



COWS FOR SALE: Michigan State University seeks to save money by selling 70 dairy cows in the Upper Peninsula. The school expects to make about \$70,000 from the sale at the Upper Peninsula Experiment Station in Chatham in October. The university would save money it has been spending on upkeep. Michigan Agricultural Experiment Station Associate Director John Baker said there were no current or future research plans for the herd.

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Bringing the park closer to home



SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

Portable stages, like this one at a Schiffer Park event in Ferndale last week, provide a service to residents in the south end of Oakland County.

Oakland County residents hope millage passes

By BILL LAITNER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

On Tuesday night, Oakland County Parks boss Dan Stencil plans to speak to Pleasant Ridge leaders as colleagues a mile away in Huntington Woods talk about why voters should renew the county's parks millage Aug. 3.

On Thursday, county parks workers will hold a free outdoor concert of Motown at their newest park, Catalpa Oaks in Southfield, which opened in 2007.

Each event is part of a multi-year campaign to show that Oakland's sprawling park system has ramped up communications, programs and facilities in the county's southeast quadrant, where residents have long resented paying for parks far from their homes. Now, with more programs nearby, that resentment has eased, although the county should do

more, said County Commissioner Dave Coulter, D-Ferndale.

"What happens after this millage passes? Will we be ignored again?" Coulter said.

He and other south-end leaders favor what Wayne County did to spread park resources across the county, earmarking 15% of funds to municipal parks, in effect handing money back to budget-strapped communities through proposals made by county commissioners and local leaders.

"We don't just send them a check. It has to go for capital improvements to a park," Assistant Wayne County Executive Alan Helmkamp said.

Macomb County's park system lacks a millage or other revenue to support it through the county's budget cutbacks.

Of Oakland County's 13 parks, nine are near or north of M-59, about 15 miles north of the county's urban south end.

Stencil said that he and his staff have spoken in more than a dozen communities south of 14 Mile and east of Telegraph



since May, asking voters to renew the county's 10-year parks millage.

The .2415-mill property tax costs the owner of a \$175,000 home about \$21 a year and accounts for 60% of the county parks budget, communications director Desiree Stanfield said.

The proposed renewal would raise \$12.4 million in 2011, she said.

At Thursday's concert, county workers plan to hand out pro-millage yard signs in a park the county almost sold to a developer in 2006, until County Commissioner Helene Zack, D-

Huntington Woods, spoke out.

Although the south end lacks big swaths of wild land, there could be compact dog parks and bike paths, she said.

"But we keep seeing parks expansion in the north."

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Detroit plays catch-up on installing curb ramps

By NAOMI R. PATTON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Nearly five years after a federal judge ordered the City of Detroit to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act by installing curb ramps at intersections, several streets still have not been fitted with properly constructed access ramps.

That's because hundreds of curb ramps that enable physically disabled or impaired people to cross city streets were improperly installed and are now being redone.

By the end of the year, \$41.2 million will have been spent on getting the city in compliance with the federal act.

And because of the past errors, the work is being monitored by a federally appointed consultant. Also keeping tabs on the progress are advocates for people with disabilities.

"The law is clear as a bell that curb ramps have to be installed at every intersection," said Mark Finnegan, an attorney representing the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America who sued the city in 2005 for not having the curb ramps.

Department of Public Works Director Al Jordan said the city will have installed more than 12,000 ramps by the end of the year.

"Clearly, we have to comply with the court order," Jordan said.

FEDERAL, LOCAL FUNDS PAY FOR THE RAMPS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. 4A

FAREWELL TO A LANDMARK

Urban Farming group can't save house at Oakland University

By GINA DAMRON, BILL LAITNER
and ZLATI MEYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

"OU: Save it, not raze it" and "Re-use repair" screamed the handmade signs lying around Varner House on Oakland University's campus as students emptied their urban-farming equipment out of the adjacent garage Sunday morning.

Preparation to begin demolishing the 70-plus-year-old home is scheduled to begin today — to the dismay of a student group that has tried unsuccessfully to save the house. The group, Urban Farming at Oakland, has created an organic farm near the Varner House and proposed renovating the facility into an energy-efficient home, possibly using grant money.

"I was really disappointed," said group president Jack Cunningham, a 20-year-old senior from Rochester, as he stood by a shed on the property. "I didn't feel they heard us out. All my tuition dollars are going to a university I'm trying to make better. To me, it's progress."

Stacy Armbruster, 26, who graduated in May and still volunteers with the student group, said that through the renovation process, students could have learned about green technology and sustainable living and, later, the home could have become a co-op, where students would live affordably on campus and tend to the farm.

