



East Village Magazine

September 2021

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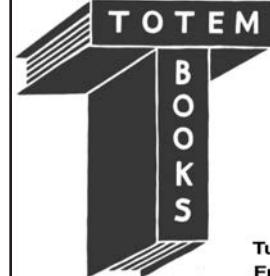
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Commentary *Flint loses 20,000 residents. What does it mean for the city?*

By Paul Rozycki

With the current census, the City of Flint has lost Grand Blanc, Davison, Swartz Creek, and Montrose.

I don't mean that those places are gone. They are still here in Genesee County and doing fine. But the City of Flint has lost enough population to fill those cities, and that has powerful implications for Flint and those living here.

Based on the current census data just released, Grand Blanc has 8091 residents, Swartz Creek has 5897 residents, Davison has 5143 residents, and Montrose has 1743 residents, for a total of 20,874 for the four cities. By contrast, the City of Flint, with a population of 81,252, has lost 21,182 residents in the last decade, over 20 percent of our population, and more than the population of the four cities combined. A century ago, in 1920, Flint's population was 91,599.

On the national level

On the national level the census reveals several surprising shifts in our population. The nation has become more diverse. The percentage of the white population has shrunk, and minorities, particularly Hispanics, have grown significantly. The census also shows a sharp movement away from rural areas and toward urban and suburban regions.

Nationally, some of the greatest regions of growth are in areas that have usually voted Democratic. But that may not always be good news for Democrats. In 20 states, Republicans are in a majority, and will have the power

to approve any new maps. Democrats have the majority control in only eight states. Sixteen states will use either independent commissions, like Michigan, or have legislatures split between parties. Six states have only one member of the U.S. House and don't need to draw district lines.

On the state level

In Michigan, a similar pattern prevailed. The Upper Peninsula, the Thumb, and much the rural areas of the lower peninsula showed significant loss of population, while the west side of the state, particularly the Grand Rapids area, and the Detroit suburban area, showed the most growth. Unlike 2010, when Michigan lost population, the state has grown about 2 percent.

Though Michigan has grown almost 2 percent in the last decade, that's below the national average, and as a result, we will lose one seat in the U.S. House, and will have 13 members of the U.S. House rather than the current 14.

When those 13 districts are redrawn each should have approximately 770,000 people. Because of the loss of population in Flint, Saginaw and Bay City, Dan Kildee's current district (the 5th) is a about 100,000 below that number and will need to pick up more territory and people for the future.

Kildee's district showed a 5 percent loss, more than any congressional district in Michigan. Exactly what the new district would look like is unknown, but

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Cover: Crapo St. Hanging Pots



Photo of the Month: Cultural Center as work continues

(Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat

Flint Schools leadership besieged by aging infrastructure in buildings averaging 70 years old

By Harold C. Ford

Students in Flint Community Schools (FCS) will miss six days of school in the just-started 2021-22 school year due to the heat. FCS ordered schools closed the entire week of Aug. 23-26; an instruction day had not been scheduled for Friday, Aug. 27.

FCS Superintendent Anita Steward issued a revised public statement about school closings on Monday, Aug. 23 on the district's website that read, in part:

"At Flint Community Schools, the safety and well-being of our staff and scholars is always a primary concern. As we look at this week's weather forecast, we have made the decision to cancel school districtwide from Tuesday, August 24 through Thursday, August 26 ... there is also no instruction on Friday, August 27. The administration building will

remain open, and principals are to report to their buildings on Tuesday, August 24. School will resume in-person Monday, August 30, and we look forward to seeing your child."

Outside temperatures were expected to be in the 80s (Fahrenheit) through Wednesday and Thursday, according to The Weather Channel and AccuWeather websites.

Flint school buildings average 70 years old

The eleven FCS buildings that currently house students in grades K-12 are, collectively an average of 70 years old, according to information provided *East Village Magazine* by the Flint-based Sloan Museum.

The opening dates, and ages of each building are: Southwestern,

1959, 62 years; Scott, 1961, 60; Holmes, 1962, 59; Neithercut, 1961, 60; Potter, 1952, 69; Doyle/Ryder, 1901 (gutted and rebuilt around 1980), 120; Durant-Tuuri-Mott, 1922, 99; Pierce, 1952, 69; Brownell, 1963, 58; Eisenhower, 1966, 55; Freeman, 1951, 70.

The FCS buildings average 70 years old.

Average age of buildings in U. S. is 44 years

The average age of about 84,000 school buildings in the United States, according to a November, 2017 report in Education Week, is 44 years since construction. (the link can be found on the online version at www.eastvillagemagazine.org)

"A majority of schools sur-

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... Aging Schools

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veyed by the National Center for Education Statistics (76 percent) said school buildings were in ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ condition,” according to the *Education Week* report.

Large percentages reported aspects of school facilities to be “fair” or “poor”: air conditioning, 30 percent; heating, 30 percent; plumbing/restrooms, 31 percent; roofs, 25 percent; windows, 32 percent; sidewalks, 27 percent; playgrounds/play areas, 27 percent.

The average combined spending for capital projects and maintenance and operations in the nation’s schools is \$99 billion each year.

Flint’s infrastructure shortcomings and needs

Infrastructure shortcomings and needs — HVAC systems (heating, ventilation, air conditioning), electrical grids, hydration stations or smart water fountains, internet capa-



Window air conditioner at a Flint school building
(Photo by H. C. Ford)

bilities, outdated plumbing, crumbling athletic facilities — and how to pay for upgrades in those areas have dominated portions of recent FBOE meetings.

At the Aug. 18 FBOE meeting, Danielle Green, board secretary, summarized, “All our buildings gotta be renovated.”

Board members learned from their financial officers at the August board meetings that COVID relief funds are not likely sufficient for

the district’s massive infrastructure needs.

