

East Village Magazine

April 2023



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Commentary

Book Bans: What's the real motive?

By Paul Rozycki

"Controversial LGBTQ+ memoir the subject of heated Lapeer library meeting"
– MLive, March 17, 2023

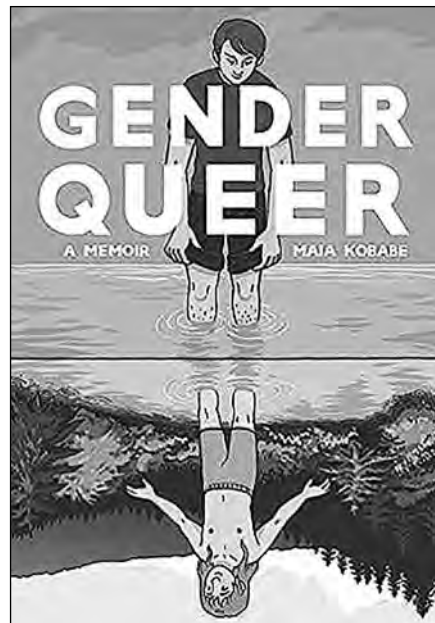
That was the headline of a story about a recent Lapeer District Library Board meeting where a crowded room of local residents attacked and denounced the local library for placing the book *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe on its shelves. The controversy began when the Lapeer County prosecutor inquired about the book, and reportedly raised the possibility of criminal charges against the librarian or library board members.

At the moment, it is the most banned book in the nation, having faced protests in hundreds of libraries.

Lapeer is hardly alone. Recently Florida passed several laws that forced some schools to close their libraries for a time until they could be sure they were not in violation of the statute. Texas has banned more than 800 books in at least 20 school districts. Between July of 2021 and 2022, PEN America, an anti-censorship group, listed more than 2500 attempts to ban books that impacted more than 1600 titles. The numbers seem on track to be even higher this year. The majority of the books under attack were about or by LGBTQ+ people or people of color.

transgender individuals dealing with social and psychological challenges.

But I have advice for those who thought that showing up at the library board meeting and angrily demanding the book be taken off the shelf was a good idea. If you are really serious and if you don't want anyone to read the book...you are doing it all wrong, and it makes one wonder about the real motive behind these protests.



Cover of the book *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe

Kobabe's autobiography

Gender Queer is Kobabe's autobiography of coming out as non-binary. Some claim it is pornographic, others said it simply is a biographical search for gender identity. At the board meeting some claimed it would expose children to sexually explicit images, yet others say that it could play a key role in assisting

Do protests really ban books?

Though there are exceptions, most indications are that the protests over banning books are likely to increase the interest, readership, and sales of those books. After all, the public library isn't the only place to find a book. The media coverage that those protests generate tell

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Cover: Flint Central disintegrating; public schools "collapsing":



Photo of the Month: Flint's blight looks worse in spring: 801-803 E. Court St. (Photo by Edwin D. Custer)

Education Beat Analysis

March 15 Flint School Board meeting collapses into chaos

By Harold C. Ford

"Meet the new boss, same as the old boss."

– The Who's Peter Dinklage, "Won't Get Fooled Again," 1971

After a few months of fragile collegiality sprinkled with polite platitudes, the newest iteration of the Flint Board of Education (FBOE) has descended into a chaotic reminder of what board-watchers have regrettably witnessed again and again in recent years.

The March 15, 2023 affair signaled, perhaps, a local, modern-day version of the infamous Ides of March. The very public bad-blood board relationships continued at the FBOE's Finance and Operations Committee of the Whole (Finance COW) one week later March 22.

Despite the fireworks, FBOE members managed to approve these resolutions:

- All seven members agreed to investigate an alleged excessive retirement payout to the district's former executive assistant.

- By a 5-2 vote, the board approved an amended document titled "Superintendent's Proposed Six-Month Focus."

Trustees Melody Relerford and Laura MacIntyre cast the dissenting votes. "This proposal ... includes strategic plan (pieces)," Flint Superintendent Kevelin Jones said. "I just want to move ... forward," he added. [The document has not been made available to the public; EVM will report on it when it does become available.]

March 15: election hopes dashed?

Each new generation of leadership in Flint Community Schools (FCS) has brought with it hopeful possibilities of a turnaround of sorts, "a pivot" as declared again and

again by Relerford, one of the panel's newest members.

In the Nov. 2022 election, Flint voters swept every incumbent from office and implanted five new faces on the Flint board. According to Paul Rozycki, East Village Magazine's (EVM) longtime political sage, it was a sweep of incumbents likely never seen in the history of Genesee County politics.

Seemingly, voters sent an election-sweep roster to Flint's public-school board hoping for an end to the dysfunction so often witnessed in recent years. [See Editor's Note below.] Any hopes for an end to that dysfunction were likely dashed in the last 90 minutes of the March 15 meeting. It included the following:

- Accusations of misconduct, even

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Education chaos ... (Continued from Page 4)

alleged prosecutable offenses, flew in multiple directions.

- Raised voices (shouting really), name-calling, gavel-banging (eight times), and figurative finger-pointing accentuated multiple accusations of wrongdoing.

- A flurry of parliamentary interjections – 62 in all (16 points of order; 46 points of information) were uttered – during the last approximate 90 minutes of the meeting. Additionally, FBOE President Michael Clack declared someone on the board to be “out of order” 16 times.

- A vote to uphold Clack’s ruling that MacIntyre was “out of order” ultimately failed on a 3-3-1 vote; Relerford curiously left the meeting just as the first vote reached her (she said she had to use the bathroom), and then abstained on a second go-round of Clack’s effort to declare MacIntyre “out of order.”

