

CITY TAKES AIM AT LEAD RISKS

Lead in Flint's water supply has shed new light on an old issue - childhood lead poisoning.

Outside of Flint, Jackson included, the problem does not lie in the water - so why are nearly 5,000 children across the state poisoned each year?

Unfortunately, it's because in Michigan, most communities rely on lead poisoned children to figure out where lead hazards exist.

Most cities in Michigan have no requirement that lead hazards in homes be fixed, or even a requirement to check for lead hazards before a home is rented or sold.

Now, a new initiative proposed by Jackson officials hopes to take aim at this epidemic.

Officials unveiled a new program last month in line with their continued efforts to curb lead risks in the community and educate citizens on the dangers associated with lead.

In consultation with the Jackson County Health Department, officials opted to move forward with reevaluating the city's property registry standards to determine where changes could be made to increase lead safety in non-owner occupied properties and plan to host an expert forum on the issue

in April.

The proposed change calls for non-owner occupied property owners to provide a lead risk assessment as a condition of registering their property with the City of Jackson.

Modeled after a similar effort in Detroit passed in 2010, the change would require landlords to work with a certified lead inspector to conduct the assessment on properties constructed before 1978. In some cases, a Michigan Department of Health and Human Services program can provide free lead risk assessments and lead hazard control work to landlords under certain conditions such as housing a pregnant woman or a child younger than 6.

"Currently, laws require landlords to disclose any known hazards in the home," Jackson Public Information Officer Will Forgrave said. "In some cases, property owners sign off saying they simply aren't aware of any specific lead hazards, provide a handout on how to protect children from lead and move on."

City officials say the change would require landlords to disclose where lead hazards exist in the home, if any risks associated with the property exist at all.

"Before you can solve a



Lead paint cracks and chips off the siding of a home.

problem you have to know where that problem is coming from," Jackson Mayor Bill Jors said. "Hopefully, through public education and proper initiatives, we can begin to fix it."

According to the most recent data report on childhood lead testing and elevated levels in the state's Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, the City of Jackson had the second highest blood lead levels in the state - nearly triple the rate of Flint in some catego-

ries.

With tests showing high water quality in the city, officials believe elevated lead levels are a result of lead paint in city homes built before 1978, the year federal law called for the elimination of lead paint and pipes in newly built homes.

"It's time for communities across the state to commit to an end to childhood lead poisoning," City Councilman Derek Dobies, 6th Ward, said. "It's just that simple."

NEW DEVELOPMENTS COMING DOWNTOWN

Downtown Jackson is poised for a rebirth with three developers pushing four new projects.

John Burtka, who began his investment in Jackson three years ago with the Grand River Brewery, announced two new projects in the works with his development partner Nicholas Dyc - the most recent a new restaurant and 12 apartment spaces within the former One Five One restaurant building, 151 W. Michigan Ave.

Burtka announced earlier this month his plan to restore the exterior of the building to its original appearance and completely change the interior for the restaurant and apartments. Construction could begin as early as this summer.

"The attitude of the City and its investment in our downtown infrastructure has created a beautiful blank canvas just waiting to be painted," Burtka said.

Dyc echoed Burtka's comments.

"The city has been helpful in our plans and hopefully this spurs more growth downtown," he said. "Hopefully this is just the beginning."

Burtka's second develop-



A rendering of the proposed development at 151 W. Michigan Ave. in downtown Jackson. The site is expected to include apartments and a new restaurant.

ment highlights a four-story apartment complex near the corner of Jackson Street and Louis Glick Highway. The 44,000-square-foot project calls for a grocery store on the first floor with 30 market-rate apartments above.

A new bar and restaurant at 140 W. Michigan Ave., owned and operated by Le-Master, owner of The Chase sports bar, is also in the

works.

The new location will feature a 1964 biplane hanging from the ceiling, much like The Chase features a race car driven by NASCAR driver Rusty Wallace hanging above the bar.

The restaurant will offer chicken wings and 40 beers on tap and plans include a patio to the east of the building.

Rounding out the exciting list of new projects is a gourmet hotdog restaurant and bar where Libby's Jazz Club once operated.

Mike Kerrigan plans to open "The Junkyard Dog" as soon as possible.

"I think Jackson residents are going to be pleasantly surprised this summer," he said. "There are a lot of big things happening downtown."

SOME RESIDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR 33 PERCENT OFF DELINQUENT CITY BILLS THROUGH APRIL

In an effort to reduce the number of unpaid Administrative Hearings Bureau judgements, Jackson officials provided some property owners with an opportunity to receive a reduction in their outstanding AHB judgement balances last month.

This initiative comes on the heels of having roughly \$762,500 in unpaid judgements, some dating back to

2005. The city's resolution is modeled after a two-day event in Detroit, which allowed city residents to resolve unpaid tickets without the risk of paying late and warrant fees.

Pursuant to the resolution passed Feb. 9, Jackson property owners who were issued a judgement prior to Jan. 1, 2016, can receive a 33

percent reduction in their delinquent AHB judgements if paid in full before April 30, 2016. Any interest or late fees that have accumulated over the years will be waived for those who participate in the amnesty program.

