

# JACKSON

Issue X, May/June 2017

BIMONTHLY

## DEMOLITIONS ARE PAYING OFF

A report released last month by the Detroit-based analytic company Dynamo Metrics shows roughly 600 demolitions conducted by the City of Jackson over the last five years preserved more than **\$30 million** in home values across the community.

Since 2012, Jackson has aggressively demolished condemned and City-owned nuisance houses. Through federally funded grants as well as demolition funds, the city spent \$7.5 million for 612 demolitions between 2012 and 2016, making the average cost for demolition about \$12,250.

Dynamo Metrics estimates that this investment preserved \$30,177,684 in neighboring home value, highlighting \$4.02 in preserved home values for every demolition dollar spent.

To establish these estimates, the firm used economic modeling to identify how much worse neighborhoods with distressed houses are compared to vacant lots. On average, a distressed house near a Jackson home reduces the home's value by 2.07 percent, the report found. A nearby vacant lot, on the other hand, reduces the homes value by only .58 percent.

"It is common knowledge that vacant and condemned homes are bad for neighbor-



**A contractor demolishes a structure within the City of Jackson. A new report shows that the demolition program has saved millions in home value.**

hoods," Jackson Mayor Bill Jors said. "They are magnets for crime and lower property values. Now we know just how much home values are negatively affected by blight.

"Our long-term strategy of blight elimination is literally paying off," he added. "I'll take a \$4 return on a \$1 investment all day long."

The Jackson study was made possible through a collaborative, data-sharing exercise amongst various City departments and the Jackson

County Treasurer. Dynamo Metrics has conducted similar studies for Detroit, greater Cleveland, and the Ohio Housing Financing Agency.

"Our report shows that cities of any size can improve their housing market by eliminating nuisance properties," a Dynamo Metrics rep said.

The results of the Jackson demolition report are available on an interactive, easy-to-use website, which can be found by navigating to [www.demolitionimpact/Jackson](http://www.demolitionimpact/Jackson).

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# FAMED MURAL UNVEILED AT LAST

After nearly two years of planning, fund raising and construction, City officials and project donors at last unveiled the Glidden Parker mural during a ribbon cutting event Friday, May 5.

CP Federal City Square now houses the mural within Horace Blackman Park. The structure also includes an art exhibit viewing area, a stage for outdoor performances and events, and a drop-down screen for outdoor movies. O'Harrow Construction began work on the structure last summer.

The 28-by-9-foot stained glass mural is set to be lit during night-time hours.

"This project stands as a testament to what can happen when a community comes together to rebuild their city and make a conscious effort to preserve a piece of art history," said Derek Dobies, 6th Ward councilman and project spokesman.

Funding for the project began with the success of two competitive grants - one from the National Endowment for the Arts and one from the



**Community leaders cut the ribbon on the CP Federal City Square building on May 5. The building is now home to the Glidden Parker mural.**

Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs. Since those funds were awarded in 2015, eight more community organizations stepped forward to help fund the project.

Speakers at the event included Dobies, Jors, Councilman Andrew Frounfelker, CP Federal Credit Union CEO John Crist and special guest Katherine Grossman, Parker's granddaughter.

"I'm very impressed with how this community has rallied together to protect and celebrate this piece of art and this piece of Jackson history," Grossman said during her speech.

Grossman also graciously donated a piece of Glidden Parker pottery to the City of Jackson, which is on display in the back of the building, along with other pieces of

Parker's work and a biography of the artist.

"We are pleased with the outcome of CP Federal City Square and excited to have our name associated with a place in which its sole purpose is to bring the community together to enjoy art, entertainment, fellowship, fun and celebrate the spirit of downtown Jackson," Crist said.

## CITY SET TO BE 'REDEVELOPMENT READY'

The City of Jackson is now working closely with the Michigan Economic Development Corporation to become certified as a "Redevelopment Ready Community."

The certification brings with it the possibility of technical and monetary assistance from the state to market and break ground on possible developments within the community. Through the RRC program, local municipalities receive assistance in establishing a solid foundation for development to

occur in their communities - making the more attractive for investments that create places where people want to live, work and play.

MEDC rep and RRC Manager Michelle Parkkonen spoke with Jackson City Council during a meeting in April. She said the City should be proud of what they've accomplished in the last four years to work toward redeveloping the community.

"We've established a number of best practices for communities to follow for certifica-

tion, and it has to be said that Jackson is already doing most of what we require," she said.