Ayunna Dombreh, executive director of finance, told the board at its Aug. 11 meeting, “They (the federal government) highly, highly discourage using these funds for new construction.”

Though hopeful, no FCS official has yet claimed the just-started process of selling abandoned properties and run-down buildings will generate sufficient funds for needed upgrades or replacement of FCS buildings.



C.S. Mott Foundation President Ridgway White speaks to board
(Photo by Tom Travis)

Mott Foundation offer to resurrect buildings nowhere on board’s agenda

Nonetheless, a \$200-million-plus offer by the Flint-based Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to rebuild or renovate all of Flint’s schools is nowhere to be found on FCS board agendas.

Ridgway White, Mott Foundation CEO, appeared before the FBOE on June 28 and invited the board to partner on the building of new schools. “I’m asking for you to allow us to partner with you, to talk with you ...”

At the same meeting, Diana Wright, board trustee, clashed with Carol McIntosh, board president, over Wright’s suggestion that the proposal by the Mott Foundation be put on the July 2021 board agendas. “It is my expectation that this

agenda item is on the July agenda,” insisted Wright.

“It will not be on the July agenda,” McIntosh replied. In fact, the Mott proposal has not appeared on any of the board’s July and August agendas.

Lost school days

At its Aug. 18 meeting, board of education members inquired about the number of lost instruction days allowed by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) before they would have to be made up.

“We get six days that are forgiven,” said Steward. FCS stands to lose significant state aid for any days beyond six that are not “forgiven” or made up.

FCS has, thus far, canceled six days in the 2021-22 school year due to the heat. On three other days, a minimum level of 75 percent student attendance was not achieved. Thus, the district is now three days beyond the number of days that will be forgiven by the state.

At the Aug. 18 meeting, one board member suggested virtual learning as an alternative to closing schools due to heat.

Steward advised the board that, following the unusual 2020-21 school year altered by the COVID pandemic, MDE no longer allows a blanket option for virtual learning for an entire school district. She said she would explore the possibility of a virtual learning exemption with MDE. Otherwise, districts are now allowed a single school day for districtwide virtual learning.

Some board members suggested exchanging missed instruction days for intersession days. The district’s first intersession break occurs Sept. 7-10, according to the calendar posted at the district’s website.

Such a move, however would require negotiating a new calendar with the district’s three employee bargaining units — the United

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... Aging Schools

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Teachers of Flint, the Congress of Flint School Administrators, and Service Employees International Union Local 517 (paraprofessionals).

“That’s a negotiable item with the bargaining units,” advised Dompheh, FCS executive director of finance.

The board then voted 4-1 to reopen discussions with the FCS unions about the school calendar.

“Unbearable”

The board’s newest member, Adrian Walker, had heard the complaints about the heat. He reported on his subsequent visits to Brownell STEM Academy and Holmes STEM Middle School Academy this past week.

“It’s just unbearable,” Walker said. “There’s no way you can learn in that environment.”

Dan Mack, an account manager with Johnson Controls, a company that is attempting to upgrade the HVAC systems at FCS buildings, agreed with Walker’s assessment.

“It’s difficult to learn in that environment,” Mack told board members. “I couldn’t do it.”

“What can we do to make it right for our babies?” asked Mar-



Dan Mack, with Johnson Controls, speaks to the board
(Photo by Harold Ford)

lis Settle, an attendance agent at Brownell. “Our children are suffering from the heat.”

Nearly in tears at times, Settle told board members she wrapped bits

of ice in paper towels and distributed them to students looking for relief from the heat. She also reported that bottled water provided students was warm due to lack of refrigeration.

Settle reported that some teachers shut ceiling lights off in



Students at Flint’s Southwestern Academy fill the hallways between classes
(Photo by Tom Travis)

attempts to lower temperatures in their classrooms. And use of window air-conditioning units often caused electrical circuits to break, the result of an aging electrical infrastructure. Further, noise from the use of fans made teaching difficult.

“They can’t learn,” Settle said. “I would prefer for us to keep them babies out ’til Labor Day.”

Balanced calendar

Green advised a pause in the balanced calendar which starts the school year earlier, finishes later, and features more frequent breaks, intersessions, during the school year.

Flint schools are in the third year of balanced calendars after the concept was adopted for the 2019-20 school year.

Many advantages are cited by proponents of the balanced calendar, notably lessening summer vacation learning loss for economically disadvantaged students.

In 2016, MDE recommended “consideration of a balanced calendar approach” to reduce the impact of high-risk factors including poverty ...” (the link can be found on the

online version at www.eastvillage-magazine.org)

The national trend is toward balanced calendars. As early as Oct. 2014, Education Week reported “The number of public year-round schools increased by 26 percent, to 3,700

from 2006-07 to 2011-12 ...” (link can be found at the online version.)

Nonetheless, a balanced calendar also means that students will be in classrooms during the



A masked student walks into their first day at Doyle-Ryder School
(Photo by Tom Travis)

warmest months of the calendar year. Flint’s high temperatures average 80 degrees in August, according to U.S. Climate Data. (the link can be found on the online version at www.eastvillagemagazine.org)

Prior to becoming the first school district in the state to adopt a balanced calendar in 2013-2014, Flint’s immediate neighbor to the north, Beecher, proactively provided funding for upgraded climate control systems in its buildings. Beecher

(Continued on Page 15.)

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

“This Month” highlights a selection of events available to our readers — beginning after our publication date of September 5. It is not an exhaustive list, rather a sampling of opportunities in the city, which, because of the restrictions starting to be lifted, are beginning to expand. To submit events for our October issue, email your event to pisenber@gmail.com by September 20.

First Friday Art & Music Highlight

Sept. 3, 4:00 p.m. to 12: a.m., Friday
This is a recurring monthly event on the first Friday of every month in Brush Alley, Flint

Capitol Theatre

Sept. 11, 8 p.m., Saturday

Former Journey lead vocalist, Steve Augeri will perform.

