-Attisha. "The crisis will be over when there is an element of justice, when accountability has happened," she said. "Accountability and restorative justice are crucial for healing. [The crisis will be over] when we have a long-term commitment to recovery."

Dr. Hanna-Attisha cited the tasks of restoring that trust and the sustainability of the programs already in place as two of the biggest challenges facing both citizens and leaders in Genesee County going into 2020.

However, when asked what trend or sign she found most encouraging, Dr. Hanna-Attisha cited the kids from the Flint Youth Justice League who opened and closed the event, as well as Flint kids in general.

"It was another opportunity to get re-inspired by our kids, another opportunity to remember why we do this work. They center us, they ground us, they are brilliant, they are brave, they are strong, they are resilient, and it was a reminder that with these kids at our side ... we have to double down our efforts on their behalf and with them to continue this work."

More information from the report is available at StateofFlintkids.com.

EVM Staff Writer Coner Segren can be reached at csegren@umich.edu.

Village Life

Flint Bucks' successes continue into offseason

By Harold C. Ford

The Flint City Bucks already have won an enthusiastic and affectionate following in their first season in the Vehicle City. And their 2019 on-field success, including a national championship in the United Soccer League Two (USL2), has continued into the off-season. Top honors for the club's executives and the ascension of three former players into Major League Soccer (MLS) accentuated the Bucks' impressive inaugural season in Flint.

Executive awards

The Bucks' Dan Duggan and Costa Papista were named Co-Executives of the Year by USL2. "The award is presented to the top executive(s) of a League Two club," according to a January 2020 news release by the league, "who go above and beyond in their commitment to improving their team both on and off the field over the course of a League Two season."

Duggan and Papista serve the club as chairman and president, respectively. This is the third win for Duggan who claimed the award in 2006 and 2014. "Duggan has ensured that the Bucks' on-field product had all that it needed to achieve success," declared USL2 in their news release.

Papista has an impressive history of developing successful sports franchises in mid-Michigan. He was a major player in the creation of the Saginaw Spirit and Flint Firebirds hockey organizations. "During the Bucks' inaugural year in Flint, Papista effectively connected the organization with fans, business leaders, media and the soccer community," according to USL2.

Banner season

The Bucks were the last team standing in the 72-team USL2 at the end of the 2019

season. Sixteen teams entered the playoffs in July and, in the end, the team from Flint captured the championship with a 1-0 victory over Reading United AC before 7,198 appreciative fans at Kettering University's Atwood Stadium on August 3.



Flint City Bucks fans parading to Atwood Stadium in July, 2019
(Photo by Patsy Isenberg)

The Bucks ended their 2019 campaign with an overall record of 19-3-3 (wins-losses-ties) and a home record of 10-1-1. The win netted the 15th national championship for a Flint-based team, the first in the sport of soccer.

Storied history

Founded in 1995, the team began play as the Mid-Michigan Bucks in Saginaw in 1996. The team changed its name to Michigan Bucks, moved to Plymouth in 2004, then to Pontiac, in 2008. They began play as the Flint City



Bucks in May 2019.

During its 24-year history, the team has qualified for 11 U.S. Open Cups, won 11 divisional titles, and has now captured

four national championships, more than any other team in the history of USL2.

Three ex-Bucks make the big league

In mid-January 2020, three former Bucks were drafted into MLS teams, the highest level of soccer competition in North America:

- Defender Nyal Higgins (Ajax, Ontario/Syracuse) spent parts of two seasons with the Bucks in 2017 and 2018. Higgins was drafted in the first round as the 19th overall pick by Toronto FC (Football Club).

- Defender Patrick Nielson (Denmark/MSU) spent parts of two seasons with the Bucks in 2018 and 2019. He was selected as the 23rd pick in the first round by Atlanta United FC.

- Center back Michael Wetunggu (Rochester Hills, Mich./MSU) played two seasons for the Bucks in 2017 and 2019. He was drafted as the 20th pick of the second round by Real Salt Lake.

"The Bucks have sent a total of 87 former players to MLS since 1999," according to a news release posted at the club's website. "More than 200 Bucks players have signed professional contracts in over a dozen countries around the world after they completed their USL2 seasons in Michigan."

New season starts in May

The Bucks will begin its 2020 home game schedule at Atwood Stadium with a 7:00 p.m. match on May 9 against Carpathia FC, a team based in Sterling Heights, Mich.

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