

JACKSON



Issue II, Winter 2015/16

QUARTERLY

DOWNTOWN IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The heart of downtown Jackson is open for business.

After roughly 14 months of construction work underneath and along Michigan Avenue between Blackstone and Francis streets, the road was open to traffic last month. Construction highlights include bringing the century-old infrastructure under the street into the 21st century, creating a more walkable downtown core and beautifying the three-block stretch for about \$3 million - start to finish.

A mere hours after opening the street, hundreds of citizens took the opportunity to park in one of the 185 spaces along Michigan Avenue, an increase of 70 spaces along the street. New angle parking along Jackson and Pearl streets added an additional 80 spaces as well.

"All that remains is landscaping and installing electrical plugs along the street's route," said Will Forgrave, public information officer for the City of Jackson. "We're very excited to essentially be done with the project, and we look forward to people utilizing downtown Jackson."

More than 1,000 people did just that during the annual downtown Christmas parade Nov. 20. The parade route

traced the path of construction from Blackstone to Francis Street and many braved the cold for the inaugural Christmas tree lighting ceremony following the parade.

"It looks amazing! Our town reinvented - well done City of Jackson," one Facebook commenter remarked.

"Makes me proud to call Jackson my home town," wrote another shortly after the street was open.

Construction crews updated the water and gas mains along the street, as well as updated electrical and Internet cables below before repaving and renovating the sidewalks along either side. Construction began in August 2014 along one block between Francis and Mechanic streets, with the rest of construction beginning in May.

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Cars and Christmas lights line the newly constructed Michigan Avenue in downtown Jackson.

ARTIST WINS \$100K ON REALITY SHOW

If it wasn't for the Grand River Brewery downtown, artist "Steampunk Eddie" Thayer would likely not be as celebrated as he is today.

The Jackson resident was recently named the winner of the first season of Game Show Network's "Steampunk'd" - a television show which highlighted artists inspired by steam powered machinery - and was awarded \$100,000 for his efforts.

Thayer, who has remained humble in his new-found fame and fortune, credits the Grand River Brewery for much of his success in the steampunk medium.

"This place got me into steampunk art," Thayer recently said during an interview at the brewery and restaurant. "Thirty-two years of custom motorcycles and I lost interest. Then I was able to put my skills to use when (GRB) suggested I do some artwork for them."

Thayer started with a working clock made out of re-used metal gears and electric motors that now rests in the restaurant's entrance way.



"Steampunk Eddie" works on a piece of contemporary art in his garage. (Photo courtesy of Jackson Citizen Patriot)

Shortly after he began creating steampunk art both privately and for Grand River Brewery, fate came calling.

"I had a friend who told me about the show but I didn't think much of it," Thayer said. "I was supposed to fill out an application but instead I just sent them a link to some of my artwork and my contact information. Four days later they said I should try out."

Roughly 25 people tried

out for the show before it was narrowed down to 10.

Thayer spent months away from his family while taping the show in Beverly Hills.

"Each challenge on the show lasted three days, with interviews and an hour break here and there," he said. "I couldn't talk to my family, I couldn't talk to the other contestants between shoots, I couldn't drink - I was basically imprisoned in a nice

Beverly Hills hotel."

Thayer was quick to say he enjoyed his time taping the show, but the time away was taxing.

The Michigan Theatre aired the show's finale. When it was announced Thayer had won the first season's \$100,000 prize, the crowd erupted.

"It was more rewarded than winning the show," Thayer said. "I feel very supported in Jackson."

DNR SETS ASIDE \$300K FOR TRAIL PROJECT

A state department has set aside more than \$567,000 for a trail system through Summit Township and the City of Jackson.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources recommends the City receive \$300,000 in grant funds, while Summit Township and Jackson County are slated to receive \$94,000 and \$173,500, respectively, if state legislators approve the DNR's recommendation.

The funds are earmarked for a new trail along Horton

Road in Summit Township that would connect to a new City trail along Fourth Street by the Ella Sharp Park and the Middle School at Parkside. The trail would then connect to Jackson's Martin Luther King Equality Trail (formerly the inter-city trail) to the north.