- Central administrators and the district’s attorney joined the fray.

- An officer of the Flint Police Department conspicuously positioned herself on the stage near FBOE members.

A few audience members openly shouted their displeasure at what they were witnessing. In the end, an investigation into alleged improper or unlawful conduct in the matter of a former employee’s retirement payout was passed unanimously with all members seeking clarity and/or vindication for their very different interpretations of what transpired.

Interested readers may witness the

dysfunction described above starting at about the two-hour mark of the YouTube recording of the March 15 FBOE meeting.

[Editors’ Note: See previous Education Beat articles about chaotic local government(s) in many past issues available online at eastvillagemagazine.org.]

Multidirectional intimations or allegations of wrongdoing and threats of lawsuits that flew in multiple directions at the March 15 meeting created a confusing latticework of points and counterpoints,



FBOE President Michael Clack

(Photo by Tom Travis)

charges and countercharges. Following are brief descriptions of some of those trysts:

1. Clack asked for an investigation of a \$61,000 payout to a former district employee, agreed to by the previous iteration of the school board, alleging it was about ten times the amount that ought to have been paid. Currently, FCS administrators are allowed a maximum of \$6,250 for “accumulated paid time off upon retirement.”

- Clack: Clack read from an audit

prepared by Stephenson & Company that found “unused paid time off was paid out to a nonunion employee upon termination of employment at a rate significantly higher than past practice(s) ... This payout ... was approved by the board.”

- Clack: “You (Joyce Ellis-McNeal, trustee) were president at that time. Can you explain it?”

- McNeal: “That was an agreement between her (the employee) and Mr. Jones ... They agreed to the \$61,000 ... The board has absolutely nothing to do with payout.”

- Jones: “I don’t care how this goes. I was just accused. This board voted. I knew nothing about it. I told her (the employee) ‘no.’ She usurped my authority and came to you (McNeal and the board) ... I wouldn’t have ever asked this board to pay out that kind of money ... I’m hurt somebody would say I would do that.” Jones said his administration is currently the subject of a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request about the matter which limited his ability to speak more freely.

- McNeal to Jones: “If you knew that was a wrong check, why did you mail it?”

- Clack: “You (MacIntyre) were the treasurer. How did \$61,000 walk out the door?”

- MacIntyre: “We voted to have this employee compensated fairly according to the law ... We had no idea what the monetary amount would be ... The board did vote to approve the payout ... I stand by that decision.”

- Clack: “Who put it (the payout)

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FCS administration building

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Rozycki commentary ...

(Continued from Page 3)

even more potential readers about the book...many who have never heard of it before. Many of the books that have faced book bans have seen a spike in interest and sales. In response some have formed “banned book clubs” to read and share the banned texts. I have a somewhat dated government textbook that has had minimal sales since I retired. Why not raise a stink about that and see if the sales go up?

Actually one way to make sure that no one reads a book is to put it on the shelves. Or better yet...require it for a class. Many of those books go unread.

Consider the books that are already on most library shelves. I’m guessing that most libraries have copies of Karl Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* or *Das Kapital* available, yet I doubt that has produced many recent communists. I suspect that Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* is on many library shelves, but I doubt that any of the wanna-be Nazis we’ve seen goose-stepping around lately have learned their fascist ideology from it. The library shelves are often lined with murder mysteries by James Patterson, David Baldacci, or John Grisham, and they can be a fun read, but I doubt that most murderers get their motivation from pouring over their books in the library lounge. As some have noted, millions of kids have read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, yet few seem to have become caterpillars, hungry or not.

Beyond the library

Beyond that, the fact is that kids (and others) will find a way to get books and information in a thousand other ways, well beyond the library. There are plenty of book stores around, and Amazon is still selling books.

When I was a teenager our local public library didn’t carry *Playboy*, and St. Mary’s school library certainly didn’t. But Ralph’s Newsstand did,

and we knew how to ride our bikes down there on a Saturday afternoon and check out the latest copy. And, by the way, did you hear about this thing called the internet? The rumor is that EVERYTHING is available there.



Author Maia Kobabe

(Photo Source: Kobabe’s Facebook Page)

The real goal of the protests

The fact is that most of the book bans are not so much about banning books, or keeping books off the library shelves, as they are about rallying a political crowd around an attempt to



Black Lives Matter Flint protesters marching downtown Flint in June 2020

(Photo by Tom Travis)

oppose anything that they feel is progressive or “woke.” It’s also a way of striking out at those who are frequently the subject of banned books---the LGBTQ+ community or people of color.

As we’ve seen in Florida, a campaign against “woke” social issues can turn up the anger and turn out voters, at least in some circumstances.

Many of the book bans seem to be motivated by the same groups that have used culture wars to attack any discussion of civil rights or slavery by labelling it “Critical Race Theory.” That may be the real goal behind these protests in our polarized times.

The real threat of book bans

In the end perhaps the most serious threat from all the book banning is not to those librarians and library boards who have faced angry mobs, threats of arrest, and loss of funds. For the most part they have been courageous, and done well standing up against those who would limit the public’s right to read certain books. That certainly is the case in Lapeer. But those are the ones we hear about on the nightly news.

The real threat may be from those we don’t hear about in the media---the librarians who look at the banned book list and quietly decide that they “don’t need the headache” and avoid buying the books because there “are so many other books to buy as well, and the budget is up for review next month.” We don’t hear about the teacher or school boards who avoid discussing slavery, civil rights, or gay issues because, they are “up for a promotion” or “there is a school bond proposal on the ballot” and they want to avoid any controversy for the voters. We won’t hear about a publisher who turns down a book because “it’s just not the time for that kind of book” because they want to avoid the conflict.

