

A black and white photograph of a brick building with a window and flowering branches in the foreground. The building has a prominent chimney and a gabled roof. The foreground is filled with large, light-colored flowers, likely dogwoods, which are in full bloom. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

East Village

Magazine

June 2023

Photograph By

Edwin D. Carter



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Commentary

Is it time to park the meters?

By Paul Rozycki

As the bricks on Saginaw Street are being redone to give us a smoother ride downtown, perhaps it is time to reconsider what happens when that ride is done. Where to park the car?

For almost the last four years, Municipal Parking Services has been running the Flint parking system. It is a private firm that shares the parking revenue with the Downtown Development Authority.

It has installed meters with remote sensors and pay stations that were designed to make parking, and paying for parking, more efficient in our computer age. Drivers were asked to park in designated areas, go to a pay station with either coins or credit/debit cards, and pay for their parking time. Rates are \$1 per hour with a two-hour limit. Those who don't pay, or otherwise violate policy, would have their license plates scanned and receive a \$25 fine in the mail.

The current parking system in downtown Flint

In Elizabeth Ireland-Curtis' article in this month's East Village Magazine, she outlines the many details of the current parking system in the downtown and its connection to the Downtown Development Authority. In 2019, Flint was the first community to use this automated technology with the Flint AutoPark system.

As Ireland-Curtis indicates, though the current system provides income for both the company and the DDA, it also presents a number of problems for both those who wish to park downtown and those businesses who want to see more

customers downtown. Many have begun to question the wisdom of the current arrangement for both the city and the downtown.

Many avoid the meters and downtown

The automated system all seems very smooth and efficient, but because of many complaints about tickets, inoperative meters, other errors, or simple confusion, many go out of their way to avoid the meters, doing business either after five or on weekends, parking blocks away, or staying away from the downtown altogether. Many complain that even a brief stop in a parking area results in a fine. None of that serves the Flint downtown or its business well.

For a city that is called the Vehicle City, it's easy to forget how important parking is to the automotive culture of the last century and the impact it can have on downtowns. In the 1960s, as shopping malls popped up on the edges to cities, they often sucked the business out of downtown and into the newly built malls. Anyone who was in Flint when Genesee Valley Mall (and others) opened in 1970 can recall the impact on downtown as vacancy after vacancy appeared in the storefronts.

Why did that happen? Parking.

Downtowns either had limited parking or costly parking, and the malls had acres of free parking spaces. It was easier for shoppers to go to the mall, knowing they could find a parking place, rather than scramble for a place on the downtown street.

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Cover: Applewood Estate in spring



Photo of the Month: Great Lakes National Cemetery, resting place of *EVM* founder Gary Custer (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat Analysis

Flint Community Schools challenged by its aging lineup of buildings; Washington demo approved

By Harold C. Ford

In May, the Flint Board of Education (FBOE):

- approved the spending of tens of millions of ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) dollars for infrastructure upgrades;
- turned down a substantial offer to sell the Zimmerman property on Corunna Road;
- approved the demolition of Washington Elementary on Flint’s east side which burned down in October 2021.

Infrastructure upgrades approved

Tens of millions of ESSER funds for infrastructure upgrades in Flint’s aging school buildings was given unanimous approval by the FBOE at its May 10 and 17 meetings.

ESSER, one category of COVID relief dollars, can be spent on upgrades of buildings currently occupied by students. They may not be used to build new facilities or to

upgrade buildings that are absent students.

In at least three waves of ESSER funding from the Federal Government, Flint Community Schools (FCS) was given access to an amount just shy of \$150 million; Flint’s city government, by comparison, was granted an amount just under \$100 million. Some of the ESSER dollars have already been spent by FCS.



A student masking up as she enters Doyle-Ryder school
(Photo by Tom Travis)

ESSER-funded projects must be completed by September of 2024 or the funds may be forfeited.

The building/property upgrades and amounts approved at the May 10 and 17 FBOE meetings are as follows:

- Potter Elementary: \$9,620, 775
- Brownell Elementary: \$8,733, 730
- Holmes STEM Academy: \$21, 415,967
- Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary: \$5,534, 697
- Southwestern Classical Academy: \$4,161, 487
- Accelerated Learning Academy: \$1,035,776
- Eisenhower Elementary: \$2,449,651
- Neithercut Elementary: \$774,094

Specifics about proposed upgrades at each of the above FCS buildings can be viewed at the YouTube recording of the May 10 FBOE meeting

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starting at about the 2:10 p.m. mark.

The next step in the process is design work by architects and other planners which must happen before any upgrades are undertaken. Other necessary steps -- such as the bidding process, contracting, and acquisition of building permits -- must occur before actual upgrades can begin with shovels thrust into the ground, paint applied to drab hallways, repair of aging pipes, replacement of frayed electrical wiring, and the like.

FCS will be challenged to achieve completion of all the aforementioned projects by September of 2024, only 16 months away.

Aging lineup of buildings

EVM, with assistance from Sloan Museum, has documented that the 11-building lineup of FCS buildings are among the oldest in the nation, averaging more than 70 years old. The average age of all school buildings in the U.S. is about 46 years.

The infusion of ESSER funds may represent only a fraction of what is needed to maintain FCS buildings in the next decade. In January 2022, the district was told by the auditing firm Plante Moran Cresa (PMC) that “FCS has a 10-year capital need of \$174 million for its 11 schools.”