"Summit Township is pleased to be included in the DNR recommended projects," Summit Township Supervisor Jim Dunn said. "The \$94,000 will connect township residents to

the City and county trail networks, and the trail will provide a safe alternative for bikers and joggers, among others.

"This would not have happened but for the collaboration with the City on connecting existing trails," he continued. "The result will be a great asset for township and City residents alike."

With an additional \$173,500 earmarked for Jackson County, officials plan to connect the MLK Equality Trail with the Cascades Park

trail loop through Sparks Park and along Kibby Road.

"For years the City worked to connect its trail systems in and around the City so we're very excited that the DNR has come forward recently with a number of grants to help us do just that," said Jackson City Councilman Dan Greer.

Other communities set to receive grant funds include Harbor Beach, Frankenmuth, Grand Traverse County and Clare County, among others.





MAYOR
Bill Jors

COUNCIL (Ward)
Arlene Robinson 1
Freddie Dancey 2
Daniel Greer 3
Craig Pappin 4
Andrew Frounfelker 5
Derek Dobies 6

CITY MANAGER
Patrick Burtch

MEETINGS/EVENTS

DEC. 23-27
City Hall Closed
Christmas Break

JAN. 12 • 6:30 p.m.
City Council Meeting*
City Hall, 2nd Floor

JAN. 18
City Hall Closed
Martin Luther King Day

JAN. 26 • 6:30 p.m.
City Council Meeting*
City Hall, 2nd Floor

**Jackson City Council's 2016 meeting times have yet to be confirmed.*

For more information about City programs, visit the City's website at www.cityofjackson.org

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Department of Public Works

On an average day, a Jackson resident may ride down a city street and think “that’s quite a pothole ... a branch is broken in that yard ... this street needs swept. Why isn’t the city getting to that?”

After all, that’s what the Department of Public Works employee’s job consists of right? Simply tending to complaints. Well, maybe not!

Of course, when things are slow there are times set aside to address the calls of citizens, but nevertheless, on a typical day for the City’s public works department, work demands are fast and furious.

There are 155 miles of streets in the City of Jackson that present all types of challenges.

An average day for the DPW crew means waking at 4 a.m. and getting to work an hour later clearing streets and sidewalks of debris left from weather, city traffic and construction.

One of the more tedious jobs is driving and operating the city’s street sweeper, which can charge ahead at a whopping 4 MPH.

“I’m driving to clean 155 miles of road on both sides, so 300 miles of street cleaning at 2 MPH, and dumping regularly every few blocks,” DPW employee Brian Ahrens, a 15-year veteran, explained. “That’s why it takes more than one person to do this.”

Ahrens said he simply wants city resi-

dents to know DPW employees are out in the city, working virtually every day and night, working their hardest.

“Like all services the city offers, we do our best with what we have to work with,” City Manager Patrick Burtch said. “The city is currently working to ramp up street sweeping within its borders.”

After a snowstorm last year, the city’s DPW crew was awarded with figurative pat on the back - something they’re not always accustomed to in their line of work. When Jackson Public Schools Superintendent Jeffrey Beal was questioned as to why JPS was having classes while every other county school was closed due to weather, he remarked it was “because the City workers cleaned the streets so well and quick.”

Emergencies are so common the term “emergency” almost loses its meaning when working day-in and day-out at the DPW garages in Jackson.

In one such case, public works crews were plowing streets when a radio call required immediate salt where a water main had broken and was leaking water onto the street - water that was soon to be ice, pushing the day’s work back hours.

So the next time you’re wondering why DPW employees haven’t fixed this yet, or that over there, remember it’s not for lack of trying - and it’s likely not a slow day at the office.



A DPW employee drives one of the city’s street sweepers.

CITY BREAKS GROUND ON MURAL PROJECT

A \$50,000 donation from the Weatherwax Foundation was the final piece in a \$394,000 puzzle to break ground on the CP Federal City Square in downtown Jackson.