But OU spokesman Ted Montgomery said Friday that fixing up the house doesn't make financial sense.

"It would cost a lot more to rehabilitate it than it would to take it down," he said.

In an e-mail provided to the Free Press by Armbruster, OU Associate Vice President, Facilities Management Terry Stollsteimer wrote it



Photos by SUSAN TUSA/Detroit Free Press

Jarret Schlaff, founder of Urban Farming at Oakland University, and professor Fay Hansen move items from the Varner House garage in Rochester Hills on Sunday. University officials say it would cost more to rehabilitate than to demolish.

would cost upwards of \$380,000 to repair the house and redo the parking lot.

According to the university's Web site, the Varner House was built around 1938 and originally had been the poultry manager's home on the Meadow Brook Farms Estate. It later served as the residence of the university's first chancellor, Woody Varner.

"He was from MSU and his specialty was agriculture and that's full circle," said the student group's faculty adviser, biology professor Fay Hansen, supervising the solemn move. "It's a very positive opportunity missed."



Urban Farming created an organic farm near the 70-year-old house and proposed renovating the facility into an energy-efficient home. It is being prepared to be demolished today.

Arrest made in 2009 bus stop shooting

By ZLATI MEYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

An 18-year-old who police say was one of the shooters in last summer's attack near Cody 9th Grade Academy in Detroit was arraigned Sunday.

Jeffrey Brooks is charged with seven counts of assault with intent to murder, seven counts of felonious assault and one count of felony firearm.

Two masked gunmen opened fire on a bus stop at the Southfield Freeway service drive at West Warren on June 30, 2009, injuring seven people, many of them students.

Brooks was at a youth detention camp in central Michigan for an unrelated incident when Detroit police arrested him Thursday, Police Chief Warren Evans said Sunday.

He explained that the shooting — "one of the most notorious cases at least in terms of national media" — was prompted by a grievance the gunmen had the previous day with at least one of the people at the bus stop.

"It's a case that got a lot of blood boiling," the chief said.

Evans, who said he didn't know whether Brooks ever was a student at Cody, added that police are still looking at other people in connection to the case.

"That's good news that their determination to bring the matter to justice has paid off," Detroit Public Schools spokesman Steve Wasko said in an e-mail Sunday.

FBI documents say Demetrius Hinton, 20, of Detroit also is suspected of being one of the Cody shooters, but he was arraigned Tuesday for his suspected role in an unrelated double shooting last August.



Jeffrey Brooks

METRO

Pointes will stay in fire pact with Harper Woods

St. Clair Shores out; others may follow

By CHRISTINA HALL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The five Grosse Pointes aren't backing out of their fire-fighting pact with Harper Woods, unlike St. Clair Shores and possibly Eastpointe and Roseville.

That might be the only good news Harper Woods has right now. This week, the mayor, two councilmen, the city manager and the finance director are to consider cuts prompted by plummeting property values and revenue losses.

Proposed reductions discussed last week include cutting up to 10 positions in the police department, combining positions, closing Salter Park and eliminating bus service, City Manager Jim Leidlein said. The city already plans to lay off four of its 11 firefighters on Aug. 9.

"Basically everything is on the table," Harper Woods Mayor Ken Poynter said. "We're very proud of our police services. We're very proud of our fire department services. But we might have to do things we don't want to do. We hate to see anything cut."

The meeting this week is to review the finances, including property values that next year are projected to be half of the \$429 million they were in 2007. A report will be sent to the council. The city budget is on a calendar year.

Poynter said he is glad the

Pointes are sticking with Harper Woods on their mutual aid pact after St. Clair Shores decided to start the process to end its pact with the city. Eastpointe and Roseville may follow suit.

The Macomb County cities are concerned about Harper Woods' fire department staffing levels.

Public safety officials from the Pointes and Harper Woods agreed Wednesday to changes in light of the St. Clair Shores withdrawal.

For example, Grosse Pointe Woods will send a ladder truck and Grosse Pointe Shores will send a medic to Harper Woods if the city calls for a second alarm, said Al Fincham, Grosse Pointe Woods public safety director and interim city administrator.

Officials in Grosse Pointe Woods and Grosse Pointe Farms received letters from Leidlein requesting to temporarily contract with them for first fire response in Harper Woods after the layoffs.

The layoffs are to help the city absorb the more than \$220,000 in back pay an arbitrator awarded Harper Woods firefighters last month.

Neither of the Pointes cities has decided on the request. Fincham said he asked for fire call volumes from Harper Woods to determine the possible impact.



Photos by WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press

After years of noncompliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, the City of Detroit is aggressively installing curb ramps and fixing ones that were done incorrectly. The city says that by the end of the year, nearly 32% of the 87,000 ramps will have been installed.

