

A black and white photograph of a woman sitting in the driver's seat of a car. She is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and has a piece of crinkled, reflective emergency blanket wrapped around her neck and lower face. Her head is tilted back, and she is looking upwards. A hand wearing a white glove is visible near her face, possibly adjusting the blanket. The car's interior, including the window frame and seat, is visible. The background shows a cloudy sky.

# East Village

Magazine

June 2020

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# East Village Magazine

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## Commentary

# Vote by mail: An idea whose time has come?

By Paul Rozycki

How do you want to vote this year? No, I don't mean whether you like Democrats, Republicans, Joe Biden, or Donald Trump. I mean, how do you actually want to cast your ballot? It seems simple, but there are a lot of choices.

### It's been done many ways

Voting: It's the most basic ritual of our elections, and it's at the heart of what we call the democratic process. At one time, voting was done by voice vote in public, and others were given preprinted ballots by their parties (only later did the government provide the paper ballots). In legislative assemblies, some voting is done by voice vote, some is done by standing and passing by a vote counter, sometimes by a roll call of names, and at other times it's done by an electronic toteboard. For most elections, the methods have included printed ballots, voting machines, scanned ballots, computer screens, and punch cards. The ancient Greeks voted by dropping pebbles into an urn. (The word ballot is derived from a French term meaning "small ball.") Romans voted by writing on a wax tablet. In The Gambia, voters toss marbles into different colored drums. Some organizations decide whom they accept by placing a white ball or a black ball into a box. (Thus the term "blackballed" for those rejected.)

And while there have been many ways to vote, and the details vary in a thousand ways, usually it's been a communal event, where we join together with others, to share the practice of democracy. Now, with the fear of the COVID-19 virus, that may be changing.

### Voting by mail

Within the last few weeks, Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson mailed out absentee voting applications to all 7.7 million registered voters

in the state, giving them the option of staying home on Election Day, and casting their ballots by mail.

Voting by mail isn't a new practice. It was first used during the Civil War to allow soldiers to cast their ballots from the field in 1864. Since that time, it has generally been available to those in the military, or others required to be away from their usual voting location. Five states already use it as their main, or only, way of voting. Another 21 states allow for the option. Many others, like Michigan, have made absentee voting open to all, with no reason needed, as a result of a 2018 initiative vote. In the past, absentee ballots were available only to those over a certain age, unable to get to the polls for health reasons, or those who were otherwise occupied on Election Day.

While the use of the absentee ballot has grown, it has not been used by a majority of voters. Most voters went to the polls and cast their ballots in person. About 27 percent voted absentee in the 2018 midterm election.

That all changed with the COVID-19 pandemic, where we were all advised to avoid crowds and public gatherings. The potential of the new absentee rules were tested in our recent May elections. May elections typically have few issues on the ballot and have a very low turnout. Yet last May 5, in an essentially all-mail election, the vote went smoothly and the voters in Genesee County turned out in record numbers — more than 25 percent — to approve bond issues and millages in several local school districts.

### Conflict over vote-by-mail

So it worked well. We have a pandemic on our hands. Maybe vote-by-mail is the best way to go, right?

Not so fast.

*(Continued on Page 11.)*

Cover: Flint life 2020 means testing: Kathy White at Shiloh Baptist



Photo of the Month: Back to the river, top to bottom, Nick Godlesky, Robert Bennett, Jeni Godlesky (Photo by Tom Travis)

## *With masks, gloves, sanitizing in place, Flint Farmers' Market reopening in phases*

*By Jan Worth-Nelson*

The Flint Farmers' Market, closed to the public since March 28, welcomed back customers for the first time since the shutdown, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Tuesday, June 2.

At first the market will be open only Tuesdays and Thursdays, with the exception of Thursday, June 4, when it closed to allow the market to evaluate the re-opening procedures from the first trial date.

Curbside pickup will continue to be available 1 to 5 p.m. Saturdays through June, with pre-ordering open online 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays.

A notice from the market said 33 of the 44 indoor vendors will open up their spaces with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines in place.

The additional 11 vendors are expected to join July 2.

Since the inside of the market closed March 28, just a few outdoor vendors have been selling on Saturdays

under the outdoor pavilion.

The market also has offered curbside pickup service two days a week since March 29, providing an average of 250 customers a week with fresh produce, baked goods and other groceries.

### **No Saturdays inside in June**

The inside of the market will remain closed on Saturdays in June. However, the outside pavilion will be open with social distancing guidelines



in place 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

“When re-opening, we will provide a safe experience for all shoppers and for our vendors,” Market Manager Karianne Martus said. “We know how much everyone has missed the market. We are so thankful to the community and to our customers for supporting our small businesses during this shutdown!”

### **Several crucial changes will be in place**

Customers will notice many changes, including the following, based on CDC guidelines and described in a press release from the market:

- **Customers will be asked to wear a mask or face covering upon entering the market to shop.** Grocery workers are among the highest risk category for exposure to Covid-19, therefore the market is taking all reasonable precautions to protect market workers.

*(Continued on Page 5.)*



**Inside counter service opening up in June**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

## ... Market

(Continued from Page 4.)

- **Customers will be allowed in the market through one door** and will exit through another designated door, so that management can keep track of the number of people inside the market at any given time.

- **All vendors will be wearing masks and gloves** as required by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Genesee County Health Department. Vendors will follow ALL rules set forth for safe food preparation and handling. Some vendors will also have plexiglass shields on counters.

- **Samples will not be allowed.**
- There will be **no public seating or event spaces** open during the month of June.

- **All restrooms will be closed for five minutes at the top of each hour** so that market cleaning staff can sanitize the area.

- **Customers will find Purell touchless hand sanitizer stations** throughout the market as well as Clorox Wipe dispensers so that they can clean their hands or wipe off products as needed while shopping.

“We are hopeful that by July 2, the market will be once again open all three days a week with all vendors open and able to greet customers. Event space rentals and public seating areas will be determined by the State of Michigan guidelines for public gatherings,” Martus said.

More information is available at the market website or social media pages. To order online for Saturday curbside pick-up, customers can go



**Crust loaves may be available again**  
(Photo by Jan Worth-Nelson)

online Wednesdays between 10 a.m. and 5 p.m.

