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El Azteco Praised, Deer Criticized, and Much More at This Week's Council Meeting ^[1]

Thursday, September 15, 2016, 7:25 am

By:

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East Lansing's City Council meeting on 9/13/16 lasted about an hour, with four members present: Mayor Mark Meadows, Mayor Pro Tem Ruth Beier, and Councilmembers Erik Altmann and Susan Woods. Councilmember Shanna Draheim was away in Mackinac City for the Michigan Municipal League Convention. All motions passed 4-0.

El Azteco turns forty: As a special presentation, Mayor Meadows read aloud a proclamation ^[2] recognizing El Azteco's fortieth anniversary. The restaurant opened August 15, 1976. A representative of the Vlahakis Companies, which has owned El Azteco since 2012, said that founder Art Santa Cruz deserves the credit for having "start[ed] it all." Santa Cruz also spoke, encouraging Council to continue working with Vlahakis Companies because "they have the best interest" of East Lansing residents at heart.

Welcoming international visitors and residents: Meadows also read a proclamation ^[3] in support of Welcoming Week, which is this week (September 12-18). MSU hosts approximately 7,500 international students each year.

At the meeting, Public Library Director Kristin Shelley advertised East Lansing Welcomes the World on October 2 at ELPL, an event aimed at engaging international students and families. Shelley also reminded everyone about author Ben Rawlence's event ^[4] for One Book, One Community which happened the day after Council's meeting, September 14.

A representative of MSU Greek Life briefly spoke to advertise an informational scavenger hunt for international students on Friday, October 7, scheduled to happen throughout downtown. The event is designed to promote inclusion between the Greek community and international students, as well as helping international students getting acquainted with downtown businesses.

Deer management policy proposed: Elinor Holbrook of Lantern Hill Drive spoke before Council to request consideration of an official citywide deer management policy. Proposals for an official deer cull were before Council several times over the last year ^[5], but an official City policy has not been established. Holbrook said that there are eight deer (two fawns, some does, and a buck) living in the wooded space bordered by Lantern Hill Drive, Knoll Road, and Burcham Drive. She said that the deer have been "breeding, eating, and living there" for the last three years, and that it's hard to control them and what they eat from residents' yards.

Holbrook said that many of her neighbors would gladly speak before Council on the matter. In addition to Holbrook and her immediate neighbors, some residents have been calling for a defined management strategy for several years.

Marathon gas station to be demolished and rebuilt: At this week's meeting, Council approved a site plan ^[6] for replacing the existing Marathon gas station at 100 E. Saginaw Street (at the southeast corner of Abbot Road and Saginaw Street) under the same ownership. Currently, the gas station and car wash are separate buildings, whereas the approved site plan features a single building and an updated layout ^[7]. (For further information, see our standalone report ^[8] on this redevelopment.)

Bailey Pump House air conditioning: Konrad Hittner of Kedzie Street spoke before Council representing the Bailey Pump House board. Hittner extended his thanks to City Manager Lahanas and staff for providing and installing an air conditioning unit in the Bailey Pump House. The unit was taken from the shuttered Bailey Community Center and repurposed for the Pump House.

Bailey senior apartments groundbreaking: Meadows announced the groundbreaking of the

Bailey senior apartments and community center complex, which will take the place of the closed Bailey Community Center. (Please see our last report on the Bailey complex here [9].) The groundbreaking, including a few brief speakers, was yesterday, September 14 at 10:00 a.m.

Tin Can entertainment license deferred: An entertainment license request [10] for The Tin Can was originally placed on the consent agenda [11] for this week's meeting, meaning it was expected to be approved without discussion. However, Mayor Meadows requested that it be removed from the consent agenda for separate discussion and consideration. He said that an ordinance adjustment would be needed to accommodate the request, and asked to defer the matter to October 11 in order to allow time to address the ordinance in the interim.