The projected 10-year costs for each of Flint’s school buildings, according to PMC:

- Brownell: \$11,650,906
- Doyle/Ryder: \$10,272,579*
- Durant-Tuuri-Mott: \$20,556,920



Zimmerman School (northern view) on Corunna Rd. on Flint's west side
(Photo by HC Ford)



Zimmerman School (southern view) on Corunna Rd. on Flint's west side
(Photo by HC Ford)



Zimmerman School (southwest view) on Corunna Rd. on Flint's west side
(Photo by HC Ford)

- Eisenhower: \$9,495,358
- Freeman: \$11,733,922
- Neithercut: \$11,887,194
- Pierce: \$10,601,128
- Potter: \$14,231,142
- Holmes: \$22,648,968
- Accelerated Learning Academy: \$9,919,749
- Southwestern: \$38,402,032



Durant-Tuuri Mott school on University Ave near Kettering University
(Photo by Tom Travis)



Bruce Jordan MEA teacher union leader
(Photo by HC Ford)

[*The Doyle/Ryder building is currently closed as black mold remediation and other upgrades near completion. Doyle/Ryder students are currently housed in the Potter building. Mitigation of bat infestations and roof repairs were undertaken at both buildings.]

When ESSER funds disappear in 2024 – sans cost-cutting measures or revenue enhancements -- the district is likely to return to a financial state of recurring annual deficits and long-term debt.

Holly Stefanski, PMC’s assurance manager, told the FBOE, “You’re definitely not going to be in excellent financial shape for a long time.”

PMC told the district that the substantial loss of student population in the past decade was at the heart of its declining revenue. Approximately two-thirds of the students who reside in Flint are not enrolled in FCS schools; they and their families have opted for private schools, charter schools, home schooling, and enrollment in neighboring public-school districts through Michigan’s Schools of Choice program.

Every student who abandons the district has taken with him/her \$8,000 to \$10,000 in state aid; the amount of aid-per-student has changed during the COVID pandemic years.

“Rightsizing the district”

PMC suggested “rightsizing the district” during its January 2022 report to Flint’s school board. FBOE members were told the district needed only four elementary schools. FCS currently operates eight elementary buildings: Brownell; Doyle/Ryder; Durant-Tuuri-Mott; Eisenhower; Freeman; Neithercut; Pierce; and Potter.

No plan for “rightsizing the district” has made its way onto the printed agenda of an FBOE meeting in the 17 months since the January 2022 report by Plante Moran Cresa.

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Rozycki commentary ...

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An invisible but powerful issue

Though it is something we rarely think about until we are searching for a parking place, parking is, and has long been, a powerful issue.

A few years ago I was writing the history of Mott Community College, and looking over the old student newspapers, I discovered one complaint that remained unchanged over the decades. It was parking. As early as the 1930s students were complaining about parking problems on campus, and that frustration continued in one form or another in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. Perhaps only the recent pandemic and the move to more virtual classes has limited the complaints.

Parking is also an emotional issue -- and even a violent one. Some recent shootings have taken place over parking place conflicts.

Parking rates around Michigan and the nation

How cities have handled the parking issue varies. Some are free. Some are very costly.

Nationwide, New York has the most expensive street parking, averaging \$20 an hour. Chicago is second with an average of \$19 for the same time.

On the other hand, Sycamore, Illinois, a small town near where I grew up, about an hour west of Chicago, takes pride in the fact that it still has parking meters that take pennies.

In 2018, according to the *Detroit Free Press*, the Michigan cities of Northville, Clawson, Berkley and Plymouth all had free parking, with certain hour limits. Detroit and Rochester charge \$1 an hour for their meters. Ann Arbor is higher at \$1.60, Birmingham and Royal Oak are \$1.50, Grosse Pointe and Mt. Clemens are 75 cents an hour, and Ferndale

is 50 cents. Grand Rapids varies from \$1 to \$2.25 and Lansing rates are from 75 cents to \$1.50.

The impact of parking

Beyond the issue of parking in Flint and other Michigan cities, some are taking a look at the role parking and the automobile play in our environment and our whole society. In a recently published book by Henry Grabar, titled "Paved Paradise: How Parking Explains the World" the author argues that the efforts to find parking spaces for our cars have diverted resources from other more desirable goals and made our cities less livable and uglier. He generally supports the idea that parking in large urban areas should reflect the real cost of providing parking spaces and that the higher costs would make for less auto traffic, more public transportation and a cleaner environment.



Parking meters on the east side of Saginaw Street

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

What should Flint do?

A move to wide-spread public transportation and downtown malls may be a stretch for cities the size of Flint. But there clearly is a problem with our downtown parking. It's true that it does generate some income for the DDA, but is it worth it if it drives away visitors and downtown businesses lose customers?

Are there other ways of generating the same income? Are there better ways to provide the public with secure

and affordable parking in downtown? Whether we opt for a free parking system or a paid system, at the very least it should be dependable and reliable, and citizens should not be afraid they will get a ticket every time they drive down the bricks and slip into a parking place. As we replace the bricks on Saginaw Street maybe it's also a time to park the meters.

EVM political commentator and board president Paul Rozycki can be reached at paul.rozycki@mcc.edu.

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Ed Beat ...

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“What is your plan of action?”

In recent months a chorus of constituent voices has called for FCS to right size the district and rid itself of abandoned properties. A sampling:

- “We are getting complaints about the closed schools that is just sitting there. What is your plan of action?” –Quincy Murphy, councilman, City of Flint Third Ward, December 2022

- “I think every dollar amount spent on vacant buildings is a dollar less that goes to our scholars.” –Derek Luna, FBOE treasurer, January 2023

- “The sheer number of properties need to be reduced.” –Chris Henderson, FCS director of operations, January 2023

- “We would like something done with the schools.” --Theron Wiggins, interim fire chief, City of Flint, February 2023

- “I am begging you to make the hard decisions you don’t want to make.” –Nadia Rodriguez, FCS teacher, April 2023

- “It’s April; school closings



Gordon VanWieren, Thrun Law Firm
(Photo by HC Ford)

should be announced today, May at the latest ... I’m begging you to get focused.” –Bruce Jordan, teachers union official, Michigan Education Associa-

tion, April 2023

- “We’ve passed the point of responsibility when it comes to school closures,” –Luna, May 2023

Mott Foundation offer nowhere in sight

Absent from any recent public discussions by the FBOE about its buildings is a proposal by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Flint’s largest nonprofit, to help fund the renovation and/or rebuilding of FCS structures. That offer, once titled Flint Education Continuum (FEC), was first revealed to the public by *East Village Magazine (EVM)* in April 2021.