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

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## Review

# Latest Flint book, “Poisoned Water” belongs in classrooms, libraries all over America

By Harold C. Ford

“Flint was an example of the nation at its worst but also its best.”

— Candy J. Cooper, *Poisoned Water*

I’ve just added a fourth book to my personal collection of publications about Flint’s water crisis: *Poisoned Water: How the Citizens of Flint, Michigan, Fought for Their Lives and Warned the Nation*, written by Candy J. Cooper, with Marc Aronson, released in May by Bloomsbury Publishing.

Cooper is a Pulitzer Prize finalist and a Selden Ring Awardee for Investigative Reporting. An Ann Arbor native now of Montclair, NJ, she’s been a staff writer for four newspapers including *The Detroit Free Press* and *San Francisco Examiner*.

Aronson is author of a number of nonfiction books for young adult audiences including award-winning *Eyes of the World: Robert Capa, Gerda Taro, and the Invention of Modern Photojournalism*. He is involved in a variety of projects to channel works of nonfiction to youth.

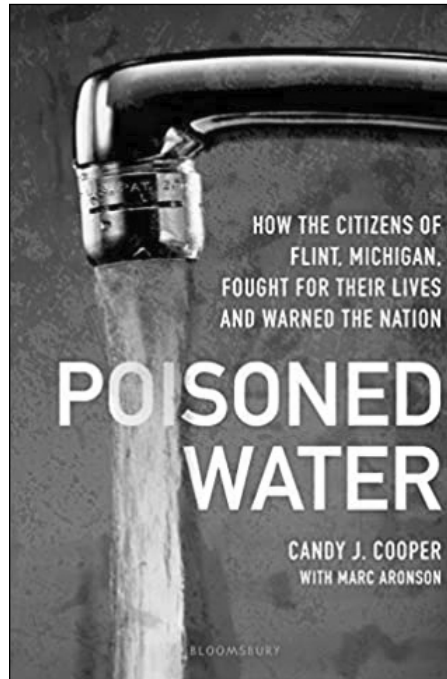
In fact, it was Aronson who conceived the idea for the book — one that targeted middle school readers in grades five through eight — and took it to Cooper.

“Flint is an X-ray of this country,” he wrote, “and in today’s news cycle world, a story everyone is gripped by today can be forgotten by tomorrow.” Pandemic prophetic? Perhaps.

Cooper was smitten right away by the idea. “Why shouldn’t youth tell a story for youth?” she mused. “Flint is a sentinel; Flint tells the story of America; the nation must listen to Flint.”

### A growing bookshelf

*Poisoned Water* now joins *Poison on Tap*, *A Bridge Magazine Analysis* (staff of Bridge Magazine, 2016), *The Poisoned City* (Anna Clark, 2018), and *Flint Fights Back* (Benjamin J. Pauli, 2019) on my



bookshelf — the latter two reviewed in *East Village Magazine*.

Other books inspired by Flint’s water story include *Power, Participation and Protest in Flint Michigan* (Ashley Nickels, 2019), *Learning, Recycling and Becoming Heroes* (Gale Glover, 2016), *Artists Treading Water: Defining the Flint Water Crisis Through Art* (Gale Glover, 2017), *Appointments: A Flint Water Crisis Account* (Carrie Mattern, Jessyca Mathews, DeQuindra Renae, 2018), *Flint: The Death and Rebirth of a City: Unmasking the Flint Water Crisis* (Gale Glover, 2018), and of course, *What the Eyes Don’t See* (Mona Hanna-Attisha, 2018).

### A different kind of book

So, what distinguishes this water crisis book from the others? It’s the intended adolescent audience, ages 10 and up. “I ... want to write about the Flint water crisis for younger readers,” explains Cooper in her prologue.

Thus, this reviewer channeled his 44 years in public education, including eight full-time years at the middle school level, for the task of review.

For starters, *Poisoned Water*’s 24 chapters more than 230 pages are each about 10 pages long — intellectually bite-sized and easily digestible for a younger reader.

The text is sufficiently augmented with nearly 50 photographs — many by *Flint Journal/MLive* photographer Jake May. Many faces will be identifiable to those familiar with Flint’s water story: Claire McClinton; Tony Palladeno, Rick Snyder, Nayyirah Shariff, Mona Hanna-Attisha, Melissa Mays, Lee Ann Walters, and others.

Many other photos effectively capture key moments in the water crisis story: local officialdom, glasses aloft, unwittingly toasting a tragic new chapter of Flint’s story; packed meetings filled with grim-faced Flintstones looking for answers and solutions; hand-scrawled signs filled with angry protestations such as “STOP POISONING OUR CHILDREN”; the easily identifiable Flint Water Plant tower; and the cutaway cross section of lead pipe that stares out at the reader like a lamprey eel looking for its next victim.

The vocabulary seems just right — easy enough for most, but with terms to inspire a dictionary assignment: rankled; contrarian; marginalized; redlining; immunocompromised; phosphates; biofilm; fecal coliform bacteria; and the oddly spelled phlegm.

Cooper boils down complex water science into language that a middle schooler can latch on to, such as her explanation of TTHMs (total trihalomethanes):

“But too much chlorine, when mixed with organic material like dead leaves, produced elevated total trihalomethanes, or TTHMs, chemical byproducts that can lead to liver, kidney or neurological disorders, and even cancer. Not right away, but over time.”

### Captive audience

But could Cooper’s book capture and keep the attention of a younger

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## ... Poisoned

(Continued from Page 6.)

audience? The answer to that query comes quickly: yes.

It happens right in Chapter One, where Cooper introduces the unforgettable Keishaun Wade, a student at Flint's Southwestern Classical Academy. Wade's grandparents earlier brought the family from the "Jim Crow South" to a "deeply segregated Flint."

Wade was born to teen parents. His father never finished high school, resorted

to drug dealing, and ended up in and out of prison during Wade's childhood years. Wade's family moved a dozen times to four different states, jumping from school district to school district.