For those unfamiliar with AHB, it is a program established consistent with state statute to address, reduce

and eliminate blight within the city. Blight is considered anything that impairs, destroys or deteriorates a person's property. Examples include failure to maintain structurally sound and sanitary living conditions.

The city enforces state and city zoning, building and housing laws to eliminate blight.





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

MARCH 25

City Hall Closed
Good Friday

MARCH 29 • 6:30 p.m.

City Council Meeting
City Hall, 2nd Floor

APRIL 12 • 6:30 p.m.

City Council Meeting
City Hall, 2nd Floor

April 26 • 6:30 p.m.

City Council Meeting
City Hall, 2nd Floor

APRIL 30

Deadline to get 33 percent off AHB bills

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

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Water Treatment Operators

Jackson's water treatment plant is whirring with energy 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year to keep our water safe, and with plant supervisor Bob Koehn and operator Chuck Radecki at the helm, the city is in good hands.

Koehn has been in water treatment for over 20 years while Radecki is a Michigan State University graduate with expertise in chemical and micro-biology.

These employees can recite the numbers of the "Langlier Index" for safe water and work complicated mathematical formulas one day and quickly grab a wrench and hard hat to fix a leak the next.

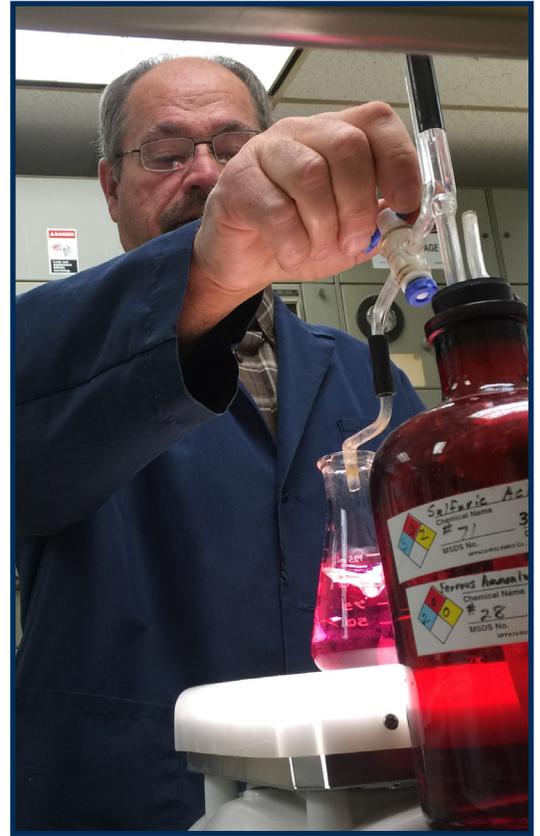
Because it is one of only two state certified micro-biology labs, our Jackson plant has experts test water for other communities as well as private systems.

If you're untrained in the science, it's easy to get lost as these two professionals describe their work as they perform a complicated scientific balancing act that if done wrong or careless could affect thousands of local homes and residents.

Radecki tests water from nine different locations in the plant daily. He also constantly monitors computer systems that give readings on every gallon of water moving through the water treatment plant. He then takes the numbers to Koehn, who computes the PH balance of the water and determines what steps the plant needs to take to harden or soften the water.

"If the PH is too high, the water will be too hard and calcium will form causing deposits in our water mains and problems in homes," Koehn explained. "If it's too low, it will attack metals and materials which could lead to residents clothes becoming thin or leaching metal from pipes, the source of Flint's current problems."

Rather than simply relying on their own lab tests of the water moving through the plant and into our city's distribution system, the water treatment plants also retrieves water from several locations in the city, Blackman Township and the state prison.



Bob Koehn

Lead and copper tests are just two of the many tests performed to monitor our local drinking water.

"Although our water comes from a groundwater source and it's not as susceptible to organic microorganisms as surface water coming from a river or stream, we still want to be safe and make sure that there are no bacteria or harmful fungi that is in our water," Radecki said.

Recently, the plant has been inundated with questions about lead levels in Jackson water, but they have the experience and records to prove that Jackson's drinking water is among the best in the state.

Although you may never recognize Bob, Chuck or any of the other men and women that monitor our water treatment plan as you may a local politician, it's nice to recognize that there are a group of unsung heroes here in Jackson keeping us safe and allowing us to take clean, healthy water for granted.



CITY RAMPS UP TAP WATER TESTS

In the wake of the lead water crisis in Flint, Jackson officials are ramping up their efforts to improve water testing in the city - going above and beyond federal water testing guidelines.

While the Environmental Protection Agency requires Jackson to test homes within the city every three years for lead in the water supply, officials said they will begin to test lead levels annually while doubling the EPA-required number of homes tested.

The state Department of Environmental Quality will oversee the city's usual lead and copper tests in 30 locations within Jackson, while city officials employ an independent firm to test an additional 30 locations.

"The water crisis in Flint has raised concerns else-

where, including in Jackson, and those concerns have not fallen on deaf ears," said Patrick Burtch, Jackson City Manager. "The city has sampled drinking water for lead and copper since 1992 - the year the federal Safe Drinking Water Act went into effect - and has never exceeded the EPA action level.