FEC envisioned revenue from three major sources – the State of Michigan, Flint Community Schools, and the Mott Foundation – applied toward the upgrade or replacement of all student-occupied FCS buildings.

FBOE declines offer to sell Zimmerman

At its April 19 meeting, the FBOE did not act on a \$250,000 offer from a bidder to purchase the Zimmerman building at 2421 Corunna Road. The 108,000-square-foot Zimmerman property, sitting on 4.6 acres, has been vacant since 2013.

Selling vacant school properties “can be very challenging,” said Gordon VanWieren, an attorney with Thrun Law Firm. Thrun, a firm that specializes in vacant school properties, works with FCS and some 500 other school districts in Michigan. VanWieren reported that Liberty Way Holdings LLC, with a local address at 1200 W. Court St. in Flint, made a \$250,000 offer for the Zimmerman property. He said the focus of the repurposed Zimmerman would be, as the FBOE previously requested, “community-based.” He added that Liberty Way Holdings planned to invest up to \$10 million to renovate the property.

Nonetheless, the FBOE did not approve the proposal. Opposition to the deal, as in the past, was led by FBOE Trustee Laura MacIntyre. “I’m not interested in giving away our buildings or our land.” She called the proposed bid “discouraging and disheartening ... disingenuous.”



FBOE Trustee Laura MacIntyre.
(Photo by Tom Travis)

MacIntyre has frequently dubbed abandoned FCS properties a “gold mine ... generational wealth.”

Trustee Melody Relerford speculated about development of “a county park right around the corner” from Zimmerman that might increase the value of the Zimmerman property. “You can look straight through and see” the new park, claimed Relerford.



FBOE Trustee Melody Relerford
(Photo by Tom Travis)

“It’s not quite by there,” advised Derek Luna, FBOE treasurer. “Yes, it is,” Relerford interrupted.

[Reporter’s note: The distance from the Zimmerman property to Chevy Commons is about seven tenths of a mile. This reporter visited the Zimmerman property and, from several vantage points, could not see Chevy Commons.]

“The state is going to create a state park,” Luna continued. In July

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Immigration advanced as a strategy for stabilizing, growing Flint

By Harold C. Ford

“This is the ultimate win-win.” –John Austin, Michigan Economic Center, March 29, 2023

The International Center of Greater Flint (ICGF) recently assembled about 40 people representing nearly 20 organizations at the Flint Public Library March 29 to promote immigration as an approach to growing the population and economy of the greater Flint community.

Phyllis Sykes and Adil Mohammed, co-founders of ICGF were organizers of the event, co-hosted by Greater Flint Health Coalition. Sykes was moderator.



Moderator Phyllis Sykes
(Photo by Harold Ford)

“The increase in (Flint’s) international population (and) a gap in services here in Genesee County,” inspired the event, Sykes said. “We would like to hear what other communities are doing.” She called for a “needs assessment and

strategic plan.”

Attendees from the Flint area included: Freelon Threlkeld, pastor, Faith Baptist Temple; Raquel Thueme, president, Ruth Mott Foundation; Deba Dutta, chancellor, University of Michigan-Flint; Asa Zuccaro, director, Flint’s Latinx Center; Costa Papista, president, Flint City Bucks soccer organization; Dylan Luna, treasurer, Flint Board of Education; and representatives from Mott Community College, Genesee County Land Bank, United Way of Genesee County, Genesee County Health Department, and Flint Jewish Federation.

Also attending were: representatives from the offices of U.S. Senator Gary Peters and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer; and Michigan Works! Association. Several members of the media, including *East Village Magazine (EVM)*, were also present.

“Immigrant-welcoming strategies”

“Our community continues to experience population decline,” said Jim Ananich, former 27th district state senator from Flint, in a taped message. Deleterious effects of population loss include a declining tax base, deteriorating infrastructure, dwindling school population, and fewer congressio-

nal seats, he pointed out.

Ananich lauded the success of Global Detroit and its “success of immigrant-welcoming strategies implemented in the City of Detroit ... and how they

have successfully fostered new business, job and population growth, and community revitalization and development.”

Global Detroit

Three featured speakers at the March 29 event from Global Detroit – Steve Tobocman, executive director; Alaina

Jackson, managing director; and Emma Davis, program manager – shared stories of challenges, strategies, and success.



Steve Tobocman of Global Detroit
(Photo by Harold Ford)

Tobocman, Jackson, and Davis all touted the possible benefits of immigration:

- Tobocman: Immigration was a “stabilizing factor in (Detroit) neighborhoods ... We found undeniable benefits in these (immigrant-welcoming)

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Immigration ...

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grant) communities that accrue to everyone in the community.”

- Jackson: Tangential benefits of immigration included: a decrease in commercial property vacancy rates; the growth of local microeconomies with increased business startups and employment; increased safety and decreased crime rates; increased home ownership and fewer landlord-tenant properties; improved conditions of homes and commercial properties; and declining tax delinquencies and foreclosures. “When immigrants come to our city (Detroit), they start businesses and they hire people ... from the neighborhood.”

- Davis: Successful immigrant-welcoming initiatives need “the right people, at the right place, at the right time ... 2023 is looking like that year” for Flint. Davis said she is hopeful that a \$30 million package to support such initiatives will soon achieve final passage in Michigan’s state government. If approved, funds would be routed through the Office of Global Michigan to grassroots initiatives.

Population loss and population growth

Constant themes at the ICGF event were the consequences of Flint’s precipitous population loss in recent decades and, conversely, the benefits of future population growth.

Flint frequently finds itself a poster child for websites like that of World According to Briggs with posts such as “10 Fastest Dying Cities in the United States.”

Flint’s top spot on the Briggs list is supported by the nation’s decennial census which documents the Vehicle City’s shrinkage:

- 1980: -17.4 percent

- 1990: -11 percent
- 2000: -11 percent
- 2010 -18 percent
- 2020: -20.7 percent

From 2010 to 2020 Flint lost more than one-fifth of its population when it declined from 102,000 to 81,000.