Wade eventually landed in Flint and a hopeful new start at Southwestern Classical Academy. Not so much: Ice-cold classrooms with holes in the walls and trash in the halls. Shuttered water fountains and empty water dispensers. An opening morning routine "that felt to Keishaun more like practice for prison life than a stepping-stone to college."

And, god forbid, "the history teacher who turned on the television news, wrote a question on the board, and then played computer solitaire for the rest of the class."

Eventually, a grandmother and an aunt, an International Baccalaureate program, some great teachers "who truly cared," and Wade's indomitable spirit helped him to his high school diploma and a full-ride scholarship at Cornell. Cooper starts and stops her book with Wade's story, and I willingly went along for the ride.

Chapter One also introduces the reader to a historical overview of the Flint River and its namesake city with an able assist from Andrew Highsmith and his landmark work, *Demolition Means Progress*. While ticking off points of pride, the history told by Cooper and Highsmith is frequently unflattering and not often found in Flint-area classrooms, especially when it comes to race:

"Flint was the third most racially segregated city in the country and the most racially segregated city in the North ... Flint found itself landlocked by white suburbs more interested in their own improvement and survival than in the old city, now majority black, they had left behind."

Chapter Two takes us to and through the water switch, from Lake Huron water to Flint River water and one of this reviewer's favorite paragraphs in the book:

"And suddenly, river water streamed into the city's musty, old water treatment plant ... It gurgled into Flint's underground waterworks, pulsed through hundred-year-old water mains, and then dispersed from all the indoor plumbing.

It circulated through water heaters and washing machines, spurting out of faucets and shower heads, sloshed into toilets, bathtubs, and sinks. It cascaded into kitchen pots of pasta and potatoes. It topped off formula in baby bottles and poured into pitchers to make Kool-Aid as the days grew warmer ..."

### A book for all ages

In chapter after chapter, Cooper's crisp imagery that borders on brilliance at times, her translation of complex water chemistry for common folk, the continuing introduction of bureaucratic villains

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# Land Bank aims to “make neighborhoods whole again,” new director says

By Tom Travis

The Land Bank of Genesee County owns, maintains and manages more than 15,000 properties in the City of Flint — a whopping 27 percent of the city’s land.

Yet many in the community may not know what it is and how it has become a leading influence on the city’s landscape of abandonment and rehabilitation.

Of those 15,000-plus properties, more than 9,000 are residential and nearly 300 are commercial. According to its 2018/2019 budget, the Land Bank, a nonprofit blend of public and private interests enabled by state law since 2004, sold 544 properties, generating nearly \$3.1 million in revenue.

Many of those properties come to the Land Bank through tax foreclosures and abandonments — properties other people don’t want, according to the Land Bank’s new director, Michael Freeman.

And instead of allowing a proliferation of ruin, the Land Bank, with a \$4.88 million budget and full-time staff of 23 working out of its downtown headquarters, attempts to transform the property by rehabbing the building, or demolishing it, or clearing it to be a neighbor’s spare lot, or even, in some cases, facilitating a neighborhood garden.

For the upkeep of its inventory, every three weeks, Land Bank staff maintain and mow 4,100 properties, engaging nearly 1,250 residents, including more than 500 youth, in improving their neighborhoods. Land Bank data suggests the organization has contributed to eliminating blight in and around Flint, work valued at more than \$1.55 million.

## **Lifelong Flint-area resident, Freeman knows the ups and downs**

All those details help Freeman, 49, the new director of the Land Bank as of May 18, explain why he wanted the job.

“As a lifelong resident of Genesee County, I’ve seen the economic ups and downs of the community,” he said in a phone interview.

“And in our current situation, with

loss of population and loss of economics and all the challenges we have, the Land Bank is there to flatten the curve, help promote the economic welfare of our community, eliminate blight, make neighbor-



**Michael Freeman**  
(Self photo)

hoods whole again,” he said.

Freeman, a Carriage Town resident, has worked for 26 years in community and economic development organizations.

“All those experiences have brought me here. I really understand the transformative power of the Land Bank,” he said.

Freeman’s resume lists many experiences relevant to the tasks he is taking on. That includes his most recent position as chief operating officer and associate director of programmatic underwriting for the City of Detroit’s Housing and Revitalization Department.

Freeman explained a fundamental purpose of the Land Bank.

“The Land Bank owns about 27 percent of the city of Flint. The properties the Land Bank has are sometimes vacant lots, commercial structures,” he said.

“Sometimes the structures are occupied because it was a landlord that owned it and didn’t pay their taxes and it wasn’t the fault of the person residing in the building, but the landlord,” he added. “We do very strong interventions to make sure residents are not dislocated.”

Among the challenges, Freeman said, is to determine “whether or not we become the landlord of the property and make necessary improvements so that

it’s not substandard, or whether we work with the resident to see if we can turn it into a home ownership opportunity and turn it into a land contract.”

Freeman emphasized, “We don’t want properties to go into foreclosure. We want people to stay in their properties.”

## **How the Land Bank began and how it works**

As is recounted on his website, U.S. Congressman Dan Kildee, a Flint native, was the creator and developer of the Land Bank. “Before being elected to Congress, Dan created the Genesee County Land Bank, a first-of-its-kind model that has redeveloped thousands of homes and buildings and brought over \$100 million in economic development to our community. Dan was the founder and CEO of a nonprofit organization, the Center for Community Progress, which continues to support economic development projects across the country.”

The Land Bank was enabled in 2004 by state legislation to respond to a tax-foreclosure cycle in Genesee County. Michigan had a tax foreclosure process that hopelessly mired tax-reverted properties in a legal limbo.

This contributed to urban decline in Flint by keeping properties off of the tax roll and out of circulation for up to seven years. With the new process, Michigan opened the door for communities to reclaim, reinvest in and rebuild their neighborhoods, according to the Land Bank website.

The Land Bank uses the amended tax law as a constructive community development tool: avoiding the potential neglect or misuse that comes from selling land at auction.

The Land Bank assembles land for transfer to adjacent homeowners, develops long- and short-term green spaces, and assembles land for new housing and commercial development. When the Land Bank sells a property, we try to make the foreclosing unit whole

*(Continued on Page 9.)*



## ... Land Bank

(Continued from Page 8.)

again. We try to return to them as much of the actual revenue as they lost.

