

Wayne County Commission Chairman Gary Woronchak

Serving The 13th District • Allen Park and Dearborn



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The Wayne County Commission

is the legislative branch of county government. Its chief role is to adopt a budget and to enact ordinances. It also approves contracts, appointments and rules. There are 15 Commissioners, elected in individual districts.

County continues to work toward resuming construction at jail site

Dear Neighbors:

While many of Wayne County's challenges have been resolved in the past couple years, including the elimination of long-term and structural budget deficits that resulted in state intervention, there remains one highly visible situation that needs resolution: The consolidated jail project at Gratiot and I-375 in downtown Detroit.

Ground was broken on the jail five years ago, and work was halted two years later, when it became apparent costs were going to far exceed projections. Since then, lawsuits and countersuits were filed, criminal investigations were conducted, and studies have been done to determine what went wrong and how to move forward.

What remains certain is the reason the project was begun in the first place: Wayne County needs a new, efficient jail to replace the two aging jails that are being used downtown, one built in 1929 and the other in 1981.

The project has been the subject of heightened news media interest since billionaire businessmen Dan Gilbert and Tom Gores in late April expressed interest in building a stadium at the site for a professional soccer franchise.

However, County Executive Warren Evans and I agree that the only way the jail would move from the Gratiot site for any other development would be if the project would cost county taxpayers no more than it would to finish it where it stands, and that it be completed in the same time frame currently anticipated. Those conditions make the chances of a soccer stadium at the site quite remote.

The Gratiot site is across the street from the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice. The jail needs to be near the courts for the practical and economic transportation of prisoners between the two. That's why the jail was started there in the first place. So, you can't just move the jail to another location, you'd have to build a new courthouse as well, adding at least a couple hundred million dollars more to the bill.

The county has already invested \$150 million into the construction. Leaving that behind for a new site, plus the costs of a new jail from scratch, and a new courthouse, would require the sort of money that no soccer stadium developer is likely to pay.

Meanwhile, the county has taken steps toward the eventual restarting of construction. The Wayne County Commission in July approved a settlement in the county's lawsuit against the original design engineers/architects, and took ownership of all design documents done to that point. Also in July, the Commission approved a contract with Carter Goble Associates to be the owner's representative for the county on the project. The South Carolina-based company, which has extensive experience building jails, will create a new request for proposal (RFP) for developers to resume the project.

So, despite speculation to the contrary, planning is continuing for construction at the Gratiot site to complete the modern, more efficient jail that Wayne County needs. As always, I will keep you updated as the plans take shape.

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Gary Woronchak". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Treasurer offers kiosks for late tax payments

Devices at local Rite Aid stores

Taxpayers now have a more convenient method for paying delinquent property taxes with the introduction of payment kiosks by the Wayne County Treasurer's Office at several Rite Aid Pharmacies and other locations in and around Detroit.

Locally, the Treasurer's kiosks are at the Rite Aid stores at 5650 Schaefer at Ford Road in Dearborn, and at 5811 Telegraph at Van Born, at the Dearborn Heights-Taylor border.

Property tax payments become delinquent if they are not made to the local collection agent, which is usually the city, by March 1 of the year after the tax bill is issued. After that point, delinquent property taxes no longer can be paid to the city, and payments need to be made to the Wayne County Treasurer.

Cash payments have previously been accepted only in-person at the Treasurer's Office at 400 Monroe, Detroit, in Greektown. The new kiosks offer that feature in local neighborhoods, without the effort of traveling downtown. As an added convenience, the Treasurer's kiosks also accept payment of DTE bills.

Delinquent property tax payments also can be made by phone (313-224-5990) or online (www.waynecounty.com/treasurer), via eCheck or credit card. Echeck payments are free, but payments by credit cards include a 2.49 percent service charge.

Payments at the kiosks can be made by cash or check, avoiding the extra charge for using a credit card. The kiosks also accept credit card payments, which adds the service charge. Taxpayers walk away from the kiosks with a receipt for each transaction.

According to Wayne County Treasurer Eric Sabree, taxpayers can also use the kiosks to look up account details and tax information.

"A major benefit of the kiosks is that taxpayers have the ability to control their own schedules," said Sabree. "They can look up their property, review amounts due and make payments at a time that is convenient for them. This will also free up staff so they can spend more time assisting taxpayers who have more complex transactions."