Even worse, we won’t hear about the kids who didn’t read the banned book, who faced social and psychological turmoil alone, who could not know there were others like them dealing with the same issues, when the book could have made a difference in their lives.

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

Education chaos ...

(Continued from Page 5)

on the agenda? Clack then indicated only two persons had final responsibility to shape the board's agenda and that would have been the board's president (McNeal at the time in question) or the superintendent (Jones).

2. Attorney Charis Lee, managing partner of Lee Legal Group, was summoned to the speaker's table by Clack to help shed light on the matter of the alleged exorbitant \$61,000 retirement payout. Upon the recommendation of McNeal, Lee was retained by the district in the fall of 2021 after the board's dismissal of The Williams Firm. A tension-filled relationship between Lee and senior FBOE members McNeal and MacIntyre has publicly unfolded since June 2022 and was on display again at the panel's fractious March 15 affair:



FBOE Attorney Charis Lee

(Photo source: LinkedIn)

- Lee: We already have a policy about the payouts ... What happened here is that the board bypassed that. That can have serious consequences." Lee said she was told by former board president Carol McIntosh, who was absent from the payout meeting, "there had been some type of criminal activity." Lee added that former board member "Pastor (Allen) Gilbert felt he had been tricked."

- MacIntyre: MacIntyre charged Lee with "a conflict of interest."

- Lee, looking in the direction of McNeal and MacIntyre: "Every time I come up here ... you begin to slander me ... I know the rules and law of slander ...



FCS Superintendent (left) Kevelin Jones and FBOE member Dylan Luna (right) in a recent FBOE committee Meeting

(Photo by Tom Travis)

The next time I will file it in the courts."

- Jones: As Sharita Galloway, current FCS executive director of human resources, made her way to the speaker's table, Jones cautioned against possible retribution(s) against Galloway by board members in response to her public statements. "Not if it's going to cause her to start to be ostracized," he warned. "I've been here so many times with these things."

- Galloway: "A payout of any kind doesn't come to the board," said Galloway. She said the board's payout was done "not according to the policy, the procedure, or the process." Galloway, hired by the district in Feb. 2022, said she had "no knowledge" of the payout prior to FBOE approval.

3. McNeal and MacIntyre again challenged the parliamentary correctness of their ouster from committee assignments at the board's earlier Feb. 8 meeting after they and Claudia Perkins, board treasurer, abruptly exited before adjournment. McNeal and MacIntyre reiterated their charges that the ousters violated board policies, Robert's Rules of Order and due process.

- McNeal: "You did not follow ... due process and Robert's Rules of Order." McNeal indicated she may seek legal assistance about the matter.

- MacIntyre: It was "an illegal (vote) ... You cannot remove a board member ... on hearsay."

- Dylan Luna, board treasurer:

"I'm not going to engage in this conversation." After Luna's comment, Clack turned the board's attention to the excessive payout controversy.

4. A terse conversation ensued between MacIntyre and Jones about unspecified threats and harassment.

- MacIntyre: "Is it true that you (Jones) made this statement ... that Dr. McNeal and I threatened and harassed you." She called the purported claim "slanderous."

- Jones: Flint's superintendent referenced "people trying to threaten and do harm to me." Jones cautioned, "We can't just put everything that's going on at this table outthere in the public." He suggested "another setting" for a full discussion and indicated he may seek the assistance of an attorney on the matter.

- Luna: "We know for a fact that these people (senior board members McNeal and MacIntyre) over the years have harassed administrators. It's in the news; it's documented."

5. Clack, MacIntyre, and Relford: Banging his gavel for emphasis, Clack ruled MacIntyre "out of order" on multiple occasions. Following a "first warning" Clack asked for MacIntyre to be removed from the meeting.

- Clack: "Can we get her (MacIntyre) out of here please. Time for her to go."

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Proposed \$63 million city budget a \$13 million increase over last year: “offers a level of stability,” Mayor Neeley says

By Tom Travis

“This budget offers a level of stability,” Mayor Sheldon Neeley declared in his budget presentation to City Council’s Finance Committee.

The 2024 proposed budget of \$63 million reflects an increase of more than \$9 million from the 2022 budget and a \$13 million increase from the 2023 budget.

Neeley explained the budget priorities were to enhance public safety and city services, keep property tax rates

unchanged, to meet Flint’s pension system obligations, and to keep fees and utility costs unchanged.

Council to conduct four budget hearings

The City Council will conduct four budget hearings during April where they will be able to ask questions to each of the city’s department heads. According to the city charter, the council must vote on the mayor’s proposed budget by the first Monday in June.

The budget presentation included, along with Neeley, the City’s Chief Financial Officer Rob Widigan and the Director of Purchasing Lottie Ferguson. The mayor read from a prepared script to the council while 20 slides were cast onto a screen. The budget slide presentation is available below and a link to the entire city’s 2023-2024 budget is available on the

city’s website (www.cityofflint.com).

Neeley began the presentation by touting the city’s unemployment rate, which has fallen from 14.1% in

receive an infusion of \$220 million from the State of Michigan coffers.

At the time of this announcement the administration assured

residents this “infusion” of State funds would allow for the city to continue with basic services. With the additional \$220 million from the State Treasury, the city will be able to allow critical city services to continue, Neeley explained. Without the infusion of state funds many

critical services would be affected because the city would be required to pour funds into the mandated pension payment. CFO Widigan explained that the city has “a moral” and “a constitutional mandate to fulfill our promise to retirees,” As reported by East Village Magazine (EVM) in August 2022.