Detroit intensifies efforts to put in curb ramps – correctly

Crossings hoped to be safer for people with disabilities

By NAOMI R. PATTON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Since suffering a spinal injury in a car accident in 1996, Lisa Franklin has lived her life from the vantage point of a wheelchair.

But the simple act of crossing the street can be perilous for her — or anyone who uses a wheelchair or is blind. Now that Detroit is in the process of fulfilling a federal requirement that street corners have access ramps, Franklin and others with disabilities hope they will see an improvement in their mobility.

"If you don't have a curb cut ... you never realize how important it is unless you're in that situation," Franklin, president of the advocacy group Warriors on Wheels, said of the curb ramps.

But after years of noncompliance with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act's requirement to have curb ramps for disabled people — and a federal court settlement — the City of Detroit is aggressively installing new curb ramps and replacing some that were improperly installed.

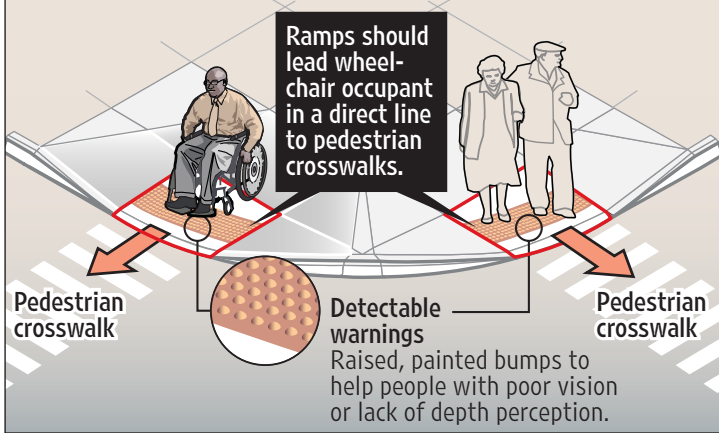
Al Jordan, city Department of Public Works director, acknowledged past installation problems, but said nearly 32% of the 87,000 ramps will have been installed by the end of the year.

"It's our obligation. If it's not right or if it wasn't right, we're taking the position that we will make it right," Jordan said.

There were 15,000 ramps installed through 2009. By the end of 2010, there are to be 2,031 newly installed ramps in the 5 square miles of downtown, as required by the court settlement, and 10,390 ramps installed elsewhere in the city.

Under the ADA mandate, the ramps are to be installed even at intersections in desolate parts of the city where few live or travel. Even advocates for disabled people who have sued the city admit the folly of

Correct sidewalk ramp



Source: Michigan Department of Transportation

MARTHA THIERRY/Detroit Free Press

such installations. They say they are willing to negotiate with city officials and are waiting for the city to present them with a policy to modify the settlement.

Ramps had problems

Ann Arbor attorney Mark Finnegan sued Detroit in 2005 on behalf of advocacy groups for disabled people for lack of compliance with the ADA. He said that since 1992, contractors with the city had been installing the curb ramps incorrectly. In some cases, the slopes were wrong, in others, the ramps' coral-colored inserts — called detectable warnings — were made with concrete instead of rubber. In 2006, the city agreed to fix the problems in a court-approved settlement.

The 2005 suit led U.S. District Judge Gerald Rosen to appoint an Ohio-based construction consultant firm, H.R. Gray and Associates, to consult with the city and monitor its progress for the court. The firm's 2008 report detailed the city's noncompliance and provided a strategy to get the project done.

"This is the only lawsuit that I've been involved in in a matter that needed a special monitor," Finnegan said.

H.R. Gray found that only 126 ramps in a 5-square-mile downtown area met federal standards.

Finnegan, who represents the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America and Center for Community Access, frequently meets with city officials as

"IT'S OUR OBLIGATION. ... WE'RE TAKING THE POSITION THAT WE WILL MAKE IT RIGHT."

AL JORDAN, Detroit Department of Public Works director, acknowledging past installation problems

part of the settlement.

Still, there remains disagreement as to where the curb ramps should go.

"They're leaving out a bunch of curb ramps they should be installing," Finnegan said.

He also said the city is not installing ramps on all sides of some intersections. Jordan, of the DPW, contends installing curb cuts along major streets, including where there is no crossing signal, would make it more dangerous for a person with disabilities because it could be interpreted as if it is safe to cross the street at any point, not just at crossing signals.

Settlement is negotiable

The installations are being paid for with two sources: money dedicated to street repairs from Detroit's tax on gasoline and federal surface transportation funds. Four firms are working on the project in downtown Detroit, one of which is Detroit based. Three firms are working on the project throughout the rest of the city. Because the ramps are a federal project, the City of Detroit cannot stipulate that local companies get the contracts.