Freeman explained the Land Bank is separate and distinct from the County Treasurer's office. While having governmental characteristics and accountability, "it maintains an 'arms length' relationship with the county while maintaining itself as a separate entity," he said. The Land Bank is non-profit and governed by a board of directors — of which Genesee County Treasurer Deb Cherry is the chairperson.

The objective is to restore the integrity of the community by removing dilapidated structures and redeveloping abandoned properties, Freeman said.

### How does a property get into the Land Bank?

Freeman explained the county is the foreclosing governmental unit — they're the ones who have the foreclosure. The county does foreclosure interventions with the property owners as well.

"We don't want properties to go into foreclosure," he emphasized. "We want people to stay in them."

Both the county and the Land Bank have staff dedicated to work with owners and tenants, he states, so residents can stay in their homes. There are intervention plans and the staff attempts to work out payment plans.

"But in the event that the property does go into tax foreclosure there is a fairly intricate process, including the right of first refusal by the local unit of government," Freeman said.

"There has to be a public purpose explained for why they're pulling down the property. After that there are properties left and are bundled and then the Land Bank is the receiver of those properties," he said.

"So at that point we go through acquiring title action, because these titles are clouded titles. When the actual title is clean, then we look at what the disposition will be. "Potentially it could be, for example, a transfer where maybe there is a neighbor next door who would like a

larger lot and they can acquire that property. Is it a redevelopment opportunity where additional housing can be put in?" Freeman said.

"We've had neighborhood gardens go in. Neighborhood associations adopt the property. We really try to find a new use for the property. Because at the end of the day, we don't want the properties back. We don't want the properties to go back into foreclosure. We want these properties to contribute to the tax base of the city, which is a benefit to everybody.



**"Before" on Eddy Street in Flint**  
(Photo provided by Land Bank)

The more tax revenue we can help the localities generate, the better off they're going to be with police, fire, streets," Freeman said.



**"After" on Eddy Street in Flint**  
(Photo provided by Land Bank)

"That's why I think the Land Bank is so critical for the economic welfare of the community, because we're helping rebuild the tax base that quite honestly has been eroding for years," Freeman emphasized.

### "We're taking the properties other people don't want"

"We're taking the properties that other people don't want. We become the caretakers for that property. The misconception is that we're actively going out and trying to acquire as much property as we can," Freeman said.

### The Land Bank becomes caretakers of last resort

"We become the caretakers of last resort for a lot of these properties. And so that's why mowing and maintenance is a big challenge," Freeman said.

People sometimes get upset because they feel the properties are not getting mowed or maintained as much as needed, he acknowledged.

"But they wouldn't be maintained as all if it wasn't for us. So we can ensure that at least there is some basic maintenance," Freeman said.

Freeman points to what he believes is creative programming as a path to effective property maintenance. Instead of hiring big lawn care and maintenance firms, the Land Bank partners with neighborhood associations who can apply for vacant lot mowing and maintenance. Then the Land Bank pays the neighbors for their work directly.

"I see much better results when you have neighborhood people taking care of the properties," Freeman said. "Because they feel accountable, they don't want people dumping on vacant lots where they're mowing."

"I live in a neighborhood that uses Clean & Green, Carriage Town," Freeman noted. "The money that we make we spend on equipment used on the lots and use for flowers on corners. And the money is turned back into an investment for the properties. So it's a win-win for everybody."

Freeman added that in the Clean & Green program, two food gardens included, flower gardens, trees and pocket parks planted. The program also has boarded 90 vacant structures using decorative boards painted to mimic doors and windows.

Significant for Flint is the Land Bank's claim that there are 30 percent fewer assaults and 40 percent fewer violent crimes overall in Clean and Green neighborhoods.

### More than 1,700 residents paid to help maintain and mow Land Bank properties

"The maintenance and mowing program has operated every year of the Land Bank. We will continue to partner

(Continued on Page 10.)

## ... Land Bank

(Continued from Page 9.)

with neighborhoods for maintenance and mowing as much as our budget will allow,” Freeman said.

The Land Bank’s money for maintenance and mowing comes from residents who pay fines for their delinquent taxes. When people don’t pay their taxes on time and they are assessed a fee, that money goes toward maintenance and mowing — supplying a yearly maintenance budget of \$1.7 million.

### “Cities with a robust population will do better”

Freeman recalled when he most recently worked for the City of Detroit, “At the City of Detroit there was a new initiative for the city about being a welcoming city for immigrant populations.” There’s a significant Central American population and Middle Eastern population coming into Detroit. Included is the Bengali family from India who are all building neighborhoods and communities in Detroit.”

“We wanted to find out: how do you make neighborhoods more attractive so they can make business decisions and investments in recreational areas and housing to bolster populations?” Freeman said.

“Cities with a robust population will do better,” he asserted. “More tax base, more activity, less blight, less vacancy. So that’s one direction that we’d love to see if we can go with the City of Flint.” “The Land Bank represents the entire county. And each community has its own development desires, and we have to make sure that in the out county we have as robust an approach to helping them deal with foreclosed properties,” Freeman said.

### “Lack of information and outreach” factors in negative PR

“I think the negative PR is propagated by a lack of information and outreach. The Land Bank does a lot of amazing things that you don’t hear about. You only hear about negatives and the perception issues,” he said.

“So it’s about educating people. We are not actively trying to get your

property. We are not trying to build our inventory. We’re dealing with property that nobody wants that has gone into foreclosure. So we need to look at how we provide that information.”

One project in particular Freeman wished had had better public relations was the Durant Hotel.

He said many people thought the Land Bank was putting \$28 million into the Durant — but they didn’t.

“In fact it was actually investors — that’s how we were able to get dollars to that particular project. What people don’t know is that it was part of what was called a cross collateralized TIF (tax increment financing) district.”

Freeman explains, “The city didn’t have enough money for demolition. So every blighted property that needed to be torn down we tied it to the Durant Hotel, understanding that demolition doesn’t create new tax revenue. There’s no new money created by doing demolition. It’s through the development.”

So the TIF money generated from the development of the Durant paid for demolitions in all the neighborhoods throughout the city of Flint. Those demolitions would never have happened.