Some of the best practices the MEDC calls for the City to provide an annual report on the progress of the City's master plan, adopt a public participation strategy, and develop a marketing strategy for developments in Jackson, among others.

Once a community is certified as "redevelopment ready," the MEDC will work to market as many development sites as possible both

nationally and internationally, Parkkonen said.

"Any tool that will assist the City in spurring developments like the new loft apartments in downtown Jackson, the possibility of Commonwealth Associates moving their headquarters within the City, and others, is more than welcome," Public Information Officer Will Forgrave said.

Jackson City Council is expected to adopt a resolution in support of this effort soon.





**MAYOR**

Bill Jors

**COUNCIL (Ward)**

- Arlene Robinson 1
- Freddie Dancy 2
- Daniel Greer 3
- Craig Pappin 4
- Andrew Frounfelker 5
- Derek Dobies 6

**CITY MANAGER**

Patrick Burtch

**MEETINGS/EVENTS**

**Monday, May 29**

City Hall Closed  
*Memorial Day*

**June 13 • 6:30 p.m.**

City Council Meeting  
*City Hall, 2nd Floor*

**June 27 • 6:30 p.m.**

City Council Meeting  
*City Hall, 2nd Floor*

**Tuesday, July 4**

City Hall Closed  
*Independence Day*

**July 11 • 6:30 p.m.**

City Council Meeting  
*City Hall, 2nd Floor*

For more information about City programs, visit the City's website at [www.cityofjackson.org](http://www.cityofjackson.org)

# A Day In The Life

## Melanie Curran • Records & Elections Coordinator

While many registered voters in the Jackson community may take an early lunch to go vote in any three of the elections slated for 2017, the 20 minutes they take to cast their ballot pales in comparison to the amount of hard work the City's records and elections coordinator has to put in not only on election day, but many days before and after.

Melanie Curran has been the City of Jackson's records and election coordinator since June 2015, and the Tompkins Township Clerk since 2000. She first worked in the City of Jackson's assessing department before taking on the role of records and elections coordinator.

A typical election month for Melanie starts with her ordering supplies for election night, including ballots and office materials, as well as testing all the voting machines to make sure they are in proper working order.

"I'm also in charge of training all the election workers," she said. "The weeks leading up to an election has me training and collecting absentee ballots."

Melanie said that for presidential elections, there are typically 1,500 absentee ballots that are mailed to her office. She then collects them and keeps them under lock and key up until election night, when they are opened and the votes are tallied.

"The day of the election I'm up at 4 a.m. delivering ballots and laptops and other supplies to the different precincts within the City," she said. "After I drop off materials, I'll spend the entire day traveling to different precincts where there may be issues, and answering any questions all my election workers may have."

Curran said that most election days there will be something that goes wrong, whether it's a voting machine that breaks down or an election worker in need of assistance.

"They're always long days," she said. "But it's what I work for. I love my job."

Curran said that many of the election workers that are employed through the City of Jackson are older than 70.

"It's just the nature of it that we're go-



**Melanie Curran**

ing to need younger election workers to come help in the future," she said.

The job pays \$165-\$200 per election day. Anyone interested in applying can visit Jackson City Hall, 161 W. Michigan Ave., and receive information in the Clerk's Office on the 1st floor.

While Curran is state certified to train election workers, she said election workers themselves are only certified for two years.

"There's a lot of turnover," she said. "We're always looking for new election workers."

When Curran isn't working an election, she serves as the City's records coordinator.

"If someone or some department needs a document, even if that document is more than 100 years old, I know where to get it," she said. "When I first started looking for, say, the minutes from a council meeting 50 years ago, I would just get plain lucky and find them. Now I'm good and getting lucky."



# SUMMER NIGHT TREE SET FOR FACELIFT

After receiving a \$20,000 matching grant from the Weatherwax Foundation as well as a \$2,000 grant award from the Camp Foundation, the Jackson Public Arts Commission is looking to garner private donations for the restoration of the Summer Night Tree sculpture.

Since its installation in 1978, the sculpture has truly become a cultural asset to the City of Jackson, JPAC Chairwoman Stacy Harrison said.

“The restoration of the 10 ton, 30-foot steel sculpture by famed artist Louise Nevelson is a high priority for JPAC,” she said.

Former arts commission chairwoman Janet Meyer-Jackman, who spearheaded the campaign to garner restoration funds, said she

expects the work to cost roughly \$40,000.