The mayor reiterated this assurance in his budget presentation.

Revenues - “This is how we operate our community” Neeley

The Mayor explained the present city tax levy of 19.1 mills will not be increased in his budget.

A mill (millage) rate is the rate at which property taxes are levied on property. According to CFO Widigan, one mill generates approximately \$895,646 for the city. Property taxes are computed by multiplying



(Graphic source: The City of Flint)

2020 to 9.7% in 2022. He said more than 1,000 new jobs were added to Flint’s economy since 2020 and the city’s tax base is up 17% or \$100 million since 2020.

Public safety

Neeley added that enhancements to public safety would include additions to personnel and equipment, noting the addition of body cams for the city police, improvements to the 24-hour intelligence center and included blight elimination as part of the public safety enhancements. The mayor’s proposed budgeted includes funds for the city’s senior centers, Hasselbring, Brennan, and Berston Field House.

City services

In August 2022 it was announced that the City of Flint would

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Budget ...

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the taxable value of the property by the number of mill levied. A mill is 1/1000 of a dollar.

In addition, the city collects 32.0083 mills in taxes from the county, Intermediate School District, Mott Community College, The State of Michigan, Mass Transit Authority and the Flint Public Library, totaling 51.1083 mills.

“The main way we finance our community is through property tax. The Genesee County Land Bank (GCLB) possesses about 38% of the property inside the city of Flint and those properties generate no tax base for us. Also, hospitals, schools and churches do not contribute to the property tax revenue for the city,” Neeley explained.

Revenue from State up \$2 million

Revenue from the State has increased by \$2 million from \$21.8 to \$23.9 million and it comes from “a bouquet” of revenue streams within the State’s budget, Neeley said.

The City of Flint has increased the number of full-time employees to 594 including a total of 154 in the police department and 174 in the department of public works.

City employee salaries, wages and fringe benefits increased from \$45.4 million in 2022 to \$47.5 million in 2023. In the proposed 2024 budget that figure will climb to \$49.9. Supplies and operating costs for police and fire have fluctuated from \$13.1 million in 2022, up to \$17.1 million in 2023 and decreased to \$16.1 million for proposed 2024 budget.

The mayor added that while the

Great Lakes Water Authority (GLWA) will increase its water rates 2.75 % and sewer rates 2.75 % beginning in July, the City of Flint will not be increasing their rates.

We still have obstacles but we’re stronger together than we are divided. Structural, or more commonly called Operating Deficit, happens whenever current expenditures exceed revenues. An operating deficit doesn’t necessarily mean that the government has a budget deficit. This is because reserves, or fund balances, from previous years can be used to make up the difference.

In the proposed 2024 budget the revenues are projected at \$63.6 million with expenditures at \$66.6 million. (In comparison, the last two previous budgets were \$54.8 million in revenue and \$58.6 in expenditures for 2022 and \$50.7 in revenue and \$65.1 in expenditures for 2023).

“The city of Flint has a positive fund balance of \$19.1 million as of FY2022,” according to CFO Widigan in an email to EVM.



Mayor Neeley presents his 2023-2024 city budget to city council.

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Overview and Next Steps

Neeley wrapped up the presentation by saying, “Our largest single increased expense is meeting retiree and pension obligations. Any budget cuts would have a detrimental impact

on our ability to provide city services.

“We face some uncertainty like workforce disruptions now and in the future, further rate hikes from the Federal Reserve, spending slowdown at the federal level, and uncertainty surrounding global and U.S. economic downturn or recovery,” he said.

City Council asks no questions

The budget presentation took place four hours into a five and half hour series of committee meetings on Monday. At the conclusion of the 20-minute budget presentation Councilperson Dennis Pfeiffer motioned to end the special order budget presentation. In a 6-3 vote the motion passed with Councilpersons Eric Mays (Ward 1), Jerri Winfrey-Carter (Ward 5) and Tonya Burns (Ward 6) voting no.

Immediately after the vote Mays spoke up, saying Pfeiffer’s motion was appalling, reckless and an outrageous move. Mays was upset the presentation ended not allowing

councilmembers to ask the mayor and administration questions. Finance Chair Judy Priestley (Ward 4) explained council will hold budget hearings on two Saturdays in April. The dates have not been set, as of yet, for those hearings. Once the April budget hearings are complete, the council is required to vote on the budget before it can be implemented.

The budget presentation ended at 10 p.m. After the mayor and his administration left, the council continued for less than an

hour, completing agendas for Legislative, Government Operations, Grant committees.

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Education Beat Analysis

Flint's public schools tipping into arguable freefall

By Harold C. Ford

As the newly-constituted Flint Board of Education is beginning to look a lot like the old board, with chaos repeatedly breaking out, a multitude of sobering realities about the school district are undeniable. Arguably, Flint's public schools are in freefall.

- Its student population has fallen from around 40,000 a few decades ago to about 3,000 at present. Though economic malaise and population loss explain away most of that loss, approximately two-thirds of K-12 students and their parents that reside in Flint opt for enrollment in other public schools through Michigan's Schools of Choice program or in the area's private, parochial, and charter options. Each student takes with him/her about \$9,000 in state aid.
- Staff attrition at FCS has resulted in at least 90 vacant positions at present according to Jones. In remarks before the FBOE on March 8, teacher's union official Bruce Jordan noted the "massive amounts of exodus of teachers."

- FCS standardized test scores are generally dismal. [EVM has reported on them in the past and will report on them again in the near future. The next round of testing is due in April.

- Dozens of properties have been abandoned, some for decades. None of those properties have been sold. Abandoned buildings – liability pitfalls waiting to happen – are often the targets of arsonists, scrappers, and ne'er-do-wells.