“So that was smart; it was innovative. People looked at this across the country as an innovative way to generate revenue to support neighborhoods where there isn’t money.”

“But on the surface all people saw was — you’re putting \$28 million into this project when you should have put that money into our neighborhoods. That money never could have gone into the neighborhoods. The investors weren’t looking to make that kind of investment; they wanted to invest in the Durant.”

“But the Land Bank made that project pay for other things to support the neighborhoods. The public knew half the story but that’s the other half that they didn’t know.”

Freeman said he understands that the Land Bank “has to be there to talk about what we’re doing and how we’re doing it. We have to be transparent, we have to be open. We have to help educate people.”

“Some people may be unwilling

to change their minds, but “we have to give them that opportunity.”

### Freeman and Kildee friendship

Freeman worked for Dan Kildee, the first director of the Land Bank, at the Center for Community Progress for several years before Kildee was elected to Congress, representing the Fifth District. Freeman said he provided technical assistance to land banks and land bank-like entities in Michigan and across the country.

The day Freeman was offered the Land Bank position, he said Kildee reached out to him and said, “We’re going to sit down and look at new ways the Land Bank can partner with the community to take advantage of philanthropic and federal resources and the role of the Land Bank.”

In a letter to the Land Bank celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2014, Kildee said, “The Land Bank’s story is about people who have seen the burned-out house next door transformed into a green space; it’s about people who have watched new development occur in places long forgotten and considered beyond repair. And it’s about people who have seen the dream of home ownership materialize after thinking they would never know the security of owning the place where they live.”

As for the future, Freeman said the Land Bank will be looking for new ideas and partnering for development to attract new people and forge a new base.

“We want to work ourselves out of business some day,” Freeman concluded.

“Some day we won’t need a Land Bank. But until that time it’s going to be through partnerships with the city and other developers to make sure that every neighborhood in the city is made whole, and that we work with them and as well with the county.”

The former Land Bank director, Michele Wildman, has taken a position in Governor Whitmer’s cabinet as senior vice president of community development with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC).

*EVM Assistant Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomtravis@gmail.com. EVM Editor Jan Worth-Nelson contributed to this story. She can be reached at janworth1118@gmail.com.*

## ... Vote

(Continued from Page 3.)

The proposal to move to voting by mail has met with opposition. Some of it is concern about the mechanics of the mail process, and how quickly our system could change. Some of it is purely partisan, where one party feels that turning out more voters would hurt their chances for victory. President Trump and Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson exchanged angry tweets as he threatened to withhold federal funds over her recent move to encourage mail-in voting.

So what are the advantages and disadvantages of voting by mail?

### Advantages

1. Many states already have used the system with few problems. The fear that it would lead to fraud seems unfounded. In all the elections held between 2000 and 2012, only 491 cases of absentee voter fraud were encountered out of hundreds of millions of votes cast.

2. Voting by mail increases voter turnout and participation. When Oregon implemented its vote-by-mail process, the turnout increased by at least 10 percent. Other states reported similar results. Genesee County's May election showed an even more dramatic increase for what is usually a very low turnout election.

3. A vote-by-mail system gives voters more time to study proposals and candidates.

4. It doesn't seem to favor one party over another. One of the major sources of opposition to voting by mail is from Republicans, who feel that it would favor Democrats. Some Democrats favor the proposal for the same reason. But most serious research suggests that a well-run vote-by-mail system would increase the electorate, but would guarantee no automatic advantage for either party.

5. It would save money. When Oregon moved to an all-mail system, they saved about 30 percent of the cost of running elections by not having to maintain polling places or pay as many

poll workers.

It would be healthier. In a time of COVID-19, it would limit the spread of the virus by keeping us at home rather than gathering at the polls. That was a major concern when Wisconsin held its traditional primary as the COVID crisis began.

### Disadvantages

1. It might increase the possibility of fraud. When voting takes place outside of the public eye, there is the possibility of coercion or undue influence on voters. Even scholars who argue that voter fraud is rare admit that absentee voting is more prone to fraud than in-person voting. Similarly, while actual fraud is rare, voter registration lists are often inaccurate, and could result in ballot applications to dead voters or ineligible voters.

2. Some argue that voter turnout doesn't increase in the long run. While Oregon showed a sharp increase in turnout when it first used the mail-in option, the levels slipped in later years.

3. It's expensive to set up. While it may be cheaper in the long run for states to use all-mail voting, the initial costs can be substantial, and might be a challenge for state and local governments to implement in time for the Aug. 4 and Nov. 3, 2020, elections.

4. In those cases where voters have to pay postage, some may feel that it is an unfair financial burden, and a kind of a "poll tax." That small cost might discourage some voters.

5. There can be errors in handling mailed-in votes. Errors, or late delivery of mailed-in votes, could prevent voters from having their ballots counted or could delay results.

6. Some may regret the loss of a voting tradition. There is a long custom of voters showing up in person, walking the gauntlet of candidates with flyers in hand, and greeting their neighbors as they go in to mark their ballots.

### Future challenges

While most of the arguments favor some sort of voting-by-mail system, and there are good reasons to consider it, there

are still some serious concerns for local election administrators. While it worked well for a limited election in May, it might take more changes to make it work well for a dramatically larger countywide, statewide, and nationwide election in August and November. Will local officials have the funds and the time to make a transition to a new system? If there are problems, as there can be with any new project, will it undermine the trust in our election system, which is already facing challenges? Will losing candidates blame the new system for their loss?

### A time for vote-by-mail

All in all, even with some concerns, there is much to be said for a mail-in system, and it's a step in the right direction. It has worked well where it has been used. Provisions are made for those who wish to — or need to — vote in person. It brings more voters into the system, and it gives them more time to study the ballot. It saves money, and it may keep us healthier during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the concerns over fraud and partisan favoritism seem overblown.

Genesee County Clerk John Gleason is a strong supporter of voting by mail and expanding the electorate. He said, "I'm not one bit concerned about how folks vote, as much as I am that they vote. Because of the horrific costs both in human life and personal possessions, I don't feel voting is only a right. It is a gift. So, 'Let's Lift the Gift!'"