“Our first step was to have it appraised,” she said, “which came in at \$4 million from the Pace Gallery in New York City. We then moved to restore the asset since it has been 24 years since the last restoration efforts. McKay Lodge Fine Arts Conservation Laboratory completed the inspection for the restoration.”

The restoration efforts include the removal of all previous paint coatings and corrosion and application of layers of new protective coatings that will maintain the structure for an estimated 30 years.

Donations for the project can be made through the Ella Sharp Museum’s site: [www.ellasharpmuseum.org](http://www.ellasharpmuseum.org).



The Summer Night Tree sculpture, by artist Louise Nevelson, was commissioned by the City of Jackson in the 1970s.

## A Message from Jackson Mayor Bill Jors

Anyone who has lived in Jackson for the last five years cannot, at least with a straight face, say the City is worse off than it was in 2012.

For years, City officials and administrators have said the demolition program has helped Jackson move forward, and for years we were saying it anecdotally - we didn’t have the hard numbers to back up those assertions. Now we do.

A recent report by Detroit-based Dynamo Metrics estimates that the City has saved more than \$30 million in home values through its demolition program, which has demolished roughly 612 blighted and distressed residential

properties since 2012.

For every \$1 spent on demolitions, the City preserved an average of \$4.02 in home values within 500 feet of that site. A banker by trade - I can tell you a \$4 return on a \$1 investment is virtually unheard of, and welcomed news.

Dynamo Metrics has investigated demolition programs in major cities such as Cleveland and Detroit, and their findings show that blight removal doesn’t just work in Midtown, it works in smaller communities like ours as well.

It’s important to note, this does not mean the City now has \$30 million more with which we can spend on infrastructure or services to

residents, but it’s chilling to think how worse off the City would be if we hadn’t started the demolition program in earnest some five years ago.

By preserving \$30 million in home values, property tax revenues have stabilized and for the first time since 2008, property tax revenues are expected to increase in the coming fiscal year.

The demolition program had a direct effect on saving property values, which in turn has increased property tax revenues. This means that the massive construction projects you see this summer, including the repaving and renovation of all of Michigan Avenue, from



the west side of the City to the east side, is a direct result of the demolition program starting more than five years ago today.

For these reasons and others, the future looks bright in Jackson!



# DID YOU KNOW?

## How to Stay 'In The Know' on Construction

City of Jackson residents interested in receiving a weekly update on every single street construction project within the City limits, including traffic reroutes, road closures, and estimated construction completion times, are in luck.

"We created a tool where interested citizens can receive the necessary information on street construction projects so that they can avoid closed streets and remain 'in the know' on projects," Public Information Officer Will Forgrave said. "While we'll continue to provide fre-

quent updates on social media, online, and through periodic press releases, this weekly email includes every detail that inquiring people will want to know.

"We understand it's difficult to get around Michigan in the summer and fall, and we're doing our best to inform residents so they can do just that this construction season," he added.

Those interested can visit the website [www.digjackson.com](http://www.digjackson.com) to sign up for the weekly email.

The "Dig Jackson" project began as a collabora-

tion between the University of Michigan School of Information and the City of Jackson to update residents on the Michigan Avenue construction project in downtown Jackson two years ago.

"We've since expanded the idea to include every construction project City-wide," Forgrave said. "It's a great tool that provides details that media outlets and contractors may leave out when informing people on the project. It cuts out the middleman and comes straight from the engineering division at City Hall."



# POLICE TRAINED TO SPOT BLIGHT

The Jackson Police Department teamed up with the City's Neighborhood & Economic Operations Department this month to train its officers on how to identify blight in the community, and what to do about it.

Retired police officer and current code enforcement officer Shane LaPorte led the weekly sessions with JPD personnel, the last and most recent on May 11.

"It's tried and true," LaPorte said. "If you take care of the smaller problems the bigger issues often take care of themselves."

The two-hour sessions touched on what to do when a police officer identifies a blighted property and which department or state organization handles the various issues that may come up depending on the property in question.

"This idea that 'somebody will take care of this' needs to be suppressed," LaPorte explained. "It's the police department's job to prevent crime and disorder. It starts with law enforcement."

Due to Jackson's reputation for cracking down on distressed properties within the community, not only did JPD personnel attend the training sessions, but officers and administrators from surrounding communities sat in on the seminars as well.

"It's a matter of raising the expectations of an entire community," LaPorte said.



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