John Austin, director of the Ann Arbor-based Michigan Eco-



Asa Zuccaro of Flint’s Latinx Center

(Photo by Harold Ford)

nomic Center, another featured speaker at the ICGF event, pitched population growth as a way of revitalizing communities in the midwestern United States:

“This is still the land of opportunity where Flint looks awfully good for so many ... particularly if they’re coming from countries



John Austin of the Michigan Economic Center

(Photo by Harold Ford)

where they’re not safe, where there’s no economic opportunity ... Immigrants are a source of economic renewal ... Immigrants come here and they start businesses and they put other people back to work ... Immigrants have historically been professionals. They come and apply their talents to communities ... It’s a very powerful strategy for embracing, as Flint once did, folks who come here seeking a better life.”

Statistics from the Office of Global Michigan bear out Austin’s assertions:

- 84,000 Michiganders are employed by Latino and Asian-owned businesses;
- \$11.6 billion in sales and receipts are generated by Latino and Asian-owned businesses;
- \$544 million in state tax revenue is generated by Arab Americans each year.

Austin, who started his professional career in Flint at Flint Roundtable, said that one third of population-depleted communities in the midwestern United States have experienced population and economic regrowth “only because of immigrants.”

“Immigrants account for all population growth (in Michigan) in the last 30 years,” Jackson added. “No major U.S. metropolitan area that has lost population since the 60s has been able to stabilize that population, reverse its course, without immigration.”

“I’m hopeful.”

“Institutional change is slow,” Zuccaro cautioned. “We see the discrimination that happens in our community. It’s difficult ... It can be difficult to sleep at night.”

“I wonder if some of our important institutions had representation from the immigrant community,” Zuccaro said. “I think that would drastically and rapid-

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Guest Commentary

Flint's unique opportunity for better, safer streets needs design for more than cars

By Joel Arnold

If there's one thing we hear regularly in our city and region, it's that people drive far too fast and far too dangerously.

In the Flint area, we've seen business after business -- whether a fast-food restaurant on Dort Highway, Mega Coney Island in Flint Township, or even Dawn Donuts on Clio Road -- get hit by vehicles.

A consistent theme in all these incidents is that they take place on roads designed for one thing: moving cars as fast as possible. But what if we considered more than just the drivers on our roads, like bikers or pedestrians? And what if we made space for them?

Throughout the US, there has been a growing movement to adopt what are called "Complete Streets." As defined by Smart Growth America, "Complete Streets are streets for everyone. Complete Streets is an approach to planning, designing, building, operating, and maintaining streets that enables safe access for all people who need to use them, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities." In short, this means making our streets easy to use whether you are walking, biking, using public transportation, using a wheelchair, or driving. Smart Growth America's Complete Streets Coalition has even created a handy image to show what such streets can look like.

Today in Flint, we have many roads that were designed using a different concept known as "Levels

of Service," or LOS. LOS rates the quality of a road based on one thing: the speed and smoothness through

selves. In particular, Black and Hispanic households are less likely to own a vehicle than white households.

However, the most important reason to embrace a Complete Streets worldview is a simple reason -- safety. Our current roads are incredibly unsafe. According to The Crim Fitness Foundation's Neighborhood Impact Department, since 2012 there have been 453 pedestrian-involved

vehicle crashes in the City of Flint, involving more than 1,000 pedestrians and leading to 105 fatalities. An additional 296 bicyclists have been hit, with 7 losing their lives. That's 112 lives lost to these crashes in our community.

Additionally, data shows that low-income individuals have the highest rates of walking and bicycling to work, and are less likely to have access to a personal vehicle. Making changes to our roadways thus is not simply a way to make different modes of transportation safer, but a critical means of advancing social equity. The faster cars move through our city, the more at risk pedestrians are if they are hit.

Thankfully, Flint is poised for change.

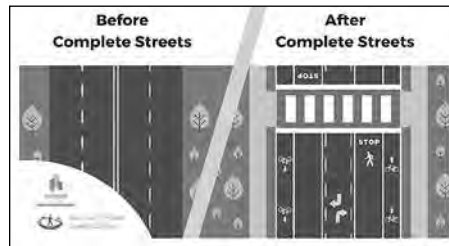
Currently the city has a vacancy in the Department of Public Works Director position. This position oversees Flint's transportation investments and the decisions made on how our roads get designed. The City should seek to hire someone

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(Graphic source: strongtowns.org)

which vehicles flow through a road. It's a measure that does not account



(Graphic source: smartgrowthamerica.org)

for pedestrians, cyclists, bus passengers waiting at a stop, or others traveling along the road. While many of us drive here in the Vehicle City, it's also true that thousands of Flint



(Graphic source: The Seattle Department of Transportation)

residents don't drive or don't have access to a vehicle. According to the US Census Bureau, nearly 25% of workers in Flint get to their jobs in a way other than driving by them-

Better streets ...

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well-versed in Complete Streets and committed to better, safer road design.

The City of Flint could also adopt a Complete Streets Ordinance, making it city law to require that all road repairs include the needs of all travelers, regardless of whether they drive.

Cities around the Midwest from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to Cleveland Heights, Ohio have already adopted ordinances like this, and Complete Streets designs have now made their way to cities in our own state -- in Ann Arbor, Kalamazoo, and Detroit. There's no reason we can't adopt a Complete Streets ordinance as well.

What might this look like in real life? It would look like more bike lanes protected by bollards or curbs. It would mean more clearly marked crosswalks. It would mean narrower roads that encourage slower, safer driving. Most importantly, it would look like Flint residents of all races and incomes being able to get to work, school, the doctor, and visits with friends in a safe and convenient way, no matter how they move.

There's no time to waste in building a safer city. Let's take advantage of the opportunity we have and get to building.