When sampling for lead and copper in the drinking water, locations most at risk of pipe corrosion are selected, which brings with it the possibility of high lead and copper amounts in the water, said Todd Knepper, director of the city's Department of Public Works. Roughly 80 percent of homes tested have lead water lines or lead components, he said.

"This is why the water is treated," Knepper said.



POLICE ACADEMY IS TAKING APPLICATIONS

On behalf of the Jackson Police Department and Jackson County Office of the Sheriff, applications are now accepted for the 2016 Citizen Police Academy.

The CPA is aimed at citizens interested in gaining knowledge of the daily operations and procedures of the Jackson Police Department and Sheriff's Office.

Any Jackson County resident is encouraged to apply. Students will meet on 10

consecutive Wednesdays from 6-8 p.m. beginning April 13.

Some of the topics covered include Police K-9 units, firearms instruction, narcotics investigations and use of force applications.

Participants will have the opportunity to ride on patrol and test their skills on the shooting range.

For more information, visit the JPD website at www.cityofjackson.org/166/police-department.

Mayor Bill Jors: Jackson's Future looks Bright

Roughly three months into my term as Jackson mayor it's safe to say I'm still learning how and why it is we do some of the things we do at City Hall, but the more I learn the more confident I am in the city's future.

While I still have to brush up on my Robert's Rules of Order for council meetings, the more important aspects of governing like lawmaking, budgeting, city planning and economic development are beginning to turn this city around.

New downtown developments such as two new restaurant and apartment spaces along Michigan Av-

enue and an apartment complex/grocery store on Louis Glick Highway show that private investors are beginning to take a chance on Jackson - a welcome improvement compared to years past.

Similarly, the residential housing market is improving on the heels of the city's demolition program. Last year marked the first increase in home values since the housing crash in 2008, and this year home values are expected to increase more than 4 percent.

With increases in developments and home values come increases in tax rev-

enue, which in turn means more services and programs for city residents.

And other communities are taking notice, with Jackson serving as an example of what can be done to turn around a community quickly and effectively.

Finally, city officials are taking steps to ensure all Jackson residents are safe from the harmful effects of lead. Whether that lead be in the city's water supply or within old Jackson homes, rest assured community leaders are taking the necessary steps to curb the dangerous element and keep us safe.



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

Mayor Bill Jors



DID YOU KNOW?

Property Values on the Upswing

The housing market crash that crippled home values across the United States beginning in 2008 is still - for many communities - negatively affecting residential values.

Jackson is no longer one of those communities.

In October of 2011, City Manager Patrick Burtch presented a plan to Jackson City Council and the community that promised a measurable effect on our local economy. An integral part of this plan was, and continues to be, the demolition of vacant and blighted homes within the city coupled with a non-owner occupied inspection program.

Now, Jackson residents are beginning to see the benefits of the city's demolition program and rental registry initiative.

Last year marked the first time since the housing market crash that residential values increased within the city - highlighting a \$4 million boost, or a 1.4 percent increase.

This year, home values are expected to increase 4 percent, or roughly \$11 million city-wide.



"I'm happy to report that no matter how we review and analyze the data, it still points to the same conclusion," Burtch said. "We are witnessing a strong turnaround in the city's economic condition."

City leaders had estimated in 2011 a positive change within the city's home values would take five years to accomplish - the first uptick in home values occurred just four years after the demolition program began, one year ahead of schedule.

"Other cities, along with the federal government, have taken notice," Public Information Officer Will Forgrave said. "Simi-

lar programs are underway in Detroit, Flint, Saginaw, Grand Rapids and Pontiac, to name a few."

Prior to 2014, city officials opted to use a portion of local tax dollars to demolish vacant and blighted properties. The current round of home demolitions, though, will come at no cost to the City of Jackson.

Jackson received \$5.5 million in federal funds to continue its demolition program in 2014. Well over 200 vacant homes are set to be demolished under the Help For Hardest Hit Blight program, with more positive results on the way, Forgrave said.

ONLINE SERVICE TO HELP LOCAL STARTUPS

Starting a business can often be a complex and time-consuming process, but a new online tool through the City of Jackson will help entrepreneurs reach their dream.

Last summer, Jackson became one of 25 cities across the nation awarded a \$50,000 prize aimed at facilitating solutions for entrepreneurs to discover and apply for business requirements, ranging from federal to local permits. City officials this month opted to source the service to OpenCounter, a company well-versed in creating the proposed online tool.

The \$50,000 will cover the costs for creating the system and monitoring it for three years. The service - which includes a zoning mapping tool to help entrepreneurs pick a business site and a "one stop shop" for business permitting information - is expected to be up and running this summer.

"We must continue to find ways to make it easier to start a small business in the city," said City Councilman Derek Dobies, 6th Ward. "OpenCounter is one way we are re-tooling our economic development efforts in the city to support a more vibrant business environment."

City employees are currently gathering the required information for OpenCounter to build the site.



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www.facebook.com/cityofjacksonmi/