With any new idea, there may be challenges and problems. But it makes a lot of sense, especially in a time of COVID-19. We may be surprised how well it works.

But if it doesn't work, we can always go back to dropping rocks into Grecian urns.

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

COLLEGE CULTURAL  
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION  
ccnaflint@sbcglobal.net  
Stay home, stay safe!  
Watch for meeting updates at  
www.eastvillagemagazine.org

# THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

*"This Month" highlights a selection of events available to our readers—beginning after our publication date of June 5. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city which, due to the pandemic, is currently very limited. To submit events for our July issue, email your event to us by June 24 to [pisenber@gmail.com](mailto:pisenber@gmail.com).*

## YouTube's "Dear Class of 2020"

June 6

3:00 p.m. Saturday

This livestream virtual graduation event will feature Barack and Michelle Obama, lots of popular musicians, public figures and much more.

Go to: [youtube.com/watch?v=r3pTjcouaeQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=r3pTjcouaeQ)

Free

## Tony Awards Celebration

June 7

6:00 p.m. Sunday

Due to the rescheduling of the 74th annual in-person awards ceremony, this online ceremony will be hosted by Tony Award nominee, Lonny Price. The one-hour event will benefit American Theatre Wing and The Broadway League.

Go to: [TonyAwards.com](https://TonyAwards.com) or [BroadwayOnDemand.com](https://BroadwayOnDemand.com).

Free unless you donate.

## Networking Beyond the Business Card

June 9

8:30-9:30 a.m. Tuesday

This workshop will provide tips on learning to network by building relationships with others strategically for business.

Location: TBD

For more info visit [flintandgeneseesec.org](https://flintandgeneseesec.org).

Fee: \$5 for chamber members or \$10 for future members.

## Non-Profit Board Development

June 16

8:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Tuesday

This training session webinar will explore "best practices and tools" related to board governance pertaining to roles and responsibilities.

Via webinar

For more info email [bmosier@flintandgeneseesec.org](mailto:bmosier@flintandgeneseesec.org).

Free, but pre-registration is required.

## Finding the Right Digital Marketing Strategy for Your Business

June 23

8:30-9:30 a.m. Tuesday

This session helps build sales through the various digital marketing, the pros and cons and includes a quiz for registrants to take to zero in on what's best for their particular business.

Via webinar

For more info email [bmosier@flintandgeneseesec.org](mailto:bmosier@flintandgeneseesec.org).

Fee: \$5 for chamber members or \$10 for future members.

## Learn a Language

This website lists 36 different languages to choose from.

Go to: [duolingo.com](https://duolingo.com)

Free

## Learn Origami

The projects here look pretty easy. Who knows, it may be just the thing to fill your days and become a lifelong hobby.

Go to:

[origamiway.com/easy-origami.shtml](https://origamiway.com/easy-origami.shtml)

Free

## Get Outside!

Going for walks, going for drives and doing some gardening are always good options. Summer is almost here!

Free

## Play Chess

Play chess with a family member, a friend online, or against a computer.

Go to: [chess.com/play/computer](https://chess.com/play/computer)

Free

## Play Sudoku

This website allows people to play entirely online. There are levels of difficulty and even instructions explaining how to play.

Go to: [sudoku.com](https://sudoku.com)

Free

## Flint Institute of Arts

The FIA is providing several places you can click on from the home page of their website.

There are nine in all. Two of these feature kid's activities for two age groups. Plus there are tours of the galleries, lectures, and videos to be found.

FIA reopening TBD.

Go to [flintarts.org](https://flintarts.org).

Free (but there's a place to donate)

## Sloan/Longway

Several virtual activities are available from The Sloan Museum including Longway Planetarium's "sky guide" that can be downloaded. The Sloan Museum of Discovery is currently under renovation and is hoped to be completed by late 2021. Summer Camps & Workshops are still possible and registration is open. "If it becomes necessary to cancel" they "will offer full refunds." Go to [sloanlongway.org](https://sloanlongway.org) to find out more. Free virtual activities.


Ed Custer's *East Village Magazine* logo reimagined for each issue by Patsy Isenberg




## Coronavirus Testing Basics

You've probably heard a lot about coronavirus testing recently. If you think you have coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and need a test, contact your health care provider immediately. The FDA has been working around the clock to increase the availability of critical medical products, including tests for the coronavirus, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Learn more about the different types of tests and the steps involved.

There are two different types of tests – diagnostic tests and antibody tests.

 A diagnostic test can show if you have an active coronavirus infection and should take steps to quarantine or isolate yourself from others. Currently there are two types of diagnostic tests – molecular (RT-PCR) tests that detect the virus's genetic material, and antigen tests that detect specific proteins on the surface of the virus.

 An antibody test looks for antibodies that are made by the immune system in response to a threat, such as a specific virus. Antibodies can help fight infections. Antibodies can take several days or weeks to develop after you have an infection and may stay in your blood for several weeks after recovery. Because of this, antibody tests should not be used to diagnose an active coronavirus infection. At this time researchers do not know if the presence of antibodies means that you are immune to the coronavirus in the future.

	MOLECULAR TEST	ANTIGEN TEST	ANTIBODY TEST
<b>Also known as...</b>	Diagnostic test, viral test, molecular test, nucleic acid amplification tests (NAAT), RT-PCR tests	Rapid diagnostic test*	Serological test, serology, blood test, serology test
<b>How the sample is taken...</b>	Nasal or throat swab (most tests) Saliva (a few tests)	Nasal or throat swab	Finger stick or blood draw
<b>How long it takes to get results...</b>	Same day (some locations) or up to a week	One hour or less	Same day (many locations) or 1-3 days
<b>Is another test needed...</b>	This test is typically highly accurate and usually does not need to be repeated.	Positive results are usually highly accurate but negative results may need to be confirmed with a molecular test.	Sometimes a second antibody test is needed for accurate results.
<b>What it shows...</b>	Diagnoses active coronavirus infection	Diagnoses active coronavirus infection	Shows if you've been infected by coronavirus in the past
<b>What it can't do...</b>	Show if you ever had COVID-19 or were infected with the coronavirus in the past	Definitively rule out active coronavirus infection. Antigen tests are more likely to miss an active coronavirus infection compared to molecular tests. Your health care provider may order a molecular test if your antigen test shows a negative result but you have symptoms of COVID-19.	Diagnose active coronavirus infection at the time of the test or show that you do not have COVID-19

\*Some molecular tests are also rapid tests.