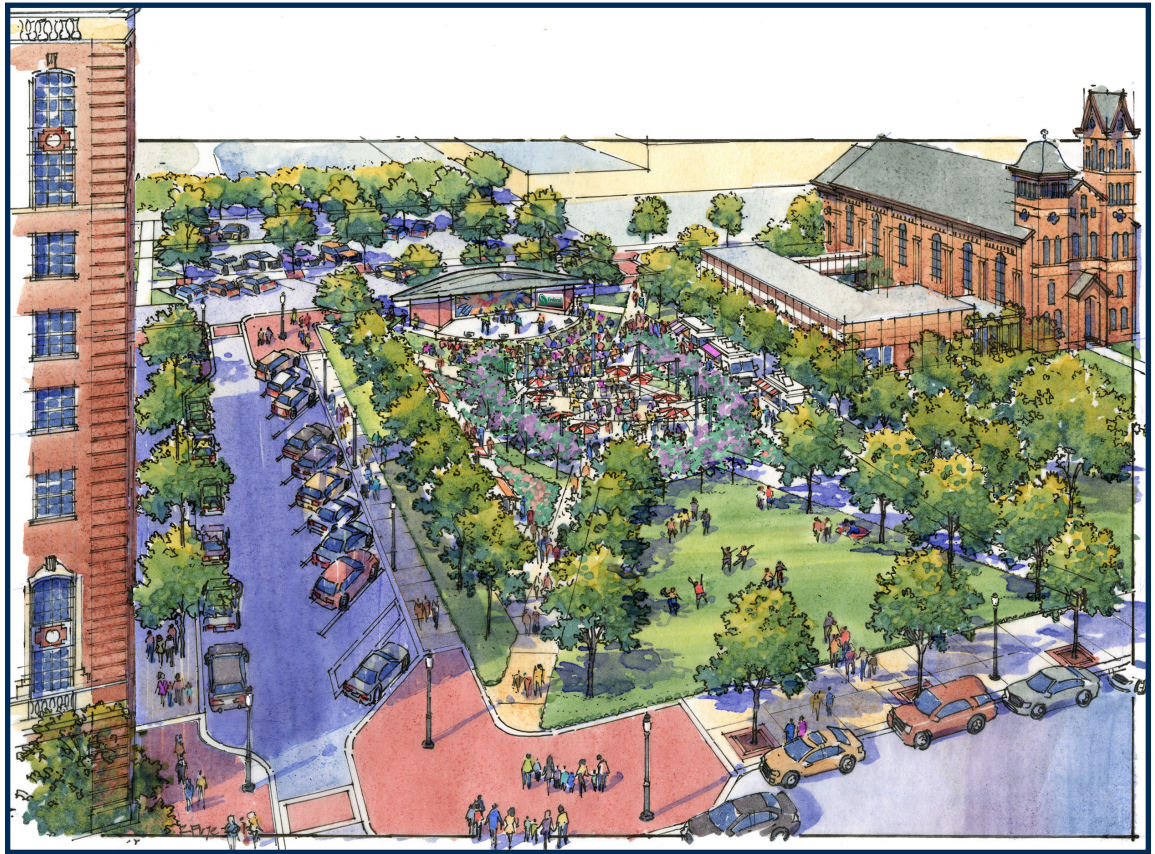
After CP Federal Credit Union officials announced a \$100,000 contribution toward the construction of the Glidden Parker mural project, Weatherwax Foundation officials donated \$50,000 to raise the necessary funds for the climate-controlled gallery site in Horace Blackman Park.

CP Federal City Square will serve as a focal point of a current downtown place-making effort in Jackson's newly completed urban core park. The design of the structure will not only protect and preserve the 9-by-28-foot mural designed by famed artist Glidden Parker, but will include an art exhibit as well as a drop-down screen for outdoor movie nights in Jackson.

"These contributions assures that future generations will be able to enjoy the Glidden Parker mural," said Janet Meyer, chairwoman of the Jackson Public Arts Commission. "These foundations and businesses are a great supporter of the arts in our community."