Joel Arnold is the Planning and Advocacy Manager at Communities First, Inc., a Flint-based nonprofit committed to building healthy, vibrant communities through economic development, affordable housing, and innovative programming. He is also a co-founder of Flint Residents for Stronger Neighborhoods, a resident group whose mission is to advocate for quality, effective urbanism in the City of Flint. He is a proud resident of the Central Park neighborhood and can be reached at jarnold@communitiesfirstinc.org.

Immigration ...

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ly change the pace at which our institutions address our systemic barriers that exist locally."

"You can have a dream, an idea, but if you have no money, you have no mission," Zuccaro continued. "It takes money to move this mission along."

"I'm hopeful," he concluded.

Immigrant population in Genesee County increases as overall population declines

Data from the American Community Survey as analyzed and summarized by the University of Michigan-Flint, estimates that Genesee County's overall population declined by 1.6 percent, from 413,090 to 406,400, from 2012-2016 to 2017-2021. During that same period, the immigrant population in the county increased 12.9 percent, from 9,977 to 11,269.

In 2021, the top five countries of origin for immigrants into Genesee County included (country of origin, number of immigrants, percentage of total immigrant population): Canada, 969, 8.6 percent; India, 951, 8.4 percent; China, 816, 7.2 percent; Mexico, 663, 5.9 percent; Cuba, 567, 5 percent. At least 63.5 percent of these immigrants have become naturalized citizens.

[Editor's note: Through genealogical research, EVM writer Harold C. Ford discovered that he descended from a great-grandmother and grandmother who were illegal immigrants from French Canada in the late 1800s.] More information is available at <https://www.eastvillagemagazine.org/2019/02/14/i-love-flint-bakers-dozen-reasons-why-my-town-is-not-the-11th-worst-city-to-live-in/> in a story by Ford "Why I Love Flint."

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

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Ed Beat ...

(Continued from Page 7)

2021, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced plans to develop the Chevy Commons, an area in and around the former industrial site once known as “Chevy in the Hole”, as the location for Genesee County’s first state park.



Students at Flint’s Southwestern Academy, Fall of 2022

(Photo by Tom Travis)

“Delay kills deals,” VanWiere warned. “We simply would like direction.” He called for “a starting point (to) move forward.” Demolishing the Zimmerman property, VanWieren

said, would cost between \$400,000 and \$640,000 based on 2019 estimates.

Prodigious costs to restore FCS buildings

The projected costs to restore some of Flint’s abandoned school buildings are enormous, according

has since been targeted repeatedly by arsonists. Area residents and school officials have considered it an eyesore and an endangerment to citizens ever since.

“It looks bad,” Luna said after taking his seat on the board in January 2023. “We have to do something.”

“This (the demolition of Washington) is a good start,” added Terae King, FBOE trustee. “The community is ready for change ... It’s time to get to work.”

“It’s the worst looking property we have,” Kevelin Jones, FCS superintendent lamented. Jones informed the FBOE in February 2023 that FCS had paid \$2,500 to the City of Flint for calls to, and responses by, its fire department.

“A dangerous, hulking Jenga game of mortar and bricks just waiting to fall,” Flint resident Lisa Squier added.

In an uncommon moment of unanimity, the FBOE voted 7-0 to approve demolition of the Washington property at its May 17 meeting at a projected cost of more than \$700,000.

* * * * *

The next meeting of the FBOE is a Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting scheduled to begin at 6:30 p.m. June 14; FBOE’s June 14 regular meeting features the annual budget hearing. Meetings are at Accelerated Learning Academy, 1602 S. Averill Ave., Flint MI 48503. A link is posted at the FCS website to access online viewing; visit www.flinstschools.org, or type Flint Community Schools into the YouTube search engine. Check the FCS website for any other FCS meetings open to the public.

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

to estimates prepared by Flint-based THA Architect Engineers in 2008:

2008	2023*
<u>Anderson</u>	
\$3,481,304	\$5,003,306
<u>Bryant</u>	
\$8,683,020	\$12,479,188
<u>Carpenter Road</u>	
\$3,856,887	\$5,543,097
<u>Civic Park</u>	
\$5,620,848	\$8,078,251
<u>Dort</u>	
\$4,383,128	\$6,229,407
<u>Garfield</u>	
\$5,407,248	\$7,771,266
<u>Johnson</u>	
\$2,251,935	\$3,236,468

*U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics CPI Inflation Calculator

Funds approved for Washington demolition

Washington Elementary, at 1400 N. Vernon on Flint’s east side, burned down in October 2021. The century-old building was closed in 2014 and

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Parking meters are obvious but revenue is not

By Elizabeth Ireland-Curtis

Parking in downtown Flint is contentious and confusing. City council regularly hears complaints about the meters, how to use them and the many unwarranted tickets residents receive.

East Village Magazine (EVM) reached out multiple times to the City of Flint Communications Department, Municipal Parking System (MPS) and Flint Downtown Development Authority (DDA). None have responded with information to the questions we asked.

The questions raised by *EVM* and yet to be answered include:

- Number of tickets issued in a month by DDA generated by Auto Park
- Amount of revenue generated by the meters and fines separately
- Number of tickets that are disputed
- Number of disputed tickets that are dismissed
- How much the management service agreement with MPS costs
- What happens to consumers of unpaid and undisputed tickets
- With the construction on Saginaw, will the current meters be reinstalled

Why have paid parking?

Paid parking provides control over coveted spaces for downtown businesses, limits the time a car may be parked to two hours and is meant to generate revenue for the city. However, the current system is not transparent and may not be the best solution.

The DDA collected \$2.7 million in gross revenue in FY2022; parking revenue comprising the largest source of that income at \$1.2 million, according to DDA's 2023 Strategic Plan conducted by Progressive Urban Management Associates (P.U.M.A.) Around half of the DDA parking revenue can be attributed to monthly parking passes, with the remainder generated from on-street meters."

How did we get here?