Sabree said the easy-to-use, intuitive kiosks also allow taxpayers the option of working through transactions in the language of their choice.

With a simple touch, the language screens can be changed from English to Spanish or Arabic (at select kiosks) as desired.

Interest and penalties are added to delinquent taxes when they are turned over to the Wayne County Treasurer's Office for collection. This assists the Treasurer's Office to fund the county's Delinquent Tax Revolving Fund, which

County selling thousands of tax-foreclosed properties in Treasurer's online auction

Thousands of tax-foreclosed properties are being sold in an online property auction conducted by the Wayne County Treasurer's Office.

More than 14,000 residential, commercial and vacant parcels were put up for sale this month during the first phase of the auction. The deadline for registering to participate this month has passed, but potential buyers still have an opportunity to pick up remaining properties during the October portion of the auction, when bidding will start at \$500.

Buyers must be registered to bid. Registration for the October auction will take place Oct. 11-17. Property information will be posted online.

Interested persons can register or get more information online, including rules and regulations, at waynecountytreasurermi.com. Questions can be emailed to: WCTAuction@waynecounty.com. Questions also can be directed to (313) 224-2864.

The Treasurer's Office provides assistance to help taxpayers remain in their homes, but if property taxes go unpaid for three years, the Treasurer is required by state law to foreclose and then sells the property by auction. Bidding on property requires a \$2,500 deposit.

According to information released by Wayne County Treasurer Eric Sabree, properties sold in the tax foreclosure auction are sold "as is" and "where is" with no warranties, either expressed or implied.

Prior to the auction, purchasers are advised to research the property's condition and to perform careful due diligence to understand any potential issues with the property, including special assessments, environmental issues or demolition status.

The Treasurer pointed out that the number of properties being auctioned this year is dramatically fewer than in the past few years.

is used by the Treasurer to reimburse local communities and school districts for unpaid taxes even before the delinquent tax bills are paid to the county. This ensures that local communities and schools have all the funds they are expecting to meet their budgets and provide local services.

More information on the payment kiosks, including all locations, can be found online at www.wctkiosk.com.

Wayne County News in Brief

Voters renew parks millage

Voters in Wayne County have approved the continuation of the county parks millage, a property tax dedicated to improving and operating several parks and related facilities.

The tax was on the primary election ballot Aug. 2, and was approved by nearly a 3-to-1 margin, with 129,692 votes in favor of the renewal and 47,010 against.

Voters in Commissioner Gary Woronchak's district followed similar patterns. In Dearborn, there were 8,792 yes votes and 2,709 no votes, for a 76.45 percent approval rate. Allen Park voters also approved the renewal, though by a narrower margin of 2,103 votes to 1,115.

The parks millage was authorized by county voters in 1996, then was renewed for five-year periods in 2000, 2005 and 2010. The proposal approved by voters Aug. 2 continues the millage through 2020. It is expected to generate \$9.9 million next year. The parks levy is just under one-quarter of a mill and appears on winter tax bills.

In very approximate terms, the tax costs \$12.30 per year on a home that is worth \$100,000. To determine precisely how much one pays on the parks millage, one can multiply their home's taxable value by .0002459. Taxable value is listed on tax bills and on assessment notices.

The ballot language also reflected the practice of providing funds for park improvements in local municipalities. However, none of the money raised by this tax can be used for any county functions other than parks.

Household waste event Oct. 8

The final Household Hazardous Waste Collection of 2016 offered by the Wayne County Department of Public Services will be held Saturday, Oct. 8 from 8 a.m.-2 p.m. at Wayne County Community College Downriver Campus, 21000 Northline Rd. in Taylor.

Items acceptable for disposal include household paints, stains and dyes, floor care products, bathroom cleaners, solvents, fertilizer, batteries, fluorescent bulbs, fire extinguishers, mercury thermometers and more.

The electronics recycling portion of the event will accept computer CPUs, flat screen monitors, printers, scanners, keyboards and mice. Also accepted will be cell phones, fax machines, copiers and flat screen televisions. The program no longer accepts the older-style TVs and monitors with cathode ray tubes.

Only household products from Wayne County residents will be accepted. No commercial or industrial waste will be taken. Also not allowed are refrigerators, microwaves or other appliances, tires and concrete.

Questions can be directed to the Department of Public Services at (734) 326-3936. For a link to a flyer for the program, email Commissioner Gary Woronchak at gworonch@waynecounty.com.

