Commission reviewing jail site proposals

We’ve heard a lot lately about the proposals involving two alternative sites for the new Wayne County Jail. With that in mind, I am providing an update on the selection process, including a background on each proposal and timeline of the jail issue.

Currently, the county is deciding whether to complete the already-started jail at Gratiot and I-375 or accept a developer’s offer to build an entirely new jail, juvenile detention facility and court complex at an alternative site near the Chrysler Freeway Service Drive in return for $300 million, rights to the Gratiot/I-375 site and an unspecified credit from the county based on the cost savings the new facilities would provide. Both are county-owned sites.

County Executive Warren C. Evans last month announced this “two track” strategy, and presently, no decision has been made regarding either site. I can assure you, however, my colleagues and I on the commission will continue our due diligence reviewing each proposal and drawing a conclusion best suited for the taxpayers of Wayne County.

The county’s selected bidder Walsh Construction, submitted a bid and is in the process of preparing a proposal to restart construction at the Gratiot/I-375 site. That report is expected in May.

While the county awaits the Walsh proposal, evaluation on the alternative proposal from Rock Ventures continues among the Wayne County Commissioners, the County Executive’s office and nationally recognized experts in jail and court facilities.

Construction at the Gratiot/I-375 site began in 2011 but was halted less than two years later when the county’s previous administration projected millions of dollars in cost overruns for the project. Though the partially-build jail remains unfinished, a study released in November indicated it was still structurally sound.

If you have any questions or concerns about either site, or the site selection process, please let me know.

Commissioner Bell serving in leadership roles

Wayne County Commission Vice-Chair Alisha Bell is serving this year in several leadership capacities with the National Association of Counties (NACo). Commissioner Bell is presently chairman of the organization’s Juvenile Justice Subcommittee, president of both the National Association of Black County Officials and the Women Of NACo and secretary of Next Generation NACo.

See NACO, Page 2
**County’s financial outlook improving**

After several difficult years, Wayne County’s finances are now in a much better place.

In September, the Wayne County Commission adopted a balanced county budget of $1.5 billion with $533 million allocated toward the county’s general operating fund for the 2016-17 fiscal year. The county is now operating under that budget, which includes a slight decrease in spending from the previous year and a major $180 million decrease from 2014-15.

Commissioner Alisha Bell, who serves as vice-chair of the Committee on Ways and Means, has joined her colleagues in ensuring that the county continues to institute measures necessary for a balanced budget.

The county’s structural deficit – once running at some $52 million – has been eliminated while the county’s accumulated deficit of $88 million has nearly been eliminated as well.

For the first time in a long while, the county has been able to place additional funding into its pension system, which had been funded at only 47 percent.

“Committee members, commissioners who attended meetings, commission staff and the Evans administration are to be commended for working together to frame this budget,” Commissioner Bell said. “We continue to find ways to trim spending, while still providing programs necessary for the residents of Wayne County.”

Challenges continue and more work still needs to be done but there is no doubt that county finances have entered a newer and brighter day.

**Parks events scheduled**

**Marshmallow Drop**  
April 14

The popular kids event returns for its 33rd year at two locations: 9 a.m. at Elizabeth Park in Trenton and 11 a.m. at Nankin Mills Park in Westland. Events at each site will be held for three age groups: under 4, 5-7 and 8 and older. For more on this, call Wayne County Parks at (734) 261-1990.

**Earth Day Celebration**  
April 22

Celebrate nature at the Nankin Mills Interpretive Center (1-4 p.m.) at this free event with no pre-registration required. Live animal shows, music, crafts, speakers, nutty nature re-enactors and educational demonstrations will all be available. Nankin Mills Interpretive Center is located at 33175 Ann Arbor Trail in Westland.

**Saturday in the Park**  
May 6

Hines Drive will be shut down to vehicular traffic from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Ann Arbor Trail to Outer Drive each Saturday through Sept. 24 so visitors can walk, run, skate or cycle safely. (Hines Drive, east of Ann Arbor Trail).