Tickets are \$29 - \$47.
Saturday, Sept. 18, 7:30 p.m.

The Legends of Motown will perform.

Tickets are \$23 - \$40.

The Capitol Theatre

140 E. Second St., Flint

For more info visit capitoltheatreflint.com or call 810-237-7333.

Crossroads Village

Sept. 4, 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Saturday
“Living in the Past,” end of season and Labor Day Celebration for the whole family.

Crossroads Village

& Huckleberry Railroad

6140 N. Bray Rd., Flint

For more info call 800-648-727

Art Walk

Flint Art Walk on every second Friday, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. has resumed.

More info can be found at greaterflintartscouncil.org/events.

Flint Public Library Used Book Sale

Sept. 16, 10:00 a.m. -3:00 p.m. Thursday

The Friends of the Flint Public Library are selling a variety of used books, CDs, DVDs and puzzles starting this month. All proceeds benefit special programs of the Flint Public Library. There will be sales on the third Thursday of every month through October.

Flint Farmers’ Market, Pavillion

300 East First St., Flint

For more info visit fpl.info.

Flint Institute of Arts

Takeshi Murata exhibits works “from intricate computer-aided, hand-drawn animations to exacting manipulations.

Art à la carte happens each Wednesday at 12:15 p.m. This is a series of informative programs focusing on the arts. Visitors should bring lunch; coffee, tea and cookies are provided.

Flint Institute of Arts

1120 East Kearsley St., Flint

For more info call 810-234-1695

or visit flintarts.org.

Buckham Gallery

The gallery is open for exhibition viewing but programs are temporarily limited due to COVID-19.

BIPOC is the Theme for Buckham Gallery’s National Juried Exhibition. Deadline for entry is Nov. 15, 2021. Fee is \$25.

Buckham Gallery

121 W. 2nd St., Flint

For more info visit buckhamgallery.org

or call 810-239-6233

The “New” McCree Theatre for Kids

McCree starts its 2021-2022 season with Day Camp and Workshops in theatre arts for kids. Day Camp for 5 to 13 year-olds starts Sept.

11 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Sept. 20 after

school workshops in the same specialties for

kids ages 5-18 will start. Registration at Mc-

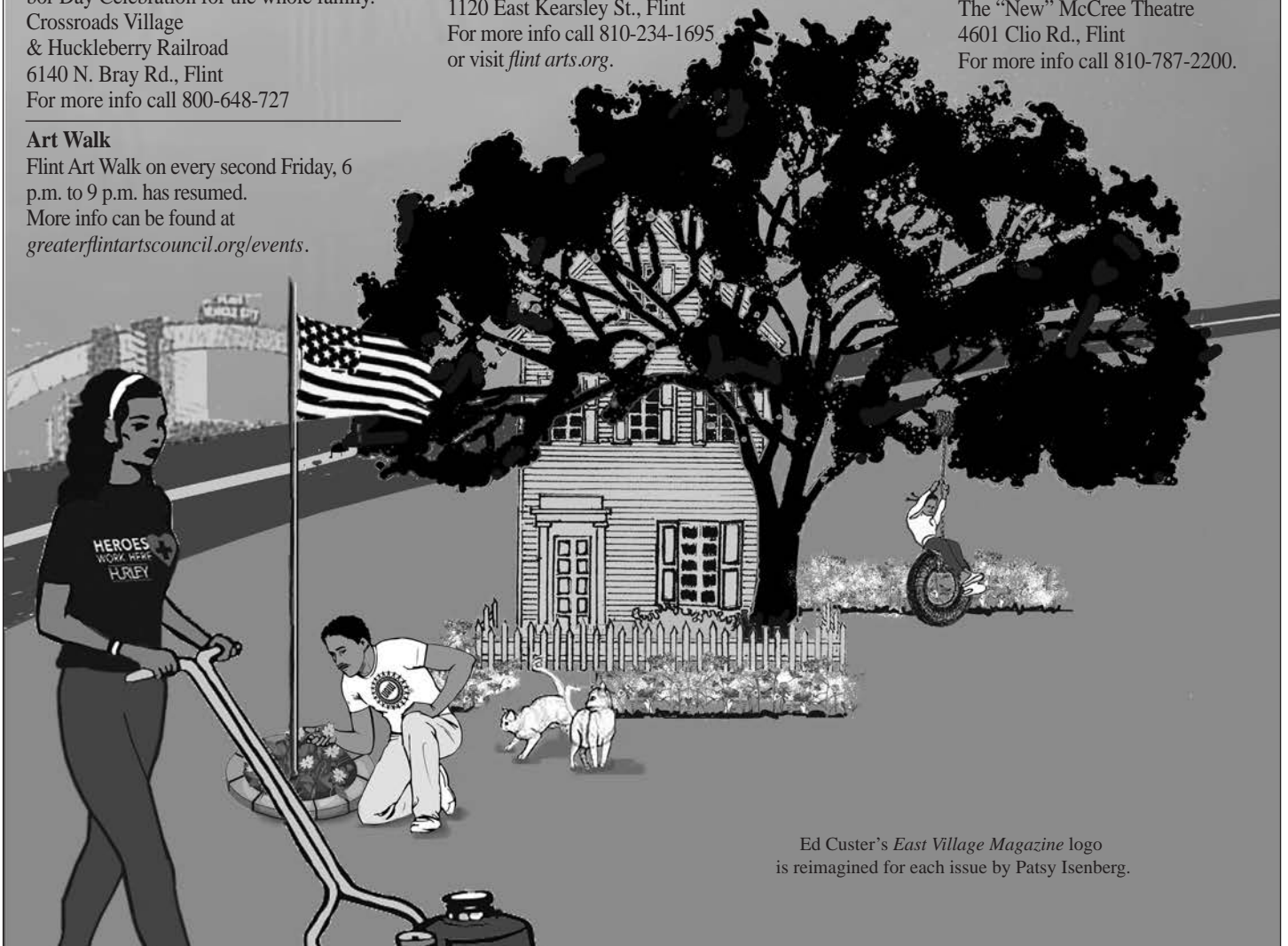
Cree’s new location are Mon. - Fri. 10:00 a.m.

to 5:00 p.m. Openings are limited.