The Flint DDA was established in 2011 under the Public Act of 1975. It is that Authority that is charged, according to their bylaws, with the power "to implement a parking enforcement bureau for parking enforcement in the downtown district". They do so by issuing citations based on the information MPS provides. Tickets are issued and fees are collected by Flint DDA, but it is not clear how much of that money goes to the City.



Downtown Flint parking meter

(Photo by Paul Rozycki)

Prior to the current system, Flint's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) stated the city had 35 solar powered pay stations for the 276 spaces on Saginaw from City Hall to the river. This system, in place for nine years, was plagued by equipment failures and increasing maintenance costs. No data is available as to the monthly revenue that it generated.

Municipal Parking System (MPS) financed a 3-month trial in 2018 for their cloud-based system, called AutoPark. That study stated the parking revenues had increased in one month to \$57,000. Violations went from an estimated yearly figure of 2,800 to 6,500, in just 30 days. It also claimed their trial system resulted in a return of \$165,000 in one month, with violation revenue and compliance increasing 20% over the length of the study.

Subsequently, the city entered into a 5-year agreement with MPS to manage

metered parking. According to a DDA press release issued in 2019, Flint was the first Michigan city to adopt this system.

When MPS's AutoPark system was installed, the gross revenue from metered parking was \$14,000 per month according to that study they presented to the city. MPS projected their system would increase the financial return to the City of Flint four-fold. However, information concerning current revenues cannot be confirmed.

The city did not have to make any capital investment to obtain the AutoPark system; it is leased. The monthly or yearly cost of the MPS agreement for the hardware, software, repairs, maintenance, or future updates is not known. According to the 2019 press release from DDA, revenues were to be shared by the vendor and Flint DDA.

How it works?

The MPS system uses remotely monitored image capturing technology to record parking violations. The cost of the equipment (327 Safety Meters, 90 Payment Kiosks and 237 Safety Sticks), installation, fee collection software, administration, and management are all covered by a multiyear managed services agreement which expires in 2024 according to the survey conducted by P.U.M.A. earlier this year.

The number of meters increased under MPS to include Harrison and Beecher Streets in addition to those on Saginaw. The Flint DDA website, flintdda.org, outlines information on the meaning of the colored lights seen on the Safety sticks, where parking is prohibited, and the location of handicap and free spaces.

What we do know

As it stands, MPS operating costs must be met before any funds are available to the Flint DDA, let alone the

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THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

A selection of events available to our readers is highlighted — beginning after our publication date of June 6. It's a sampling of opportunities in the city. To submit events for our July issue, email info about your event to pisenber@gmail.com by June 26.

“Ragtime”

June 9-25, Performances every day of the week except Mon. and Tues. Performances begin at 8 p.m. all days but Sun. and Wed. which start at 2 p.m. Originally a book by E.L. Doctorow was adapted for the stage by Terrence McNally. “Ragtime” is a musical focusing on three people in NYC in the 20th century. Flint Repertory Theatre
1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For tickets and more info call 810-237-1530 or visit thefim.org.

Juneteenth Celebrations

June 9-19
This year there are many events planned. On June 19 is the Traditional Celebration which starts at 12 p.m. at Max Brandon Park (3606 Fupont St., Flint) with many games for children, arts & crafts, prizes and backyard BBQ activities with dominoes and card tables. A parade starts at 5 p.m. and attendees can join the parade. To learn about more events that week visit eventbrite.com/e/traditional-flint-juneteenth-celebration-2023-tickets-632462160347?aff=ebdssbdest-search.

Levitt AMP presents “Jazz on Wheels”

Saturdays in June, 7 p.m.
The Levitt AMP Grant Foundation awards money to cities facing challenges for these free outdoor concerts in the summer. This year Totem Books presents “Jazz on Wheels” starting in June through August. The concerts are on the Totem Books property. Bring a chair. Totem Books
620 W. Court St., Flint
For more info call 810-407-6402, visit totembooksflint.com, or levitt.org/amp.

Flint Institute of Arts

FOMA (Friends of Modern Art) Films for June are “Collective,” June 11-18. The following weekend the film will be “Saturday Night Fever,” June 18-20. The last film for June will be “Reservoir Dogs” June 25-27. Show times are Fri. and Sat. at 7:30 p.m. and Sun. at 2 p.m. Flint Institute of Arts
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For more info call 810-234-1695 or visit flintarts.org.

Strengthening The Power of your Attention with Mindfulness

June 14, 6 p.m.
This family-friendly event features Dr. Amishi Jha sharing her insights to help find our focus practicing mindfulness in groups and in our personal lives. This is a family-friendly event. Tickets are \$5.
The Capitol Theatre
140 E. 2nd St., Flint
For tickets and info about this event about other events at The Capitol Theatre in June visit thefim.org/capitol-theatre.

Father’s Day Clean Comedy Explosion

Sat. June 17, 7-9 p.m.
This is a family-friendly show where talented comedians from Michigan use their routines to make everybody laugh.
The New Standard Academy
2040 W. Carpenter Rd., Flint

