Wayne County Commissioners approve selling two historic Ford mills, acquiring new park land

Wayne County Commissioners voted Dec. 5 to sell two historic Ford Village Industry mills in Hines Park to artist Tony Roko and developer Richard D. Cox as well as to approve purchase of nearly 17 acres of the long-closed Hawthorne Valley Golf Course in Westland to expand the park.

The proposals involve:

• Sale of the Wilcox Mill site at 230 Wilcox Street, in Plymouth to Mill on Rouge, LLC of Plymouth for $360,000.

• Sale of Newburgh Mill, 37401 Edward N. Hines Drive, in Livonia, Newburg Mill, LLC of Northville for $405,000.

• An agreement allowing the county to buy 16.73 acres of the former Hawthorne Valley site on Merriman Road in Westland from the Wayne County Land Bank for $1 and use the property to expand Hines Park.

The commission voted 11-3 on the sale of each mill site, with Commissioners Glenn S. Anderson (D-Westland), Tim Killeen (D-Detroit) and Diane Webb (D-Livonia) voted no. Commissioner Killeen also voted no on the purchase of the Hawthorne Valley property.

“The proposed sale of Wilcox and Newburgh mills has been a passionate issue for many commissioners and residents for the entire year,” said Commission Chair Alisha Bell (D-
Detroit). “Condos were on the initial plan and I made it known that it was a non-starter for me. Another issue that was important to me was that these mills would keep to the integrity of the park. Everyone here wants what’s best for Hines Park, the mills and the residents of Wayne County.”

The Wilcox Mill site is expected to be converted to an arts studio and education center, with programs for children, under the direction of Roko and support from a local non-profit arts organization.

The Newburgh Mill site has been used by the county parks system to store Wayne County Lightfest displays and to house the Wayne County Sheriff’s Department mounted unit. The buyer will build a new facility for the mounted unit at 8004 N. Farmington Road in Westland as part of the purchase agreement.

The buildings are state historic sites and were among several village industry sites created by auto pioneer Henry Ford to bring small-scale factories to what were then rural communities.

The county has owned both sites since the late 1940s, but the buildings have fallen into significant disrepair over time. Neither site is currently open to the public.

The county retains the right of first refusal on each mill property should the new owners ever decide to sell them.

Wilcox Mill stands on the site of a former flour mill. The current building was designed by famed architect Albert Kahn and dates to 1923.

Newburgh Mill stands on the site of a former cider mill. The current building was created by the Depression-era Works Progress Administration in 1935. Hawthorne Valley closed several years ago and has remained vacant.

The commission’s seven-member Committee on Public Services voted unanimously on Tuesday, Nov. 26 to recommend all three proposals for a full commission vote.