- The district's legal machinations involving lawsuits, threatened lawsuits, and at least three legal firms are too complex and mostly hidden

from public view to attempt an explanation here.



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

- Infrastructure challenges in a building lineup that averages 70+ years have included parking lots, athletic facilities, internet capabilities, water supply, the electrical grid, black mold, bat infestation(s), and HVAC systems (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning).



Pictured left to right, Chris Henderson, FCS director of operations and ancillary projects, Tish Wolf, FCS controller, and FBOE trustee Terae King.

(Photo by Tom Travis)

Last year, the district was told by an accounting firm that it has about twice the number of school buildings it needs.

Yet –excepting the unfinished upgrades at the Doyle/Ryder, and Potter buildings, and resurfacing of

some parking lots – no plans have been adopted to downsize the district's building lineup or put up new structures. A years-ago offer by Flint's largest nonprofit foundation to help build new facilities has never gotten past the talking stage.

Background and further detail on these stories can be found at eastvillage-magazine.org.

- Though temporarily flush with cash due to COVID relief dollars totaling about \$150 million, FCS is likely to find itself in a familiar long-term debt/annual deficit posture by 2024 if it does not reduce its expenditures and/or increase revenues; 2024 is when COVID funds will disappear.

- FCS leadership is uncertain, constantly changing: At least eight superintendents have helmed the district in the last 18 years since 2005: Walter Milton; Linda Thompson; Lawrence Watkins; Bilal Tawwab; Gregory Weatherspoon; Derrick Lopez; Anita Steward; and Kevelin Jones. The accompanying changes in central administration and building administration have been even more dizzying.

- Nearly 20 persons have cycled in and out of positions on the seven-person Flint Board of Education (FBOE) in the past 27 months since Jan. 2021:

Casey Lester; Betty Ramsdell; Blake Strozier; Adrian Walker; Vera Perry; Diana Wright; Carol McIntosh; Allen Gilbert; Chris Del Morone; Linda Boose; Danielle Green; Laura MacIntyre; Joyce Ellis-McNeal; Claudia Perkins; Dylan Luna; Melody Relford; Michael Clack; and Terae King.

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Education freefall ...

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Each brings his/her own assortment of strengths, flaws, and hopes.

“Governance”

King may have identified what ails district leadership when, apparently exasperated, he concluded on March 15: “We need to talk about board issues in a governance meeting.” One week later, at the Finance COW meeting, King again called for attention to governance.

“Let’s talk about solutions,” he pleaded.

“We need the Michigan Association of School Boards.”

[EVM endeavors to report on nonprofit governance issues in the future using information from the Michigan Association of School Boards, BoardSource, Diligent, and other sources.]

Governance, narcissism, and tragedy

Of William Shakespeare’s King Lear, Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote: “No man will ever write a better tragedy...” The play begins, according to literary critic Dennis Brown, by revealing Lear as a person that governs with “near-fairy tale narcissism.”

Of several main characters in Lear, American writer Isaac Asimov observes: “All were haughty, arrogant, and ruthless in using power when they

had it.” The play ends tragically with the deaths of nearly all main characters.

Ides of March

March 15 was a deadline for settling debts in ancient Rome. It became notorious as the date of the assassination of Julius Caesar. Roman governance was changed forever.

* * * * *

Future scheduled meetings of the FBOE: April 12 (COW or Committee of the Whole); April 19; May 10 (COW); May 17; June 14 (COW); June 21. Meetings start at 6:30 p.m. at Accelerated Learning Academy, 1602 S. Averill Ave., Flint, MI 48503. A link will be posted at the FCS website to join the meeting online; visit www.flintschools.org. Recordings of the meetings can be accessed via YouTube. Also, check the website (flintschools.org) for other FBOE meetings that the public can attend.

* * * * *

Editor’s Note: Education Beat reporter Harold Ford has been an educator for over 40 years in the Beecher Schools holding several positions including 30 years as a classroom teacher, 10 years as a non-profit director and three years as a school administrator.

EVM Reporter Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

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E-mail: ecuster@sbcglobal.net. Write: Apartment Box11, 720 E. Second St. MI 48503.

 LONGWAY PLANETARIUM SHOW SCHEDULE APRIL 4 - 30, 2023 OPEN TUES-SUN CLOSED MON CLOSED APRIL 9 FOR EASTER Buy tickets at Longway.org	 perfect little planet Greetings Earthlings. We're on vacation. NOON SAT & SUN Sensory Friendly showing Sat. 4/8 at 11 a.m.	 SPACE ACADEMY BLACK HOLES (LIVE FORMAT) 1 P.M. SAT & SUN	 SERENGETI A GIANT SCREEN EXPERIENCE 2 P.M. SAT & SUN
	 Skies Over Michigan (LIVE FORMAT) 3 P.M. TUES-SUN	 SECRETS OF THE UNIVERSE 4 P.M. TUES-SUN 7 P.M. THU-SAT	 THE QUEEN LIGHT SHOW FROM MERCURY WITH LOVE 8 P.M. THU-SAT

Education chaos ... *(Continued from Page 7)*

- Relerford: The aforementioned bathroom trip and abstention vote stymied Clack's effort at removal.

6. Relerford and Wolf: Trustee Relerford was obviously irritated by something FCS Executive Director of Finance Latisha Wolf said or did during an appearance in front of the school board.

- Relerford: "Mr. Jones, I would ask you to address Dr. Wolf tonight." Conspicuously, Relerford quizzed Jones about the deadline for nonrenewal of employee contracts.

- Wolf did not respond publicly to Relerford's comments.