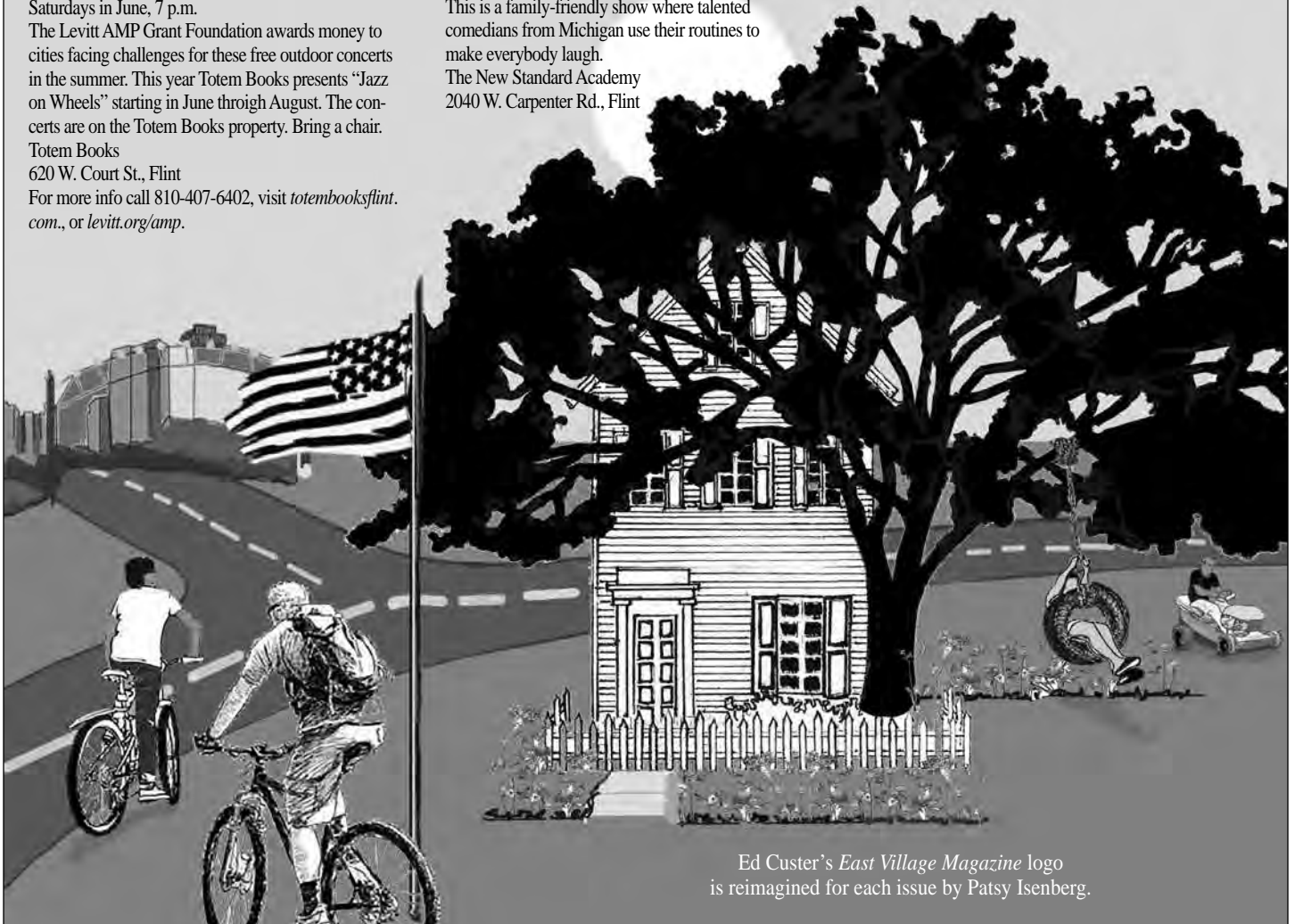
Tickets: \$20 adult, \$10 youth, and \$60 family
For tickets visit eventbrite.com/3/father-day-clean-come-dy-explosion-tickets-643868105837.

The Right for Sight Gala Event

Sat., June 24, 6-8 p.m.
The Right for Sight group works to improve the lives of visually impaired people by raising awareness, securing funds for technological and training-based resources, and advocating for equal rights. This formal affair will include a cash bar, hors d’oeuvres, world renowned Flint artist, Dr. Hubert Massey, The Institute of R.H.Y.M.E.S. and Flint-based pro-wrestler Leo Napier. Tickets are \$75 for VIP level or \$50 general. For tickets visit nfbflintgen.ticketspice.com/the-right-for-sight-gala-event.

Flint City Bucks

Sat., June 24, 7 p.m., Bucks against Oakland County at Atwood Stadium. The Bucks opening home game was on May 27 against Midwest United. There are no more home games in June but plenty more to come. Atwood Stadium
701 University Ave., Flint
For ticket info visit flintcitybucks.com.



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

Village Life ...

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Farmers of America (FFA). While farming is not in his future his future is very bright.

While high school graduations are boring I've never been bored at graduation ceremonies of my kids' high school or college. I don't take photos of anyone except my kid, I keep my eyes on my own kid the whole time.

I watched him sit in his seat and talk and laugh with the guy he was sitting next to. I watched him stand up, get in line for his diploma, listen for his name to be read, all three of his names, watch him walk off the platform and return to his seat, snapping photos of him along the way.

It's a stirring moment for a parent to watch your pro-creation move through these rites of passage. It can be a kind of a "life flashing before your eyes moment" for the child and for the parent.

As I watched my son along with his older sister and brother that day I had twinges of emotion catch in my throat. Thoughts of things we had done together, happy and hilarious times. I never had full blown weeping moments but the emotion was there, welling up inside.

Those moments of emotion cause me to reflect on what was and what could have been. I reflect on my own high school career that brought smiles and regret.

Sitting in that gym on the last Saturday of May with hundreds of other parents I reflected on his life on earth since 2005 and I reflected on my own relationship with him as his dad. Like any child/parent relationship it sure hasn't been perfect.

That messy, bug splattered window came to mind and I realized then it was a metaphor for me in this weekend of reflection. Life is messy including parent/child relationships and sometimes it can seem bug splattered - you can still drive but not without distractions and imperfections.

My son and I met in the parking lot to say good-bye. I handed him a card with a gift inside. He seemed to smile all

weekend. He seemed happy, pleased and content with life. He looked at me and was still smiling, even before I told him there was cash in the card. I hope he is happy.

I imagine there's a lot he would like to say to me. More often than not it's hard to get things out, especially personal things. His girlfriend came up and gave me a hug too. I told him, for probably the twentieth time that weekend, how proud I was of him. I said goodbye and requested him to keep in touch with me and promised I would do the same. I hope we both keep up with that.

I sat in my car plugging my phone into the charger and getting the GPS ready to direct me through the country roads back to I-69. I turned to see my son walking back towards the school with his friends. It was a heartwarming moment for me. I just sat there and watched him, seeing him laughing and enjoying life with his buddies and their girlfriends.