The “New” McCree Theatre

4601 Clio Rd., Flint

For more info call 810-787-2200.



Ed Custer’s *East Village Magazine* logo is reimagined for each issue by Patsy Isenberg.

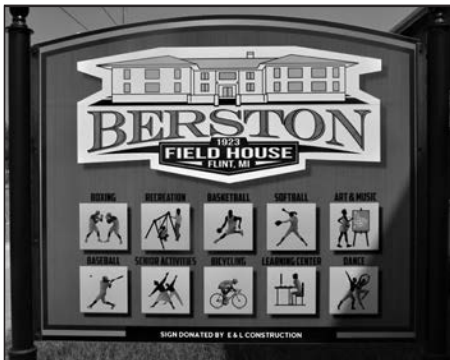
Sports Beat

Team Handball Emerging at Flint's Berston Field House

By Harold C. Ford

"This sport is so cool. There's gotta be a way that America can get good at this sport." —Mike Tirico, NBC's anchor for the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, commenting on team handball

The venerable Berston Field House — the nearly 100-year-old facility on Flint's near north-side where Olympic champion Claressa Shields



Berston Field House sign
(Photo by H.C. Ford)

honed her boxing prowess and future NBA players sharpened their basketball skill — is now the starting point for a new sport that's come to Flint: team handball.

Yes, handball. No, not the kind played in a cracker box-sized room in which players take turns smashing a small ball off the wall. Rather, the



Flint City Handball Team
(Photo by H. C. Ford)

kind that's found in the Olympic Games — sometimes called Olympic handball or European handball or team handball.

Handball is what you may have witnessed during the just-concluded Tokyo games. It's one of three summer games sports the U. S. has never medaled in.

It's a team sport in which two



Flint Hand Ball banner hanging at Berston Field House.
(Photo by H.C. Ford)

teams — a goalkeeper and seven out court players — pass a ball using their hands with the aim of throwing it into the goal/net of the other team. A standard match consists of two 30-minute periods; the team that scores more goals wins the match.

Handball has the appearance of soccer, basketball, rugby, hockey, and lacrosse combined. Some physicality is permitted by the rules.

Flint City Handball Club

Shane Proulx is the owner, chief operator, and assistant coach for the fledgling Flint City Handball Club (HC). He also loves to play and will fill in to complete a competitive roster during practice or matches.

Proulx was introduced to team handball by watching it on television



Shane Proulx, owner; Eli Madar, team captain, Flint City Handball Club
(Photo by H.C. Ford)

during the 2008 Olympic Games. "Once you get introduced to the sport it really has a way of grabbing your attention and keeping ahold of it," Proulx said.

John Brown, 39, was one of Flint City HC's nine team members present during outdoor practice at Berston on Aug. 21 as temperatures climbed into the 80s.

"Initially, I got into it in high school ... my freshman year, 1996," Brown recalled. "Like this is super cool ... running, positioning, bodying people up, the physicality of it, I've been doing forever."

Brown played soccer as a midfielder. "This is just the next step," he said.

Growing the sport

Proulx is attempting to grow team handball in the Flint area in

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... Handball

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several ways:

Donations:

- Proulx secured a \$5,000 grant from from 100K Ideas, a local nonprofit headed up by Phil Hagerman and David Ollila.

- He also received \$500 from Flint Soup, a community-funded micro-grant program backed by the C.S. Mott Foundation

- Berston Field House provided home and away jerseys in addition to a venue for practice and matches.

Public relations:

- Proulx has garnered some attention from local media that now includes *East Village Magazine*.

- Flint City HB has its own Facebook and Twitter pages and is found on the USA Team Handball website.

Associations:

- Proulx is cultivating relationships with European clubs in Germany and Scotland, with a youth club in Italy, a women's club in France, and a senior team in Spain. He is in talks with Flint Tonsberg, a women's handball team in Norway.

Challenges:

- Proulx challenged other sporting teams in Flint — the Firebirds (hockey), Flint City Bucks (soccer), and Flint United Basketball — to engage Flint City HC in a team handball match.



John Brown launches the handball toward the net

(Photo by H. C. Ford)

Invitations:

- Anyone interested is invited to try out for the team on Saturday mornings at Berston starting at 10 a.m.

- Similarly, spectators are invited to the same Saturday morning sessions. "I think if people watch it, people will love it," Proulx said.

Development of a league:

- Proulx says he is optimistic about the formation of a league of handball clubs in Midwestern cities such as Flint, Detroit, Chicago, and elsewhere. The launch of a new league was delayed, in part, by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coaching:

- Proulx just acquired a coach, Todd Slitkas, who boasts experience with Team USA's reserve handball squad. Slitkas also played competitively at Northern Michigan University.

- Free clinics for youth.

Asked if he were optimistic about the chances of handball catching on in the community, Proulx replied, "Absolutely ... the sky's the limit for Flint City Handball Club."

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



(Photo by Mike Naddeo)

“When your hometown calls, you go” - Robert Widigan, City of Flint’s newest Chief Financial Officer

By Tom Travis

Robert Widigan, 31, has joined the City of Flint’s finance department as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Widigan is a Flint native and attended Mott Community College and transferred to the University of Michigan - Flint graduating in 2014 with a concentration in finance.



Robert Widigan, the City of Flint’s new Chief Financial Officer (CFO)
Photo source: The City of Flint

Currently living in Lansing, Widigan hopes to move into downtown Flint soon. He is not married and has no kids and no pets. He says he has been thinking about getting a dog but added, “I work such long hours in city government it may not be a good idea.”

