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Who Knew About East Lansing's eBay Auction? City Leaders Still Won't Say ^[1]

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By:

Alice Dreger



Above: Director of Planning Tim Dempsey, who was listed as the City's contact at eBay, and Mayor Mark Meadows, last night at Council.

If the goal of the City of East Lansing was to get top-dollar for the auction of its six-acre property on Merritt Road, the method used was rather curious.

Results of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request received late yesterday confirm that City staff advertised the sale nowhere but on the eBay auction page, where the property appears to have obtained bids from only three parties, topping out at \$1,000,900.

That's the auction page ^[2] almost no one seems to have known about until after the sale was over ^[3].

City staff didn't issue a press release announcing this million-dollar property was up for sale during the month-long online auction. No one in the media appears to have been informed.

City staff didn't mention the sale on the City's website in time for people to bid.

They didn't issue an announcement about it in the weekly e-news.

Based on ELi's investigations, City staff didn't contact many business owners who may have been interested in the property ? even though Planning staff had contact information for them on various applications and correspondence.

City staff also made no mention of the matter at City Council, at Planning Commission, or at the Downtown Development Authority, even as those bodies were actively considering legislation [4] directly related to the property's value.

All of these unused methods might have alerted multiple potential bidders, at virtually no cost to the City. But, for some reason, none of these channels were used.

What the City has said so far, in a statement attributed to no one [5] in particular, is that the City ?directly notified? ?approximately 12? ?interested parties.?

But who were they?

Inquiries by ELi of all the people we can find who might have logically had interest in this sale ? mostly people affiliated with the marijuana industry who have expressed interest in operating marijuana businesses in East Lansing ? have turned up only one person having been advised by City staff about the auction. (That person has asked to remain anonymous.)

Several business people have now told ELi they would have wanted to know about the auction. One is Bill Willbrandt, owner of a local moving company, who told the City last year [6] he wanted to buy that property for his business. Another is local attorney Jeff Hank, who is well known to City staff to be a statewide player in the marijuana industry.

Based on a screenshot the City released today [7] under FOIA, the winner of the auction, Jeff Yatooma representing Kodiak Landarc, appears to have been bidding against two other parties. They are identified in that screen shot as operating under the names ?h.e.wholesale? and ?niey_22?.

But as of now, we have no idea who these apparent bidders were.

Last Tuesday, March 5, right before Council voted 4-0 to approve the purchase agreement [8] with the ?winning bidder? on the Council's consent agenda, we asked [9]: Who was notified of the auction? Who bid? Why wasn't it announced and made more public, if the City wanted top dollar?

Mayor Mark Meadows said he would ?try to get some answers to those questions.?

But he did not ask City staff to answer any of them. He called for the vote. It passed, 4-0.

Last night at City Council's meeting, I asked why, if the City wanted to obtain top dollar for this property, only a small, select group of people appear to have been notified about the auction.

Mayor Mark Meadows replied, "I'm sure we'll get an answer for you."

He then moved on to the next agenda item.

ELi is awaiting results of one more Freedom of Information Act request, specifically seeking the identities of the "approximately 12" "interested parties" who were "directly notified" of the sale.

You may also be interested in:

[Answers to Your Questions about East Lansing's eBay Land Sale](#) ^[4]

[eBay Listing Reveals Details of Million-Dollar Sale by City of East Lansing](#) ^[10]

[City Auctioned Million-Dollar Property on eBay; Notified Only "Interested Parties"](#) ^[3]

[City Approves Million-Dollar Land Contract; Details Yet to Come](#) ^[9]

[City to Sell Public Land in Deal Brokered by Marijuana Industry Player](#) ^[6]

Dan Totzkay contributed reporting.

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[3] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/city-auctioned-million-dollar-property-ebay-notified-only-interested-parties>

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[7] https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/ebay_bid_history_02-06-2019.pdf

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