- One week later at the FBOE's Finance COW meeting on March 22, McNeal revealed that Wolf had submitted her resignation earlier that day. "The district is losing its CFO (Chief Financial Officer)," she said. "We're losing our CFO," confirmed Perkins.



FBOE member Melody Relerford
(Photo by Tom Travis)

- Luna: "We're on a ship that has lost crew members ... She's leaving because she feels she hasn't been treated fairly."

7. MacIntyre, Clack, and Dompfeh: Somehow, past charges of harassment by Ayunna Dompfeh, the district's former executive director of finance, long since resigned, made their way into comments:

- Dompfeh had filed several "hostile work environment" charges against MacIntyre in Aug. 2021.

- MacIntyre: "I was cleared of any of the allegations (of harassment) ... I am really tired of the lies and accusations ... I will take action."

- Clack, immediately: "Do what you gotta do."



FBOE Trustee Laura MacIntyre.
(Photo by Tom Travis)

8. MacIntyre to Clack: MacIntyre said she felt "railroaded" by Clack. "To have the president of the board railroad us into this discussion (is) alarming and disturbing." She said the implied charges of wrongdoing were "very unprofessional ... unsubstantiated ... stemming from vague Facebook allegations."

- MacIntyre to Clack one week

later at the March 22 Finance COW meeting as the meeting adjourned: "What's the result of the investigation? ... I've been accused of improprieties."

- Clack: "You'll find out."

- MacIntyre: "You're not fit to be president."



FBOE member Joyce Ellis-McNeal
(Photo by Tom Travis)

9. Luna to MacIntyre and McNeal: "Our two senior colleagues were not on the (November, 2022) ballot. I believe if they were, they would've been voted out."

EVM Education Reporter Harold C. Ford can be reached at hcford1185@gmail.com.

Village Life ...

(Continued from Page 16)

decision. She just stood there kind of glassy eyed while I revealed far too much of my personal life. I apologized. She took a big swallow and just smiled and continued with my matriculation, silently. Wrong place and wrong time. We live and learn.

Back to that big comfy couch. I've walked into counseling sessions with nothing on my mind and actually have told the counselor that I have nothing to talk about today. Of course, the counselor, in their professional and expertise ease ask one simple question or say one phrase and it's like the bursting of a water balloon. (One of the reasons we pay them big bucks.)

In my recent sessions I've noticed that when I'm talking to the counselor I stare out the beautiful

picture window while I'm babbling on. But when he speaks to me I look directly at him as to not miss a word. From time to time I'll glance down at my notebook to write down things he suggests or phrases he uses.

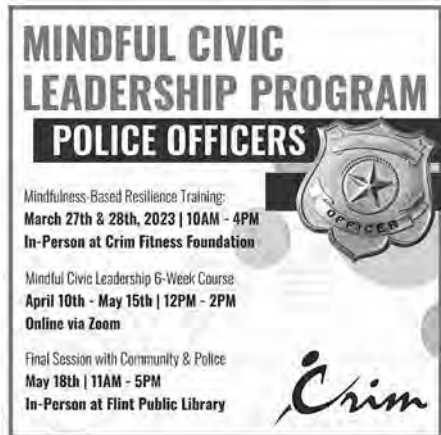
That picture window is just wonderful to me. All I can see out the window are shrubs and trees and the edge of the river bed. There's only one human-made object in view: a canopy of a bank's drive-through. That couch, that window, they beckon me, calling me to be reflective, peaceful, safe, and to share what's on my mind. I feel like asking if, before we begin, can I just stare out the window in a way to center my mind?

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

Mindful Civic Leadership Program brings community and police together – a model for the nation

By Canisha Bell

The Mindful Civic Leadership Program, designed to bring Black community members and police officers together to build mindfulness skills, launched a second run March 27. The next session will begin April 10. The program is part of the Mindful Flint Initiative, led by the Crim Fitness Foundation.



Graphic source: The Crim Foundation

Theresa Roach, associate director of the Initiative, said the program aims to “build the skills of mindful leadership, engage in a mindful dialogue and practice communication strategies around the future of policing in our community.”

It is a repeat of a pilot program begun in March, 2022. The sessions begin with a six-week mindfulness based program online to learn techniques to calm the mind, reduce stress and have mindful conversations.

That portion of the program will begin with Flint’s Black residents and Flint police officers meeting separately in their respective “affinity groups.” After that initial phase, participants will meet with police officers to discuss policing in the Flint community.

Flint mindfulness initiative used as a model for the nation

This course is the first of its kind in the United States with Flint

being studied as a model for other cities around the country, Roach said. The Crim is partnering with experts at Brown University, Washington State University, and Mindful Badge to design and facilitate the course in Flint.

The program is free for Flint residents thanks to Flint ReCAST (Resiliency in Communities after Stress and Trauma), a program of the City of Flint and the Greater Flint Health Coalition. ReCAST envi-

going to be up to funding... It is our intention to work with the city and ReCAST to be able to offer this annually,” Roach said.

“Hopeful” Black residents and police officers can build relationships

“I’m hopeful that during this program, Black residents and police officers can begin to build relationships with one another and mindful leadership skills,” Roach explained.

“Meeting separately creates a safe space for each group before we get into more challenging discussions,” Roach explained. “And it’s important that each group has an opportunity to learn about mindfulness and begin developing a personal practice before diving into potentially difficult conversations.”

“Having a shared language and beginning to develop more emotional awareness will support deep, meaningful conversations about policing in our community. The participants

will meet once a week for the six weeks, building their understanding of the impact of stress and learn new strategies to navigate it. They will enhance their own mindful leadership skills and the ability to have difficult conversations to promote positive individual and systems change.” Roach describes.