Widigan says he enjoys golfing and fly-fishing, saying, “I’m not good at either but love to do them.” He enjoys winter hiking and is looking forward to going to the downtown Flint restaurants and getting a great burger at The Torch.

Widigan’s parents live 15 minutes west of Flint and he has two aunts who live near the College-Cultural area.

In a Zoom interview with *EVM*, Widigan said the city of Flint sought him out for the CFO position. “When your hometown calls, you

go,” he said.

Widigan started in late August and is currently serving as interim CFO. His appointment will go before the full City Council for its consent as outlined in the Flint City Charter. Widigan will earn \$135,000 as Flint’s CFO, former CFO Frayer earned \$148,000.

“Be honest and transparent” - Widigan’s plan working with city council

EVM asked Widigan about his thoughts of working with the city council given their past tumultuous and chaotic record of meetings. He responded, “it’s important to tackle each piece of the finances one piece at a time, take your time, be patient, honest and transparent.”

Widigan’s first council meeting was last Wednesday’s nine-and-a-half hour marathon. He commented that he was “very tired” after the meeting.

Widigan brings “a wealth of knowledge” - Mayor Neeley

An experienced finance professional in local and state municipalities, Widigan previously served in key leadership roles with the City of Lansing, State of Michigan, and multiple counties in Michigan.

“We are pleased to welcome Robert back home and accept this role as we complete a successful transition period after Shelbi Frayer’s departure. His critical review of financial and operational management will keep the City of Flint in a strong financial position,” Mayor Sheldon Neeley said.

“His wealth of knowledge will keep our commitment to making the City’s finances a priority as we

continue to move forward in a positive direction,” according to a press release issued by the city.

Before joining the City of Flint team, Widigan served the City of Lansing as finance director. In that role, he managed the Finance Department, oversaw short-term and long-term fiscal planning and operations of the City, prepared revenue projections and debt service requirements, evaluated department operations, along with other tasks related to the City’s financial health, according to the press release.

Widigan also previously served at the Michigan Department of Treasury in the Bureau of Local Government and School Services as an analyst. His responsibilities included analyzing trends, compiling local government data, and preparing reports for long-range strategic planning and recommendations for state support directly to local governments.

Widigan’s previous work also included community relations and helping to develop and sustain diverse communities throughout Michigan, according to the press release.

Widigan replaces Shelbi Frayer, the city’s former CFO, who left last month after six months. Frayer worked with Widigan in the State of Michigan finance offices. Widigan said that while their career paths have crossed he and Frayer never worked directly with each other. He added he does not know what position Frayer moved to.

Status of \$94 million federal COVID stimulus American Rescue Plan funds

One large element of city finance that will be on Widigan’s desk as he begins is how the city deals

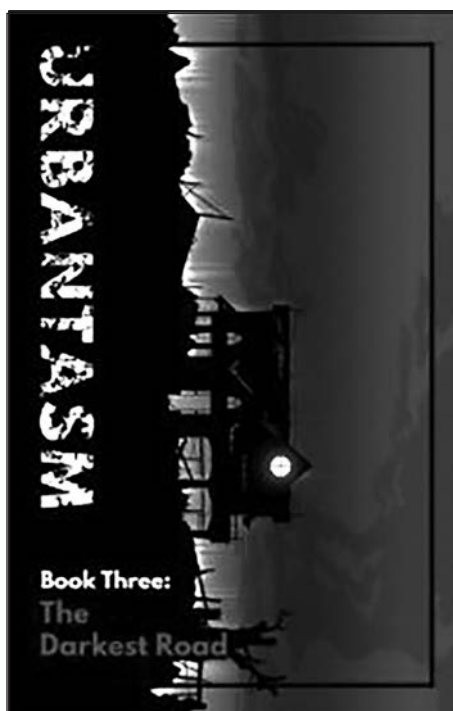
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Book Review

Connor Coyne's mighty opus compels in *URBANTASM: Book Three -- The Darkest Road*

By Robert Thomas

Urbantasm is categorized as a magical teen noir serial novel composed of four books. *The Darkest Road* is Book Three of the series created by Flint writer Connor Coyne. But it is much more than a teen novel. It is a massive creation from Coyne's omnivorous mind, and an often gripping evocation of the throes of a struggling city.



Book cover design by
Sam Perkins-Harbin

Having reviewed the first two books for *East Village Magazine* *The Dying City* (EVM July 2, 2018) and *The Empty Room* (EVM September 20, 2019), I awaited the Book Three episode like a kid with a puzzle box in which one box of stories propagates another box of surprises.

Coyne's epic serial novel is an allegorical tale set in his fictional Rust Belt town of Akawe, Michigan -- strangely and hauntingly like Flint -- in the 1990s. The first two books set the stage upon which the characters dwell.

While coated in rusting post-industrial decay. Akawe is *The Dying City* and *The Empty Room* with *The Darkest Road*. Akawe is also inhabited by real people. The humanity of Coyne's characters grows as their plight darkens.

In Book One, the characters were entering junior high school; in Book Three they are entering high school. They have been scattered throughout the city's four high schools according to district.

In Book One, John began his narration with "I have to become the Antichrist." The page fills with John's multiple grudges against God, concluding with: "If I wanted to save



Connor Coyne
(photo by Shane Gramling)

my friends, I would have to murder God."

The Darkest Road accentuates the noir element of Coyne's tale as it opens with a ghastly murder. As I dipped into muddier waters with John Bridge, the narrator of this fable, and his band of friends as they wrestle with the shifting realities of time and space and the horrors of evil in a decaying city upon a plundered planet adrift like a ship of fools. Leonard

Cohen's song "So You Want It Darker" came to mind.