On June 8 of this year, Doug Johns, the owner of Tin Can submitted a new license application [10] for consideration saying the type of entertainment that is planned includes "euchre tournament, art contest, D.J.-hosted trivia." In April of 2016, when Johns' request for a license was denied, 5-0, [12] by Council, the types of games planned [13] had included "darts, water-pong, Connect 4, table games."

Ordinance regarding "big box stores" to get hearing: Council set a public hearing for October 11 regarding Ordinance 1386. The zoning ordinance [14] would prohibit "land use restrictions" enacted in deeds for so-called "big box stores" that keep competitors from occupying the same building when a like-store closes and moves out. City Attorney Yeadon's memo [15] describes the negative effects on property values and economic development that result in such currently-enforced deed restrictions.

Citizen Technology and Innovation Panel off the ground: In his councilmember report, Altmann informed Council that the newly-created Citizen Technology and Innovation Panel [16] will hold its debut meeting on September 22 at 7:00 pm at City Hall. (The meeting is open to the public.) He thanked staff for their help in starting the panel, and the applicants for their interest. Altmann described determining membership as "a tough decision" due to the large number of applicants.

At the meeting, Council voted to name the following people to the Panel: Margy Barile, Dennis Bond, Doug Couto, Lauren Douglass, Jonathon Irvin, Thasin Sardar, and Pat Wolf.

Dancing the night away: Councilmember Susan Woods thanked the City and community for their support in making the last weekend's Downtown Dance "a lovely evening" and a success, and that she looks forward to doing it again next year. Mayor Meadows read a thank you note from Councilmember Draheim, who was absent, publicly thanking Woods and city staff for the event.

Town and gown: In her councilmember report, Mayor Pro Tem Beier asked that both the students "particularly those living in neighborhood rentals" and permanent residents remember that they live in the City together and to be mindful and respectful of one another.

Board and Commission appointments: Besides those named to the Citizen Innovation and Technology Panel as noted above, Council made the following appointments:

- Zoning Board of Appeals: Jonathon Jorgensen

- Elected Officer's Compensation Committee: Jennifer Arbogast (reappointed).
- University Student Commission: Tiffany Khoury, Amber Plemons, Grace Kendra, Jacob Keesee, Giana Carli, Asmaa Walton, Terrance Range, Grace Carmichael, Cookie Rifiotis

Retiree healthcare renewal: Council authorized City Manager Lahanas to sign for renewal ^[17] of Humana health insurance plans for Medicare-eligible retirees for coverage in 2017 ^[18].

More upgrades to wastewater system: Council authorized the City Manager to sign a contract ^[19] for two raw sewage grinders to be rebuilt ^[20], one each for the Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) and Woodingham Pump Station. Council also approved the purchase ^[21] of a new pump for the CSO Control/Pumping Station ^[22] on Kalamazoo Street, which helps deliver sewage to the WRRF.

Transportation Committee's new meeting time: Council approved a request from the Transportation Commission ^[23] to change their meeting time from 7:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Landfill monitoring: Council approved a contract ^[24] with Golder Associates for the monitoring, maintenance, and testing of the wells and gas probes at the Burcham Park landfill ^[25] through the second quarter of 2017. Golder Associates has conducted this work at Burcham Park since 2010.

MSU Homecoming parade: Council approved street closures ^[26] for the 2016 MSU Homecoming Parade. The parade will occur on Friday, October 14 at 6:00 p.m., and related street closures will occur between 2:30 p.m. and 7:15 p.m. that day ^[27].

Pedestrian bridge maintenance: Council approved the City Manager to sign agreements between the City of East Lansing and Ingham County to repair or replace six pedestrian bridges ^[28] in the City. The total cost is \$890,500, and the money will come from the Ingham County Trails and Parks Millage. A map of the sites is available here ^[29].

Written communications: All written communications received by Council since the August 16 meeting may be viewed here ^[30]. None of them directly addressed any of Tuesday's topics, but they did cover a wide range of issues, including CATA's BRT, parking, old trees being taken down, and more.

Reminder: You can speak to Council at its public meetings ^[31] or write to council@cityofeastlansing.com ^[32] on any issue.

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