Mona Hammoud on Ethics Board

Mona Hammoud of Dearborn has been appointed to the Wayne County Ethics Board by the Wayne County Commission. Commission Chairman Gary Woronchak nominated Hammoud for the appointment, which was approved by the Commission earlier this year.

Hammoud is a vice president for PNC Bank, where she has worked since 2003. She holds an MBA degree from the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Also, Hammoud is a former president of the League of Women Voters Dearborn-Dearborn Heights, and is active in Child Safe Michigan and the Arab American Women Business Council.

The Ethics Board is the enforcement arm of the county's ethics ordinance, established to receive and consider complaints filed for possible violations of the ordinance. The board has seven appointed members, one each for the county executive, sheriff, prosecutor, treasurer, clerk and register of deeds, and one for the Wayne County Commission.

More information about the Wayne County Ethics Board can be found at waynecounty.com/ethics.

Lightfest returns along Hines Drive

Wayne County Lightfest, billed as the Midwest's longest drive-through holiday lights display, offers five miles of colorful displays along Hines Drive for a fee of \$5 per car. Entry is off Merriman Road between Warren and Ann Arbor Trail in Westland.

Grand opening ceremonies with fireworks, music, refreshments and a sneak peak at the lights will be held at 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 17 at the Merriman Hollow Area of Hines Park in Westland.

Lightfest runs Nov. 17 through Dec. 31, closed Dec. 25. Hours are 6-10 p.m. Friday through Sunday, 7-10 p.m. Monday through Thursday.

Senior conference date set for next year

For those local senior citizens who like to plan far (very far) in advance, the annual Senior Citizen Conference hosted by Wayne County Commission Chairman Gary Woronchak has secured its date for next year.

Woronchak's 19th annual senior conference will be held Wednesday, May 17, 2017, again at the Ford Community & Performing Arts Center in Dearborn. More information will be announced next spring, including registration details.



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Wayne County News Update

Commissioner WORONCHAK: Keeping You Informed

Resolution urges state to end expanded fireworks sales

A resolution calling for the repeal of the state law that allows the widespread sale and use of commercial grade fireworks was approved recently by the Wayne County Commission.

The resolution was introduced by Commission Chairman Gary Woronchak, who said the complaints from residents have increased each year since the state eased restrictions on fireworks, starting in 2012.

“This is a case where Lansing is just not listening to the people who are most affected by changes in the law,” said Woronchak. “I don’t think anyone realized when they made the change just how much it would affect neighborhoods, and the amount of pushback it would get from residents.

“I hear from more and more residents every year that they don’t want these fireworks in their neighborhoods, set off on days and at times that aren’t allowed under the law,” Woronchak said, “and it’s just not possible for local police to keep it contained.

“I understand and appreciate that there are those who enjoy buying and using the fireworks, but those who do so with reasonable care and observe the law should blame those who take less care for the backlash against neighborhood fireworks.”

Added Woronchak: “The new practice of allowing purchase and use of fireworks is just in its fourth year, so it’s still early enough to put the genie back into the bottle and repeal the law.”

The state Legislature in 2011 approved the so-called Fireworks Safety Act, which legalized the sale, distribution and use of a wide variety of commercial grade aerial fireworks that were previously prohibited in Michigan. It was approved by wide margins in both the House and Senate, with the argument that it would bring tax revenue into Michigan, since

people were buying the fireworks anyway in other states where they were legal.

Fireworks retailers pay permit fees, and a “fireworks safety fee” is charged along with sales tax. But, the Commission’s resolution states that any economic benefit to the state “is more than negated by the cost of local communities’ attempts

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-- Commissioner Gary Woronchak

to enforce the law.”

“The only solution is a complete repeal of the legalization of these fireworks,” Woronchak said. “Certainly, there would still be people who would drive to other states to buy fireworks, and there would still be illegal discharging of fireworks in neighborhoods. But such activities would be far less than they are now, when you can buy fireworks in tents set up along the roadway on your way home from work.”

During the recent Fourth of July holiday weekend, there were published reports of at least six people in Wayne County transported to area hospitals by ambulance, including a critically injured 5-year-old taken to Beaumont-Trenton. Also, a resident of Sumpter Township was hit by fireworks, and one death was reported in western Michigan as a result of an explosion.

Copies of Woronchak’s resolution were sent to state Representatives and Senators as well as to the Governor.