# Democracy Beat

## *City Council accepts \$550,000 C.S.Mott grant addition; Mayor scolds Council President for attack on City Clerk; Galloway apologizes*

*By Tom Travis*

The City Council approved a budget amendment for a grant extension of \$550,000 from the C.S. Mott Foundation and passed a resolution for a tax abatement on a commercial property on the east side of Flint at a Tuesday, May 27, meeting conducted electronically via tele/video.

The Council also scheduled an electronic/video Special City Council meeting for 1 p.m. Thursday, May 28, to discuss the 2021/2022 city budget. However, on Thursday no quorum was achieved and the meeting concluded after an unofficial discussion.

The Tuesday meeting led to an exchange between Council President Monica Galloway and City Clerk Inez Brown that led Mayor Sheldon Neeley to issue a statement soon afterward scolding Galloway for her behavior and treatment of the long-time clerk. Galloway later apologized.

### **C.S. Mott Foundation adds \$550,000 to a grant for the City of Flint**

The council voted to approve the extension of a grant from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The grant was originally awarded in 2017 to the City of Flint for \$417,199; with the added amount, the total is \$800,955.

A letter from the Mott Foundation attached to the agenda packet explained the breakdown amounts of the overall grant: \$350,955 is to be used for salaries, \$375,000 is to be used for consultants, and \$75,000 is to be used for equipment in the water plant.

City Administrator Clyde Edwards explained the additional amount will be placed into the budget to fund the city for a grant writer, salary for the city's Economic Development

team, a portion of the salary for the Department of Public Works Director and the "Rebuild Flint the Right Way" program.

Six council members voted yes; Councilpersons Jerri Winfrey-Carter (5th Ward) and Monica Galloway (7th Ward) voted no, and Councilperson Eric Mays (1st Ward) abstained.

General information regarding the Mott Foundation grant procedures and other grant related questions can be viewed at their site, *mott.org*.

### **Ashley Furniture set to receive tax abatement to move into old Target store on Lapeer Road**

The council approved the establishment of an "Obsolete Property Rehabilitation District" (OPRD designation) for Ashley Furniture, presently located on Linden Road in Flint Township, to relocate their retail and warehouse space to the old Target store at 3701 Lapeer Rd. (at the intersection of Center and Lapeer Roads).

Obsolete Property Rehabilitation Act (OPRA) was established by the Michigan legislature in 2000. It allows for a tax exemption for a property during a period of 1 to 12 years. The resolution for the Lapeer Road property passed last night sets the tax abatement for a 5 year period.

Before a property can enter into an OPRA agreement the area where the property exists must be established first as an OPRD. The council's resolution approved 3701 Lapeer Rd. to be established as an OPRD.

State law gives cities permission to establish OPRDs within the city limits. There will be a public hearing about this tax exemption at a later date, according to Suzanne

Wilcox, Director of Planning and Development.

### **Special council meetings cancelled due to lack of quorum**

Two televideo special meetings were scheduled for May 18 to discuss the 2021/2022 city budget, but were called off due to a lack of quorum.

Nonetheless, the council spent three hours unofficially discussing the budget.

### **Mayor Neeley scolds Council President Monica Galloway for "flippant and ageist" comments to City Clerk Inez Brown**

Four hours into the six-hour meeting that lasted from 5:30 to 11:30 p.m., Council President Monica Galloway began a dialog with City Clerk Inez Brown which turned into a heated exchange.

Many council members jumped in, gaining the floor by saying "point of order." Councilpersons Jerri Winfrey-Carter and Eric Mays both advised Galloway to "calm down."

The dialog centered around an email between Galloway, Brown and Councilperson Kate Fields after a previous city council budget hearing or as some are calling it "a session" because it was not an official City Council meeting.

The Galloway exchange prompted an email scolding from The City of Flint today designated as a press release for immediate release."

"Mayor Sheldon Neeley is denouncing Council President Monica Galloway for her mistreatment of City Clerk Inez Brown during the Flint City Council meeting on May 26, 2020," the statement read. "Ms. Galloway repeatedly

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## ... Council

(Continued from Page 14.)

talked over, interrupted and spoke condescendingly to Clerk Brown for 8 minutes until other Council members intervened.”

The email statement quoted 2nd Ward Councilperson and Council Vice President Maurice Davis as saying, “You’re the chair; you’re not the dictator. You’re out of order, Madam President. You are disrespecting the clerk.”

The statement continued that “Ms Galloway rejected his point, but the rest of City Council stood firm and successfully overrode her decision” to refuse to allow Brown to continue an explanation.

“Ms. Galloway explained her behavior to her fellow Council members with a flippant and ageist response,” the city statement continued, saying that Galloway asserted, “I am challenged with working with Ms. Brown from time-to-time, and I have to talk to people who help me work things through,” and that Galloway added, “It’s like working with your grandmother.”

Quoting Mayor Neeley, the state-

ment continued, “Ms. Galloway’s actions are especially concerning because the Clerk is appointed by the City Council. No employee should be treated in that disrespectful manner, especially one who has honorably served this community for more than 20 years.

“This is a place of business and even disagreements must be handled professionally. Shame on Ms. Galloway for this abusive treatment of staff,” Mayor Neeley said.

The email ended, “Inez Brown has served as City of Flint clerk since 1997 and with seven different City Councils. She was allowed to finish answering the question after Galloway was ruled out of order.”

The email included a statement from Inez Brown herself.

“For me to hear this kind of thing over one small meeting where no decisions were made, just dialogue took place, is really appalling,” she said.

### Galloway reboots

At the next meeting, Galloway

came back to the incident and said that she had apologized to Brown.

“I am disappointed about the dialog between Ms. Brown and I,” Galloway said. “I respect her. She is highly regarded by me and the community.”

### How the public can participate

The public may participate in the council meetings by emailing comments to [CouncilPublicComment@cityof-flint.com](mailto:CouncilPublicComment@cityof-flint.com) no later than 10 minutes prior to the start of the meeting. The emailed comments will be read by the City Clerk.