For this year, \$24.2 million will be spent on the ramps, in addition to the \$17 million spent through 2009 to install the detectable warnings inserts that appear as braille in the ramps.

Yet the city can't pick and choose where the ramps are installed. All residential areas have been designated to receive the ramps, even areas where there are more aban-

doned homes and vacant lots than there are people.

"Here's why we want to be as effective with the resources we have available to us," Jordan said, referring to the fact the city is to install curb ramps even in areas with few inhabitants.

Finnegan said he is aware of the problem of having to install ramps in desolate areas and is willing to modify the settlement if the city can come up with a fair policy addressing the issue.

"I'm glad to hear that (Finnegan) is willing to negotiate," Jordan said. "We are having the discussion to establish some acceptable terms."

At least one transportation expert says making some allowances for Detroit's desolate areas would be helpful.

"It's a big impact ... especially when you start talking about municipalities like Detroit," said Tim Colling, senior research engineer with the Michigan Tech Transportation Institute at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, who advises municipalities on managing issues such as ADA compliance.

'They have come a long way'

Franklin and Michael Harris, president of Michigan Paralyzed Veterans, said the city is doing a much better job installing the curb ramps.

"They really are working on this, and they're very responsive to our requests," Franklin said. Harris, whose group was part of the 2005 suit, says the lack of curb ramps is a problem throughout the state. Left a paraplegic by a 1986 car accident, Harris said he once toppled out of his wheelchair at an improperly installed ramp in Lansing.

Harris lives in Westland but comes to Detroit to work and for sporting events.

"They have come a long way," Harris said about the curb ramp installation in Detroit. "I have nothing but good things to say."

Raymond Roberson, 82, of Dearborn is blind and comes to the city almost daily to volunteer with the Detroit Department of Transportation local advisory council.

But Roberson doesn't enter the street from the inclined curb ramps that have raised bumpy surfaces, which are designed to alert visually impaired people to the street's edge, because the ramps can send him in the wrong direction. Instead, he taps his cane around the ramp to align him with the edge of the sidewalk.

"I still look for the curb so I can figure out which way the traffic is going," he said.

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Oakland

SOUTH LYON

Mom suspected in killing, cops say

South Lyon police said Sunday that a 52-year-old mother is a suspect in a bizarre murder-suicide attempt involving her teenage stepdaughter.

South Lyon police Sgt. Doug Baaki said it appears the mother gave her 13-year-old stepdaughter, who is disabled, a fatal overdose of prescription drugs Saturday and then tried to commit suicide by ingesting drugs herself.

Police and EMS crews responded to a call about 1:45 p.m. Saturday afternoon from the girl's home health care worker, who found the two unresponsive after reporting for her afternoon shift. Baaki would not release their names.

The 13-year-old girl was pronounced dead at the scene. The mother was transported to a hospital and police said her condition was unknown.

FARMINGTON HILLS

Missing woman, 79, found dead in pond

The body of a 79-year old Farmington Hills resident with Alzheimer's was discovered in a pond in her neighborhood near 11 Mile and Middlebelt roads Sunday afternoon.

According to Farmington Hills Police, Barbara Matthews had been reported missing Saturday evening.

A neighbor who was alerted by a door-to-door police search later discovered the body and notified police.

Anyone with information is asked to call Farmington Hills Police at 248-871-2610.

PONTIAC

Animal lovers, lawmaker target torture videos

Some local animal lovers, accompanied by their pets, joined U.S. Rep. Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, Humane Society officials and directors of animal shelters at the Michigan Animal Rescue League in Pontiac on Sunday to renew a fight to ban animal torture videos often used for sexual fetishes.

These types of videos had been banned by federal law, but a Supreme Court decision in April struck it down, saying the bills' broad wording might restrict First Amendment rights, according to a news release from Peters' office. The court indicated a differently worded bill, which Peters has authored, could pass constitutional muster.

The U.S. House of Representatives is scheduled this week to vote on the new bill.

Macomb

Energy upgrades to save money

Macomb County plans to reduce its energy use after it replaced 180 high-intensity discharge lighting fixtures at its warehouse on Hall Road with energy-efficient fixtures.

Occupancy sensors also were installed to turn off the lights when the area is not in use, the county said in a news release.

The upgrade is to save more than \$9,000 per year in energy costs. The upgrade was funded, in part, by a \$14,000 rebate from DTE Energy.



The ramp at Kercheval and Hibbard includes the coral-colored detectable warnings. A settlement mandates the ramps even in desolate areas.