It's a heartwarming thing to see your kids learn the skills of how to make friends, enjoy each other's company and have a happy social life. I don't know if he'll have great success, make lots of money or struggle to survive but knowing he has friend-making skills is reassuring. Rich or poor we all need friends.

As a parent it makes me feel good that they're going to be okay. A full life is ahead for each of them. Troubles will come and troubles have already come for them and we've tried to navigate them. I'll be less quick to clean off the bug splatter on the windshield of my life and take a moment to reflect and learn from my mistakes.

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

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Parking Meters ...

(Continued from Page 13)

city. For example, bonds were used to construct the Rutherford Parking structure built in 2009 at a cost of \$8 million. As of 2021, the bond, at 5% interest, was \$5,735,00 and will mature in 2034. Surplus monies collected from meters and fines were to be earmarked to repay this bond.

The Rutherford parking structure is one of seven parking facilities owned by the city; half of those are owned by the DDA, whose net capital assets are quoted in the Flint DDA Strategic plan as \$12.7 million. Information from 2020 listed operating losses for the parking structure at \$600,219. Profits or losses from other parking facilities is not known. Metered parking is separate, although under the DDA umbrella.

What's next?

In a May 23 email, Brad Segal, President of P.U.M.A stated, "One of our primary recommendations was for the DDA to hire a parking management consultant to start working on developing a new agreement and/or system in 2024."

EVM has learned that the current system will be reinstalled as the bricks and sidewalk restoration proceeds.

In a related matter, Councilperson Dennis Pfeiffer (Ward 8) posted on social media a letter he wrote to Mayor Sheldon Neeley as Chairman of the Flint DDA. He is requesting an investigation into the "expenses incurred with the office of Executive Director." The director, Kiaira May, resigned as of May 12th according to a city press release from May 5, 2023. The complete letter can be seen on his Facebook page, Dennis Pfeiffer For Flint.

EVM reporter Elizabeth Ireland-Curtis can be reached at irelandcurtis@comcast.net.

Poetry Matins

By Vivian Kao

We're starting our poetry section again this month and are pleased to begin with this Vivian Kao poem, "Matins." *East Village Magazine* hopes that the readers will ponder the meaning and enjoy it as much as we have and watch for more poetry in future issues.

Matins

*I always wake between two and four,
and stay awake for at least an hour.
I thought it was insomnia,
or the effect of drinking alcohol
(which I can no longer do).
Perhaps worry,
the strain of the day catching up with me.
The result of not turning down
the heat before going to bed.
In any and all cases:
my fault.*

*But then I read:
ancient peoples slept twice.
A first sleep,
then a second.
A big sleep,
then a little.
A pause between.
An hour or two to examine the self
in the darkest part of the night.
To continue the night's dreams,
this time their author.
To rewrite the day's dreams,
this time their victor.*

*I am not to blame for my decade of vigil.
I belong to another time.*

-Vivian Kao

Vivian Kao teaches English at Lawrence Technological University. She lives in Flint with her husband Ben Pauli and two small humans, Julian and Flynn.

Village Life *My bug splattered windshield was a metaphor for life that can be tough*

By Tom Travis

It was one of the first warm summer weekends. The bugs were all abuzz as I zoomed down I-69 for my 500-mile trip to southern Indiana for my youngest son's high school graduation.

Along the way, my car window got splattered with bugs. I'm usually kind of nuts about having a clean windshield. During the summer I grab the squeegee every time I stop for gas and give my front window a once over. I don't know why I'm so enthusiastic about keeping my windshield clean and not so much about the dust that accumulates in my house. But this time I left the bug-splattered windshield alone.

By the time I got to the little farm town my son lives in, about an hour south of Terre Haute, my car's windshield was in need of a good scrubbing. But still I didn't touch it. I was focused on seeing my son and spending time with him and celebrating him, in the town filled with an inordinate number of anti-abortion signs, Trump/Pence signs and lots of wide, heavy-duty dually trucks.

What was happening? Not until I got home, did I begin to understand. My bug-splattered car window served as a metaphor for my somewhat knotty and convoluted life over the last 10-plus years.

As I traveled the country roads to get to the town I had to maneuver and share the roads with large farm equipment. The town of 5,000 seems to be filled with nice folk, hard working, rugged, all-American types (whatever that means).

My son introduced me to his girlfriend of two years as we sat at his favorite Mexican restaurant. He's a quiet kid, like his dad and like his siblings. The three of us chatted and caught up on things. I learned that one of my son's two jobs was working at the local movie theater, across the parking lot from the strip

mall the Mexican restaurant was located.

We decided to go see a movie after dinner. We got in for free because he works there. After we got our tub of popcorn, the size of my trunk, candy and a drink which he only had to pay \$3 for we headed to theater number two of a three theater cinema. I felt bad for not having to pay for anything so I put \$10 in the tip jar at the concession counter. I still feel bad. When I go back I'll tip again.

After Friday night fun came Saturday, graduation. As expected the next day at the graduation ceremony the Pledge and National Anthem were recited and sung with robust proudness, I listened. For a little town it seemed the high school graduation was a big deal. Hundreds were in attendance, the gym was filled.

Students and faculty spoke, thanked and remembered. One poignant moment was the district's superintendent recalling that this class was one that spent most of their high school career at home on their laptops during the pandemic and shutdown.

The superintendent lamented that the 100 or so students sitting before her spent most of their high school alone, without the memory of walking the hallways of the school with their friends, chatting and gossiping at their friend's locker, dashing down hallways when they were five minutes late for class. These students were locked down at home discovering a new way to exist, as we all have done.

After the ceremony all the families gathered on the lawn outside exchanging hugs, high-fives and snapping photos. My son was decked out in a royal blue robe, a red stole, with an academic honor medallion and gold honor cords. One cord he did not have on was a blue and green one which was for the Future

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