(Continued on Page 15)



Sergeant Deon Smith with the Genesee County Sheriff's Office and Theresa Roach, Associate Director of Mindful Flint Initiative

(Photo provided by Crim Foundation)

sions the greater Flint community working together in ways that lead to improved behavioral health, empowered community residents, reductions in trauma, and sustained community change.

Organizers aim to offer the Mindful Civic Leadership Program once a year. “Our intention is to do this every year, but you know, it is

THIS MONTH IN THE VILLAGE

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

"The Magnificent Seven"

Performed on Fri., Sat., and Sun. through April 16.
This musical was developed in The Rep's 2019 New Works Festival. The show is based on the story of the American gymnastic team's competition at the Olympic Games in Atlanta. Contains adult themes.
Flint Repertory Theatre
1220 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For more info visit flintrep.org
or call 810-237-1530.
For tickets visit tickets.thewhiting.com.

Ready, Grow! Garden Egg Hunt & Natural Dyes

April 8, 2:30 - 4 p.m.
All ages can participate in an old fashioned Easter egg hunt in the Exploration Garden at For-Mar. Also hunt for cabbages and onions for dyeing the eggs with. Dress for the weather!
Cost \$5 per person.
For-Mar Nature Preserve & Arboretum
2142 N. Genesee Rd., Burton
For more info visit exploreflintandgenesee.org or call 810-736-7100 for more info.

Flint Institute of Arts

On Sat., April 15 the FIA will host the 22nd Annual Wine Tasting which includes casino-style gambling and stellar food. Through April 16 "Expressions," works on paper, can still be seen in the Graphics Gallery and through April 23 "Ways of Seeing: The Paul R. Jones Collection of American Art at The University of Alabama" in the Hodge and Henry galleries continues. The FOMA film series for April includes "The Whale April 7-9, "One Fine Morning" April 14-16, "The Phantom of the Open" April 21-23, and "The Blue Catfan" April 28-30.
Flint Institute of Arts
1120 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For more info visit flintarts.org or call 810-234-1695.

Firebirds OHL Hockey

Sat., April 8 against Bakersfield Condors, Sun. April 9 against Henderson Silver nights, and Wed. April 10 against Ontario Reign.
Games are Wed, Fri. and Sat. at 7 p.m., Sun. at 4 p.m.
Cost \$15, \$18, \$21 and \$26 per person.
Dort Financial Center
3501 Lapeer Rd., Flint
For more info visit ticketsmarter.com/pl/flint-firebirds-tickets or call 810-744-0580.

Health Fair

Wed., April 19, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Communication Access Center will host presentations on different health-related issues and there will be door prizes.
Flint Association of the Deaf
4156 Holiday Dr. Flint
For more info, email info@cacdhh.org or call 810-239-3112 or 810-250-7010.

Used Book Sale

Thurs., Fri., and Sat., April 20-27 p.m. (members only), Apr. 21 12-5 p.m. and Apr. 22 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Paperback and hardbound books, media, puzzles, and books on CD and tape will be available for \$1.00 or less. The sale will be held in the C.S. Mott Foundation Community Room in the Flint Public Library. On the last day items will be \$5.00 per bag. Proceeds benefit the community programs and services of the Library.
Flint Public Library
1026 E. Kearsley St., Flint
For more info call 810-249-2578 or email fplfriends@fpl.info.

Music in the Heart of the City

Sun. April 23, 4 p.m.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church will present "Where Jazz meets Classical Sounds." This program will feature the musical trio Rubato. Dr. Mary Procopio on flute, Dirk Neiuwenhuis on saxophone and Pat Cronley on piano make up the trio.
Tickets are \$12 at the door and \$5 for students. Students at MCC and UM Flint with ID are free.
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
711 S. Saginaw St., Flint
For more info contact Holly Richardson via email at sherlok494@AOL.com, call the office at 810-234-8637 or visit the website at stpaulschurchflint.com.

Air Quality Learning Session

Tues., April 25, 5-8 p.m.
Learn about air quality, how it is measured and protected and how the Flint community can get involved. Register in advance.
Sylvester Broome Empowerment Village
4119 Saginaw St., Flint
To register or get more info contact Monica Paguaia at paguaia.monica@epa.gov or call 312-353-1166.



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

Mindful program ...

(Continued from Page 13)

Facilitating the six-week course for the Flint community members is Trymaine Gaither, a certified Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) teacher who completed his training at Brown University.

He is a national trainer in mindfulness-based anti-racism, self-awareness, contemplative pedagogy, and self compassion. Gaither said he is committed to cultivating conscious communities, organizations, and human beings.

He has collaborated with corporate and non-profit organizations to promote civic engagement, grassroots mobilization, and social justice initiatives. The “Know Your Rights” Initiative, a city-wide community-based initiative informing marginalized groups of their rights within policing practices was led by Gaither.

“Pull back the layers and focus on the healing”

“This program is an opportunity for the community and law enforcement to pull back the layers and focus on the healing that needs to occur collectively. It’s an opportunity for everyone to see the suffering in our midst, on both sides.” Gaither answered in an email regarding the benefits of this program to the Flint community overall.

Social worker and life coach, Dr. Tiffany Quinn of Flushing, learned of the 2022 pilot program via email and was intrigued. Having already had a meditation practice, she said she felt being a participant in the program could help her deepen that practice.

“The benefits of being able to reduce anxiety, calm my mind, and begin the practice of meditation that aligns with my values,” is what Dr. Quinn said attracted her to this effort in the first place.