In Book Three, John confronts God, urbantasms — loosely translated as "blue ghosts" — and a mysterious drug known as O-Sugar as he takes a long walk along Akawe's darkest road. Long disorienting walks at night through the decay of Akawe is a trope in all three books. *The Darkest Road* walk is a doozy display, swarming with shape-shifting illuminations on a dark frozen night in Akawe.

Musical influences inform Coyne's jazzy, bluesy writing rhythms and style. As John puts it in the early pages of Book Three: "I had always admired my father's jazz music because it was all of history spread out through dancing sounds, shuttling blues."

Urbantasm's blue ghosts of the past, present, and future meld into a shape-shifting kaleidoscope of Akawe's realities via Coyne's word play. The snappy, snarky runs of dialogue coupled with John's narrative voice continue to animate the puzzle of this third story box.

As John's world swirls off into the unknown unknowns of reality, Miss Pavilik's astronomy class offers him an introduction to the current state of cosmology in which the universe is being driven by an unknown called "phantom energy."

"The expansion of the universe is accelerating," she tells her students, "and what's more, the rate of acceleration is accelerating."

"What's gonna happen?" John asks.

What's gonna happen is something called "The Big Rip," which Miss Pavilik describes in answer to John's question.

(Continued on Page 14.)

... Flint Census

(Continued from Page 3.)

because most of the surrounding counties tend to vote Republican, it could change what has been a solid Democratic area.

Michigan's congressional delegation is currently evenly balanced with seven Democrats and seven Republicans. It remains to be seen what it will look like in 2022.

The state Senate

Michigan's state Senate is composed of 38 members and each will represent about 263,000 people with the new census. Currently Genesee County is represented, in part, by three state Senators. Democrat Jim Ananich, represents most of the northern two-thirds of the county (27th District), while Republican Ken Horn represents the western edge of the county (32nd District), and Republican Ruth Johnson (14th District) represents the southern tier of townships. With Genesee County losing about 20,000 residents the likelihood is that Ananich's district would need to expand as well. His district lost almost 10 percent of its population.

The state House

The Michigan state House is composed of 110 members and each will represent about 91,000 people after the new districts are drawn. Genesee County includes all or part of the districts of five state representatives. Republican David Martin represents the 48th District, which includes northern and northeastern Genesee County. Democrat John Cherry Jr. represents the 49th District, which included much of the city of Flint, and Flint and Flushing townships. Democrat Cynthia Neeley represents the 34th District, including much of the north western part of the City of Flint. Her district saw a 22 percent loss of

population, the largest in the state. Democrat Tim Sneller represents the 50th District, including Burton and Grand Blanc region. Republican Mike Mueller represents the 51st District, which includes the southern and western tier of townships in the county. The greatest loss of population has taken place in the 34th and the 49th districts and we are likely to see both of those areas expand to include 91,000 people each.

On the local level

In the City of Flint, with a population of about 81,000, all nine ward boundaries will also be redrawn so there are about 9000 people in each ward. The greatest losses in Flint's population took place in Wards 1, 2, 3 and 4, in the north and northeastern parts of the city. Certainly those wards will need to expand their territory to meet the 9,000 person goal. However, since the city council election will be held this year, before the redistricting is completed, any new wards won't affect an election until 2026.

The county commission districts will also be redrawn and those districts within the city boundaries will most likely need to expand as well, as Flint is a smaller part of the county in 2020 than it was in 2010.

What does this mean for Flint?

Loss of political power

The main purpose of the census is to decide how many seats in the U.S. House each state deserves. In the 1970s Michigan had 19 members of U.S. House and we have lost congressional seats in every decade since then. We will now have only 13. Clearly we have less clout, and fewer votes in the U.S. House, than we once did. Locally, we will see a gradual shift of political power away from the City of Flint, and towards the suburbs and the out-coun-

ty, as Flint becomes a smaller fraction of the county population.

Financial loss

A great deal of federal money is based on the census. Overall about \$1.5 trillion are given out based on population. In 2016 Michigan received more than \$29 billion from federal programs based on the census count. Though estimates vary widely, it commonly assumed that for every individual decline in population, a state or local government will lose at least \$1,800 per year, for the next decade, about \$18,000 per person. The 20 percent decline in Flint's population will mean a significant loss of federal funds.

The loss of 20,000 resident also means a significant loss of Flint's local tax base, both income tax and property tax.

New faces?

It's possible that with all the new election districts we may see new faces running for office. Some incumbents will look at their new districts and decide not to run again. Others may be thrown into a district with another incumbent. Others may see better, or different, opportunities with the new maps.

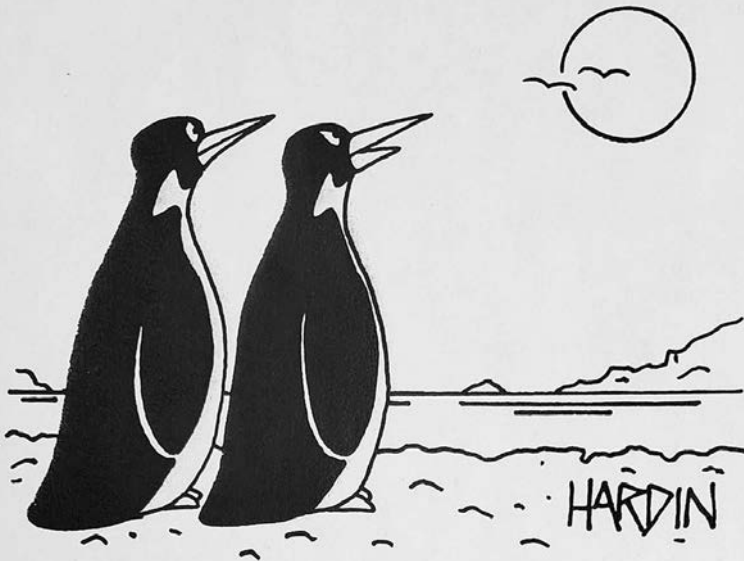
Drawing the new districts

With the passage of Proposal 2 in 2018, Michigan became one of a growing number of states that gave the job of creating new election districts to a non-partisan commission in an attempt to avoid the partisan gerrymandering, where one party gains an advantage by the way they draw election districts.

