Dear Resident:

Wayne County Executive Warren Evans has announced his administration will enter into negotiations with developer Dan Gilbert’s Rock Ventures on a new site for the proposed Wayne County Jail as well as a new county court building and juvenile detention center.

If negotiations are successful, Wayne County will turn over the unfinished jail site at Gratiot Avenue and I-375 and several other county-owned properties to Rock Ventures which will develop the Gratiot site into an entertainment complex that could include a new soccer stadium as well as other features.

In return, the county would receive a completely new jail, courthouse and juvenile detention center built several miles to the north of the uncompleted Gratiot jail site. The value of the Rock Ventures offer has been estimated at more than $520 million. Despite the announcement, the county is continuing its “two track” plan regarding the Gratiot site.

Even though the Rock Ventures proposal is now the county executive’s preferred proposal, an alternative proposal by Walsh Construction to complete the unfinished jail remains on the table. The Walsh plan would move forward if an agreement cannot be reached with Rock Ventures.

The county executive’s announcement represents a major step forward in the long-delayed jail project, but there are two important things to remember:

• It isn’t a final decision. A possibility remains that the new jail could still be built on the Gratiot site.

• The Wayne County Commission must give final approval on any jail site proposal. I want to assure you that my fellow commissioners and I will intensely examine any proposal that comes before us.

With that in mind, I encourage anyone with questions or comments about either proposal to contact me by phone at (313) 224-0942, by email at iclark@waynecounty.com or by writing to: Wayne County Commissioner Irma Clark-Coleman, 500 Griswold, 7th Floor, Detroit, MI 48226.

Working for you,

Irma Clark-Coleman
Wayne County Commissioner, District 5
Commission approves pilot program to help strengthen neighborhoods

Under a resolution by Commissioner Irma Clark-Coleman, the Wayne County Commission recently authorized transferring 141 tax-foreclosed properties to the Wayne County Land Bank in a pilot program designed to strengthen neighborhoods and reduce evictions.

The properties involved are located in Detroit, as well as 17 other communities throughout the county.

Of the 141 properties, 71 -- just over half -- are located in Detroit.

Commissioner Clark-Coleman, who chairs the commission’s Committee on Economic Development, said the goal is to have these properties rehabilitated quickly by local developers rather than purchased at auction by developers who could sit on properties for years.

The agreement also includes a provision that would allow renters to remain in these foreclosed properties rather than being evicted after they are acquired by the new owners.

While the properties represent a small portion of the roughly 8,000 county properties in foreclosure, the program could be greatly expanded in future years.

“This is an innovative way to not only uphold property values but prevent homelessness,” Commissioner Clark-Coleman said.

“We’re all looking at this pilot program with great hopes that it will meet these two important priorities.”

Under the program, developers acquire the properties by paying back taxes, plus administrative fees that will be used by the land bank.

County’s finances continue to improve as both sides seek balanced budget

The Wayne County Commission is currently working with County CEO Warren Evans and his staff to produce a balanced budget for the 2017-18 fiscal year.

County finances should continue to improve under the new budget, which goes into effect Oct. 1.

Members of the county commission’s Committee on Ways and Means are currently reviewing budget details.

Final approval is expected to come in September by the full commission.

“Wayne County has emerged from some pretty difficult years and residents should remain optimistic in terms of county programs and services being offered,” Commissioner Irma Clark-Coleman said.

The proposed $1.45 billion budget also represents a decrease in spending from the balanced $1.5 billion budget approved last year.

At the same time, the county has eliminated its structural deficit, which once ran as high as $52 million a year, nearly eliminated $88 million in accumulated deficits, and increased funding for the county pension system.

Resolution takes stand against hate, bigotry

After the Aug. 12 events in Charlottesville, Va., Wayne County Commissioners took a unanimous stand against racism and bigotry and called for investigations of domestic hate groups.

The commission denounced all forms of bigotry, especially that promoted by white supremacist, neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan and anti-Semitic movements, in a resolution co-sponsored by Commissioner Irma Clark-Coleman.

“In troubling times like these it’s important to speak out against hatred and bigotry and to let people know that all people are deserving of freedom and respect, no matter their race, religion or ethnic background,” Clark-Coleman said.

“I am pleased to join with my fellow commissioners in reaffirming our commitment to that principle.”

The resolution urges federal and law enforcement authorities to recognize white supremacist, neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan and anti-Semitic groups as domestic terrorists and investigate and prosecute hate crimes like all other terrorist acts.

Though recognizing the fundamental American right to free speech, the resolution notes that, “these extremist hate groups promote agendas that are in irreconcilable conflict with our nation’s foundational principles of liberty and justice for all.”

The resolution further states that extremist hate groups “have promoted intimidation and violent repression of individuals solely on the basis of their race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and immigration status.”
The Detroit Rape Kit Project has made substantial progress in reducing the backlog of unopened, untested rape kits.

This spring, Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy reported that roughly 10,000 kits have now been tested from the more than 11,300 untested kits that were discovered in a Detroit Police Department storage area. Most of those kits were discovered in 2009, though more than 500 additional untested kits were discovered more recently.

DNA matches from the kits have led to 86 convictions to date. Some 325 cases remain under current investigation and nearly 1,000 additional cases are awaiting investigation.

Discovery of the rape kits helped increase national awareness of the prevalence sexual assault in the U.S. Nearly 800 suspected serial offenders have been identified across 40 states, including Michigan, as a result of the Detroit project.

Last year, Wayne County Commissioners pledged $1 million from the county’s general fund to help conduct the investigation. The county also provided 5,000 square feet of space in county offices at the Guardian Buildings in downtown Detroit to help investigators, prosecutors and task force members with the investigation.

Rape kit investigations have been supported by a grant from the National Institute of Justice, a branch of the U.S. Department of Justice. The project is also supported by grants from non-profits.
Making the grade!

Sack-pack distribution a hit with students

On the eve of the 2017-18 school year, Commissioner Irma Clark-Coleman once again brought smiles to the faces of young students when she presented them with their very own sack-packs.

In conjunction with the Office Depot Foundation, Commissioner Clark-Coleman took time to present tomorrow’s leaders with sack-packs to not only help organize their daily responsibilities in the classroom, but to show her commitment and the importance for young children to receive a quality education.

“Our young children want to learn, they want to be the ones who make a difference in the world,” Commissioner Clark-Coleman said. “In order for that to happen, though, they must be motivated, and they must be excited to come to school every day. Having the necessary supplies enables that to happen and enhances the chances of experiencing and long and successful professional career.”