Funds for the project came from the National Endowment for the Arts (\$50,000), the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (\$75,000), the City of Jackson (\$119,000), CP Federal Credit Union (\$100,000) and the Weatherwax Foundation (\$50,000).

City officials and business leaders broke ground on the project Oct. 30.



An artist's rendering of the proposed CP Federal City Square structure, set to house the Glidden Parker mural in downtown Jackson.

A Message from your Mayor

As your newly elected Mayor, my first message is to wish everyone a happy and safe 2015 holiday season.

I am honored and humbled to be a servant for the taxpayers of Jackson.

Jackson has all the ingredients needed to be a thriving, growing community. We are a very rich community in many ways - our history, location and amenities prove this. Our standard of living for the cost is unbeatable.

Two factors vital to the future of Jackson should be our focus: maintaining a clean and safe city. All successful communities

throughout history possess these two characteristics. Our residents deserve to have clean local streets free of leaves, dirt and debris. Police and fire services will always have room for improvement as long as crime and accidents occur.

We want to stress that city government is here to serve and take direction from its constituents. Speak up, get involved, take action, take responsibility and be heard.

Finally, the city needs your help! We all need to be good, positive ambassadors of the city. No city is perfect, but negative attitudes cost us all money and have



kept Jackson from reaching its potential for decades. Jackson is our home, and we should be proud of it.

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Mayor Bill Jors



DID YOU KNOW?

Administrative Hearings Bureau

Jackson residents who may let garbage pile up outside their home or allow bed bugs to fester unabated can expect the City to enforce such violations through its Administrative Hearings Bureau.

Under state law, cities with a population of 7,500 or more can establish an administrative hearings bureau to address concerns and violations within the city stemming from blight - which the City of Jackson did Jan. 1, 2005.

Jackson was one of the first cities in the state to create an AHB. Since its inception, the AHB has heard more than 2,000 cases regarding code violations - with more than 400 cases in 2015, the most in at least five years.

City leaders adopted the AHB primarily to enforce housing code violations, which can lead to in-

creased property values for all who reside in the City of Jackson.

These violations affect everyone in the City, bringing down property values and negatively impacting the quality of life for residents who live near homes with such violations.

By enforcing compliance, property values for those homes and homes surrounding are raised significantly.

Those who take the time and effort to fix the problem can expect City officials to offer a helping hand while those who ignore the issues face AHB judgments with steep fines and penalties.

The sheer number of cases the AHB oversees shows exactly why the law allows for certain cities to have such bureaus - county courts can be tied up in a number of code violation

cases in cities with larger populations.

City officials witnessed an increase in code compliance over the years, and much of that has to do with the bureau's attempts to work with property owners.

Many issues are resolved before a full hearing is necessary. Property owners often correct violations and clean garbage prior to official AHB action.

The object of the AHB, and other programs like it at City Hall, is to increase the quality of life for every resident in the City, and other cities are taking notice.

Battle Creek representatives learned of Jackson's program and are working to mirror it within their community.

If Battle Creek adopts an AHB program, they will be the eighth community in the state to do so.

NEW INITIATIVE PAIRS POLICE, LEADERS

A committee made up of law enforcement and community leaders was recently created to stay ahead of civil unrest should a controversy swell.

In the wake of the riots in Baltimore and Ferguson, Missouri that followed accusations of police shooting and killing unarmed African American suspects, the 17-person committee hopes to improve relations in the City of Jackson.

"These incidents do have a local effect," Jackson Director of Police and Fire Services Matthew Heins said. "It's important to get out ahead of a problem and foster community relations."

Formally created Oct. 6, the committee will likely meet once or twice a year and is assembling a plan to deal with volatile incidents by focusing on three main points: empathy for those involved, support to allow investigations to run their course and calls for civil rest within the Jackson community.

Should a situation arise, one of the members of the committee will act as spokesperson to inform the public and stay ahead of rumors and speculation before an investigation is conducted.

Law enforcement officials say one contributing factor in Baltimore and Ferguson was a lack of public information.



*Season's Greetings and
Best Wishes for a
Happy New Year*