The commission is now in place and faces a task of drawing new election districts in a very short time frame.

(Continued on Page 13.)

Pat Hardin artist/author



"If God had meant for birds to fly He would have given them airplanes."

... Flint Census

(Continued from Page 12.)

Because of delays in the census, caused by the COVID pandemic there are questions about how quickly the commission must act to create the new maps. Officially the commission is supposed to meet a Sept. 17 deadline to give the public 45 days to review the maps. That seems unlikely and litigation may well modify that date.

Initially, the commission was scheduled to begin drawing the state Senate district on Aug. 19, then the state House districts on Aug. 30, followed by the congressional districts on Sept. 13.

However, in a last minute change, they now plan to draw all the new districts on a regional basis, starting in August, with the south east and south central parts of the state. In September they plan

to draw districts for the rest of the state.

They hope they have an initial version of the maps available for public review by the end of September, with the final maps ready by the end of the year. Public hearings are scheduled after Oct. 8 in various parts of the state. The hearing in Flint is planned for Oct. 14 at the Dort Event Center.

Following those hearings a final version of the maps will be published by Nov. 14, followed by another round of public hearings before the maps are completed by Dec. 30.

It may be a complex process, but it's important and will set our political framework for the next decade.

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

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... Book Review

(Continued from Page 11.)

“The universe will expand more and more quickly. Galaxies will be blasted into pieces by the expanding spaces between them. Our solar system will be scattered as the planets are sucked so far from the sun that its gravitational pull makes no difference. Finally, structures, molecules, atoms, and electrons and protons will be drawn away from each other; a sequence of increasingly disintegrating smaller particles. The whole universe will be dissolved to elementary particles, and those particles will dissolve as well.”

For John the Big Rip is a horror story. Everything from the universe to his deteriorating life in Akawe is falling apart at an accelerating rate. He ponders eternal verities and their mysteries.

“I also wondered,” he narrates, “how I felt about a God who would create a life-sustaining universe only to suddenly explode it, to rip it apart, just as life had finally arrived at its full burgeoning.”

Cosmological awakening collides with a deadly public water poisoning caused by political policy and perpetrated by a complete failure of hierarchical leadership from local, state, and federal authorities.

Coyne’s injection of Flint’s recent municipal water poisoning into the decay of Flint in the 1990s of John’s Akawe is an example of an urbantasm whereby the past, present, and future conflate and expand to expose gritty nubbins. Akawe is not the Land of Oz, the Hobbits, or Harry Potter. It is certainly not the Disneyland of the ethereal American Dream.

The problem between Fantasyland and Reality World is an existential reality that confronts John and his mates at every turn along the darkest road in Akawe. *Urbantasm* is a fantastical fable firmly grounded in shape-shifting realities like the universe and Akawe, both as real as real can get.

... Widigan

(Continued from Page 10.)

with its expected influx of COVID relief funds. It was announced earlier this year that Flint would receive \$94 million in federal relief funds through President Joe Biden’s American Rescue Plan. Flint has received the first installment from that stimulus. The Flint City Council passed a resolution to accept the funds, but the resolution requires that the city

The Darkest Road offers significant occultation and illumination — key components of imaginative fiction, whose rewards are rich in the mysterious wisdoms of reality as it expands, accelerates, and erupts around John and his friends like mortar rounds of shock-and-awe illuminations shaded in the blue ghosts of urbantasms composed of past, present, and future.

In search of further illumination, John meets Drake, the original O-Sugar candyman in Book One who took his band to the roof of the St. Christopher hospital for an O-Sugar flight off the roof to the parking lot below. Drake was the only survivor, albeit paralyzed and confined to a wheel chair. He and John share a mutual learning question: What is the magic ingredient in O-Sugar that would cause one to teleport off a rooftop? Drake knows what that felt like; John seeks to find out. To do so, he takes three hits of O-Sugar to accompany his long walk along Akawe’s darkest road. The journey is filled with urbantasms and awakenings. John now knows what Drake felt, but it is his cousin Michael who puts all the pieces together to solve the riddle of O-Sugar’s magic ingredient and its connection to the inexplicable hallucinations John and his friend Selby had shared at four years old.

John Bridge concludes *The Darkest Road* with an ecstatic prayer of hope which reminded me of crossroads blues and “Sympathy for the Devil.”

wait until the final regulations on spending that money is released by the U.S. Treasury Department before the money is spent.

The city council narrowly adopted a \$71 million budget in June 2021. The City of Flint FY2022 adopted budget can be viewed at www.cityofflint.com/finance/financial-reports.

EVM Managing Editor Tom Travis can be reached at tomntravis@gmail.com.

I was reminded of his two initial journal entries prompted by two questions: Where Did You Begin? and Where Are You Now?

To the first John wrote: “Akawe, Michigan. 1980. Time is travel and loss is learning.”

To the second he wrote: “Akawe, Michigan. We have bottles of water to drink and wash with. My house is warm. My mother still has her job, so we still have food to eat and a place to live. I got gifts for Christmas and I love them. I have friends though I haven’t seen them much. Adam and Nova and Selby and Quantla. Michael, especially. I need to just be here right now and to be grateful for what I have.”

Shortly after reading Book Three, I stumbled upon a book titled *Allegorizings*, by the great Welsh writer, traveler, adventurer, scholar Jan Morris. The book is a posthumous message from Morris that everything is an allegory; nothing is what it seems.

Urbantasm is much more than a teen novel; it is an epic serial allegory.