Those with disabilities may participate in the meetings by the above mentioned URL and by emailing a request for accommodation with the subject line Request for Accommodation.

Anyone with further questions about participating in the council meeting may call the City Clerk’s office at 810-766-7418.

EVM Assistant Editor Tom Travis can be reached at [tomntravis@gmail.com](mailto:tomntravis@gmail.com)

## ... Silly Walks

(Continued from Page 16.)

nests. But we don’t care. We think it’s funny.

And sometimes, now, there are the cherished moments, driveway or the street between us, with neighbors. It’s good to see them in person. Neighborliness has been enriched by COVID here. Masks in place, we call out, “Are you okay?” We hand off little pots of tomato starts and chicken wire and leftover produce and stories. We make jokes. We try to make the children laugh. We pull little pranks. I declared our sidewalk a “silly walk” zone, with a sign inviting Monty Python wannabes, and a couple of times a day, if I’m watching, I’ll see somebody prance, leap or jiggle — apparently not caring if anybody else is looking, with endearing abandon — and it makes my day.

It’s the little victories, isn’t it, that help us survive? I’m not back to walking yet, but I AM sitting less, doing yoga in a morning Zoom class,

and attaining a certain serenity while I fold the clothes.

Today was a good day: All the socks matched up. Amazing. I think tonight I’ll sleep in peace.

Love to all — out of our strength, sorrow, humor, and endurance, we will get by.

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

### Support community journalism!

Donations to *East Village Magazine* are tax deductible. For easy giving, go to: [eastvillagemagazine.org](http://eastvillagemagazine.org)

## ... Poisoned

(Continued from Page 7.)

and citizen-superheroes, and the narrative’s spotlight repeatedly shining on Flint’s children victims makes *Poisoned Water* a book for all ages.

A copy of this book should be available in libraries and classrooms all over America. Class sets should comfortably find their way into language arts, science and social studies classrooms.

EVM Staff Writer, education beat reporter, and frequent reviewer, Harold C. Ford, can be reached at [hcford1185@gmail.com](mailto:hcford1185@gmail.com).



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# Village Life

## *Of a big green chair, too much TV, two bad haircuts and the Ministry of Silly Walks*

By Jan Worth-Nelson

I seem to have been sitting too long.

Day after day of it. Day after day, for about 75 days now, obsessed with numbers, I've pretzeled myself into a big green chair too close to a glaring screen.

The chair is sort of a comfort — it's wide enough to accommodate the girth of me, widened by what I've come to call my "Trump Ten." Okay, maybe it's 15 by now. The chair is deep enough to make me feel safely ensconced, as the too-large faces on the TV screen shout, cry, bemoan, grieve, predict, attack, worry, argue, advise. Occasionally — oh, occasionally, but never enough — the faces offer a smile — now most often masked, or a chuckle or a heartfelt tear.

I know I should tear myself away. I know there are people around me who are making the most of it, cooking nice dinners, playing music for their neighbors, reading books rediscovered on dusty shelves, planting hopeful gardens of tomatoes and squash and melons.

But me — much of the past two months, going on three, I've been glued that green easy chair, mesmerized by what is without doubt the biggest story of our lives so far. I can't resist the daily drama, the numbers, the numbers — the horrifying, fascinating machinations and presidential chaos, the feeling that we're watching the dominos fall, the life-threatening collapse, in collective panic and mistrust.

How will it turn out? It's like a fat Russian novel in the making, and, in my 70<sup>th</sup> year, I suspect I might not live long enough to see the denouement.

At first I took long walks every day, bursting out of our cloistered life into the eerily deserted streets — in the early weeks when out of fear and consideration of others we didn't know if it

was safe to crack the front door even an inch.

Those walks kept me sane. There was a special spot along the way, on a little pastoral section of Cadet toward Pierce Park, where I found myself actually yelling up into the clouds — offering thanks to Mother Nature, greeting the trees, old ladies who like me have made it through another unbelievably stressful winter. I didn't care if anybody heard me — it felt good ... the suspect droplets from my mouth, my hollered catharsis, not



within blocks of any other human.

Once I ran across a quintet of deer leaping through the woods just to my right. I greeted them, gratefully, too, and told them to be careful not to get slammed on I-69. I hope there's enough room for them in the overgrown acreage of the old nine-hole, where flocks of red-winged blackbirds do their singular peals from the tops of light poles.

After those walks I'd rush back to the green chair, folding myself back into safety and addiction.

And then, a couple of weeks ago, my leg started acting up, an ache and piercing pain down my backside, traveling from my overly cushy derriere to my toes. Getting up out of the chair kept getting harder and harder. On my

walks, my hip hurt and I'd end up limping the last few blocks. So I stopped.

It seems sitting wrapped up in tragedy in front of a giant screen for weeks on end isn't that great for the spine. I've bruised my body with self-hugging, strained some muscles, ironically out of my instincts toward protection.

My body woke me up with pain. You're hurting me, my body said.

So, I've had to peel myself away from the green chair, little by little. It's not that anything in this beat-up, scary old world is getting any better. But outside my darkened den, there is this thing called daily life.

The birds have been magnificent. Outside, there have been orioles, flashing orange from tree to greening ground to feeder. And there were two rosebreasted grosbeak couples. And a flicker with his handsome black bib and red top knot. And finches, robins redwings, blue jays, nuthatches, and cardinals. There are rabbits and a waddling groundhog and chipmunks to keep track of.

They know nothing, it seems, nor do they care, about COVID-19 or Donald Trump.

There have been our daily rituals, my husband venturing out for morning coffee, a sweet time together when he comes back with breakfast victuals and news. There's been the rediscovery, again, day after day, of quotidian meditations: emptying the dishwasher, folding laundry ... each day an opportunity to make life better in small, noticeable ways.

My husband and I cut each other's hair, chopping away hilariously and a bit madly in our sunroom, leaving us both looking like concentration camp survivors, I'm told, fluffs of hair sailing out into the backyard for birds'

*(Continued on Page 15.)*

*LVIII: 6 (686 issues, 7,056 pages)*