Information about the 2022

pilot program was posted last year on the department’s bulletin board and when Sgt Deon Smith of the Genesee County Sheriff’s Department saw the posting, he said he knew he needed to take part in it.

“Your capacity to lead is predicated on your capacity to grow,” Smith said. “As a young man growing up in the city of Flint, I understood I serve a purpose much bigger than myself and it comes with an extreme level of responsibility.

“And to really gain the trust of the community you have to stay sharp individually,” he added. “As a law enforcement official I see things that people will probably never see in their lifetime, and so for me I understand that I am human, I’m no robot, I’m a person and I deal with things in my mind on a daily basis that I must continue to filter out so that I can stay sharp for the community members and the citizens that I serve. I saw the flier and said what a perfect opportunity to add more tools to your toolbox.”

After the six weeks, both groups will come together for a day of dialogue strengthening the relationships between members of the Black community and police officers serving in Flint.

Describing the “day of the dialogue,” last year, Quinn recalls, “It was very emotional. Mindfulness is such a powerful tool, they (the police officers) were very transparent and open. We were able to connect with the officers and I feel like they felt they were able to connect to the community that they serve.”

Connecting with the Flint community was phenomenal, according to Smith, “It allowed community members to share what was on their hearts, and in order to connect with people’s minds, you have to connect with their hearts. We had some candid yet tough conversations about policing in Black communities and then policing in general. It allowed law enforcement officers to truly understand.

“You know we have to seek to understand in order to be understood, so if I can understand my brother, I can understand my sister, if I can understand my young man, or my young woman, now I’m able to make, you know, better decisions based off of knowing what this community culture is, you know, and what this community needs as opposed to just doing things status quo or the way I see fit, just running call to call,” Smith added.

Registration for the 2023 program is closed; however, there is a waitlist for residents for 2024. Anyone interested in being placed on the waitlist for next year can email mindfulness@crim.org or go to <https://crim.org/mindfulness>.

EVM reporter Canisha Bell can be reached at canishajbell@gmail.com.

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Village Life

A comfy leather couch, a wide bay window and spilling my guts

By Tom Travis

Twice a month I drive 20 minutes to sit on a long leather couch, long enough for about five people. From that couch I look out a big bay window and I spill my guts. Or, as my therapist says, to get “psychoanalyzed.”

I tend to be very private and have found it difficult to share with friends when I’m struggling.

Over the years I’ve seen about four or five different therapists, counselors or clinical psychologists. I’ve never been diagnosed with a mental health issue by a professional. I’ve self-diagnosed myself with depression and anxiety. I often find solace and discover new mental health tools for my tool box when I see a professional. Those tools will ride with me through the journey of life and I can pull them out when needed.

Going to a therapist is a serious “self-care” task to take on. For people of meager incomes therapists can be pricey so you better be serious. When I went to see a clinical psychologist about 12 years ago I sat on his couch and the very first thing I asked him was, “About how many sessions do you think this will take?” Without missing a beat he said, “ten.” I’ve come to learn that’s what they all say. I asked the question in a snarky way and was kind of annoyed by being there. I eventually got with the program and realized I actually really did need to be there.

Some cheaper methods of self-care are taking a walk on a regular basis - one of those good, brisk, long walks where you get lost in your thoughts, break a sweat and even run out of breath. Or perhaps, listening to some favorite music, watching something that makes you laugh hard. One of my favorite self-care tools is to deep clean

my bathroom or bedroom. Even with the generous supply of free and inexpensive self-care methods, sometimes we need a professional, not a friend, not a confidant, but a trained professional to help us navigate this human life.

Honestly, I’ve confessed to my current therapist I’m not exactly sure why I sought him out. I explained to him I think through the languishing pandemic, months of shut-downs and overall demise of the fabric of our society I found myself in a place where



Painting by local Flint artist Seth Stoltz

I needed a professional. Every friend I talk to about the PTSD we’re all sharing from the pandemic say they’re feeling it too.

Each time I go to see a therapist I wonder, “Am I losing my mind?” My present therapist hasn’t put me in the hospital yet but I am beginning to see so many loose strings and disconnected things in my life. He’s helping me uncover things no other professional has even addressed with me. I’m feeling good.

Whenever I write a personal

essay like this I wonder how the reader will judge me, if at all. For being a ‘private person’ writing about some fairly personal stuff for thousands of people to read can be a little fretful. So to dissuade those thoughts I offer this reminder; Senator John Fetterman (D-Pennsylvania) remains hospitalized after he checked himself into Walter Reed Medical Center for treatment of clinical depression. Sen. John Fetterman, who stands 6’9” and is a strapping embodiment of masculinity, is still hospitalized after he checked himself into Walter Reed Medical Center for treatment of clinical depression.

He’s remained hospitalized for several weeks and it remains unclear if he still is hospitalized. Maybe 20, 30 or 50 years ago Fetterman, due to social pressure, would never have checked himself into the hospital or admitted he was struggling.

We’ve come a long way baby! Naysayers exclaim that our society has become a bunch of softies and pansies. I say, “Nah.” I don’t think so. I think we’ve become more authentic. Remember when Oprah often said in the 80s and 90s on her iconic talk show, “We have to talk about it.” True, but be careful, “talking about it” [your personal life] is an art form within itself.

This artform of learning how to talk about your personal life involves knowing to whom you tell things and where you tell things.

I remember over a decade ago, recently divorced, I was at the office of the local gymnasium signing up for a membership. The clerk helping me was the motherly, sweet and gentle type. She asked me what had compelled me to join the gym. I started pouring out my guts to her and within earshot of everyone else in the office, dumb

(Continued on Page 12)