**NACo from Page 1**

Long active with NACo, Commissioner Bell was also involved in this year’s annual Legislative Conference, held Feb. 24 to March 1 in Washington, D.C. At the conference, Commissioner Bell discussed issues important to Wayne County residents with members of Michigan’s Congressional Delegation and returned with information dealing with federal initiatives that can be used to help the county, its communities and its residents.

Issues discussed included defending Medicaid, rolling back or improving costly federal regulations enacted without input from counties, protecting municipal bonds and promoting county efforts to improve transportation.

“I always look forward to representing Wayne County on issues that affect us all and to have a say in policies spreading across our country,” Commissioner Bell said. “I feel honored to attend these meetings and, as we continue to make great strides in Wayne County, we will seek out the solutions necessary to combat economic challenges and create innovative legislation to benefit all our residents.”

NACo also served as host for a Capitol Hill briefing on the crucial role counties play in local health systems.

“At a time of tremendous change in Washington, it’s important that counties are at the table when decisions affecting us and our residents are being made,” NACo President Bryan Desloge said of this year’s conference.
County residents have options in paying delinquent taxes

Thanks to a recently enacted program, it is easier than ever for Wayne County residents to pay delinquent property taxes.

Residents can now pay their delinquent property taxes at convenient bill payment kiosks located inside select Rite Aid drug stores, including eight stores in Detroit. Kiosks have also been placed at DTE Energy payment centers, the Samaritan Center, the Northwest Activity Center and Focus: HOPE.

Payments can also be made by cash, check or credit card. Taxpayers can also look up their account details and even pay their DTE Energy bills as well.

Residents can also pay via credit card by following instructions at www.treasurer.waynecounty.com. You can also mail a cashier’s check or money order to: Office of the Wayne County Treasurer, P.O. Box 33555, Detroit, MI 48232-5555.

A payment coupon must be included. Taxes can also be paid in person at the Treasurer’s Office, 400 Monroe, 5th Floor, Detroit. Hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. weekdays with hours extended to 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays. For additional information, call (313) 224-5990.

Though the Treasurer’s Office cannot offer legal advice, it provides a list of organizations that can offer help to taxpayers. The list is available by visiting www.treasurer.waynecounty.com or by sending an email to taxinfo@waynecounty.com.

Aid available in avoiding foreclosure

Several steps are available through the county Treasurer’s Office for Wayne County residents who seek to avoid foreclosure on their homes:

• A Stipulated Payment Agreement allows homeowners to extend the deadline for payments on delinquent property taxes dating to 2014 or earlier. Agreement forms are available through the Treasurer’s office at treasurerweb@waynecounty.com or by calling 313-224-6105. Forms must be returned along with a cashier’s check or money order for not less than 20% of unpaid property taxes.

• A Distressed Owner/Occupant Extension (DOOE) can extend the foreclosure for taxpayers experiencing financial hardship. Forms are available through the Treasurer’s office at treasurerweb@waynecounty.com or by calling 313-224-6105.

Taxpayers have until early June to apply for either.
Wayne County Commission
Vice-Chair

Alisha Bell
COMMISSIONER • DISTRICT 7
500 GRISWOLD, 7TH FLOOR
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226

"Belle of the Ball"
10th Annual Prom Dress Giveaway

Prom Dress distribution will be:
Saturday, April 8, 2017, at the Boys & Girls Club
16500 Tireman
from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
For more information call:
(313)224-0936

Prom dress distribution set for April 8

Dozens of young ladies will again be treated to a colorful display of prom dresses, shoes, purses and jewelry that normally they couldn’t afford when the Boys & Girls Club on Tireman opens its doors Saturday, April 8.

The girls will choose among hundreds of dresses of varying styles and sizes and a table full of accessories as part of Commissioner Bell’s 10th Annual Belle of the Ball Prom Dress Giveaway.

This year’s distribution, beginning at 10 a.m., promises more smiles for those young ladies.