The Darkest Road, Book Three of Connor Coyne’s epic four-volume fable will be available September, 2021. More information about the upcoming book can be found at the link www.urbantasm.com/the-darkest-road.

EVM emeritus board member and frequent book reviewer Robert Thomas can be reached at capnz13prod@gmail.com.

... Aging Schools

(Continued from Page 6.)

also held meetings with students, staff, and parents to pitch the advantages of a balanced calendar.

What happened in Beecher did not happen in Flint, a system beset with aging infrastructure and financial shortcomings. And poor student attendance signals a community not wholly convinced of the benefits of a balanced calendar.

Mack cautioned board members that Dec. 2021 is the earliest possible completion date for HVAC upgrades to provide air-conditioning to all FCS buildings. "Unfortunately, we will not have air-conditioning units completed early this year," advised Mack.

It's not just a matter of installing AC units. "Electrical service is still an issue," said Mack.

An aging infrastructure derailed Steward's plans to put window AC units in the 110 classrooms that do not have them. She said aging electrical infrastructure and the cost and labor for needed ventilation made that plan impracticable.

"Every time we come up with a thought, we get a roadblock," said a chagrined Steward. "I'm trying to do what I can to cool off these classrooms."

Despite their noise, Steward said the district may purchase large fans for the hallways and classrooms.

"Putting the kids at risk"

"My concern is we're putting the kids at risk," said Ellis-McNeal. "We cannot sit here and pretend we do not have an emergency situation."

"We can't keep subjecting people to this type of treatment," agreed McIntosh. "We haven't fixed our issue and our kids are suffering."

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

East Village Magazine

is updating coverage of water crisis recovery efforts.

Rather than track only the monthly number of lead service lines replaced, we will now report additional numbers related to ongoing work toward recovery from the Flint water crisis.

Number of Lead Water Service Lines as of July 16, 2021

Pipes Explored: **27,133** (27,092 in June)

Pipes Replaced: **10,059** (10,041 in June)

Copper Lines Installed: **17,074** (17,051 in June)

Between Aug. 1 and Aug. 26, 2021

6 of 192 homes tested above 15 parts per billion for lead
(in July it was 4 of 91 homes)

1 of 192 homes tested above 1,300 for copper between
(in July it was 1 of 91 homes)

As of Aug. 27, 2021

16,000 enrollees in the Flint Registry,
which connects people affected by the water crisis to services
(in July it was 15,318)

22,900 referrals to service from the Flint Registry
(in July it was 22,332)

2018 was the last year

the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
reported on lead in water testing in Flint Schools

**153 Lead Safe Home
program abatements completed in 2019**

2.4% of children in Flint 6 and under with blood lead
level above five micrograms per deciliter in 2018

————— **1 new grocery store** —————
opened in Flint in July, 2021

Woodside Church of Flint seeks

Worship Production Coordinator

Do you know how to

- mix audio & video?
- stream live and prerecorded content to social media?
- run iOS and Switcher Studio?
- get along with wild-eyed progressives?

Job description and application info: www.woodsidechurch.net/employment-at-woodside

Must be available Sundays!

Village Life

Sarah Carson's poems grow from the heart of Flint

Sarah Carson is the author of the poetry collections *Poems in which You Die* and *Buick City*. She is also the former Executive Director of the Flint Festival of Writing.

Her poetry collection, *How to Baptize a Child in Flint, Michigan*, won the 2021 Lexi Rudnitsky Editors' Choice Award. The Lexi Rudnitsky Editor's Choice Award competition is open to any poet who has previously published at least one full-length book of poems. The winner receives an advance of \$2,000 and publication of their collection by Persea Books.

Spanning girlhood to motherhood, *How to Baptize a Child in Flint, Michigan* traces the lineage of four generations of a Flint, Michigan family--from the trailer park to the factory floor to, perhaps, a future far away. These poems examine the wreckage of the American Dream and ask who will answer for the promises we were made to believe as children: God? Industry? America? If we are all a part of the problem, are we are also all a part of the cure?

The collection will be published by Persea Books in Fall 2022.

How to Baptize a Child in Flint, Michigan

First, hold the curve
of his head like

packed snow,
a struck match,

a field mouse
you catch

with the cup
of your hand.

Say he can be anything;
refill his root beer;

read him a story:
say, *Yes*,

people like us
can be great, too.

If you're going to the firehouse,
bring him with you;

tell him, *God is good*,
even if
a guardsman
says otherwise.

At home,
dinner in the microwave,

Mountain Dew
and TV light,

when the textbook insists
we are already water

say, *Of course*,
we are, boo,

though you don't know
the specifics,

just that Pastor says river
is a holy thing;

Jesus himself
could walk it in bare feet.

On Easter, when he
falls asleep

during altar call,
when he wakes

and whispers,
What is brimstone?

What's repentance?
Send him out to the narthex,

ask him if he's thirsty,
tell him,

These reckoning songs
are not for us.

—Sarah Carson

Telling My Daughter the Story of the Woman at the Well

Lovely, I say,
we cannot count the ways

we may
have never existed,

the improbability
of our grandmothers,

women who picked & packed
pieces of the future:

here a warm quilt,
there a child who could read.

Think of it.
GG says if she'd had a choice in it,

there'd have been
far fewer babies,

bottles boiling
in the stock pot.

Your grandfather,

sixth of seven,
carries this knowledge
in his knuckles.

Today, driving along
Stewart Avenue,

past homes
where our foremothers

once seasoned stew,
hung bedsheets,

one cement stoop
after another

collapses:
A boy scans the sidewalk.

His sneakers scratch
the pavement

like a loose boat scrapes
a dam.

Maybe his mother
has also
explained
the way things become

the way things
were

without warning.

If Jesus
walked out
of an empty tomb,

who's to say
that we won't also?

Every day
women split themselves open

so that the future
can begin again.

—Sarah Carson