

Split Hines to control youths

By TOM LONERGAN

As sure as December beckons snow, the month of May brings out new proposals to "control" Hines Park.

For youths, the 17-mile parkway, which winds through western Wayne County, is a popular summer gathering spot.

For some adjacent homeowners, it's a sore spot.

Several homeowners last week urged a Wayne County Board of Commissioners committee to consider closing the park, banning alcoholic beverages and "concentrate on getting rid of the riff-raff that cause all the problems."

The Public Safety and Judiciary Committee, which met last Wednesday at the sheriff department's Patrol and Investigation Headquarters in Westland, formed a subcommittee that will report by May 29 on an alcohol ban, a minimum 25 miles-per-hour speed limit along Edward N. Hines Drive and two-way/no parking zones.

Recommendations may be made to the three-member Board of County Road Commissioners, who also act as park trustees.

SECTIONS OF the park have been closed twice since mid-April due to overcrowding, according to Lt. Thomas Harrett, commander of the sheriff's Hines Park division.

Harrett said this year's popular youth gathering spot is a section in Westland between Merriman and Ann Arbor Trail.

The county board committee met to consider a proposal by Commissioner Thomas Presnell, D-Westland, to divide the parkway into eight or nine separate sections, each with its own entrance and exit.

Presnell's proposal would break up Hines Drive, a county primary road, with cul-de-sacs, or dead-end turnarounds. He said sectioning the parkway would prevent young crowds from moving easily to different areas of the park.

Inspector Richard Novak, head of the sheriff's Patrol & Investigation Division, said the parkway could not be sectioned.

'The unemployment problem and the economic situation are going to feed the fire this year.'

"As far as law enforcement is concerned, we can't do it," Novak told the county board committee, "but we're willing to discuss it."

NOVAK SAID the county should not "give up one inch of that park or roadway," by closing it. He said 10 percent of the young people who frequent the park are "screw-ups."

"If we've got a problem, we'll just keep leaning on them," he said. Sections of the park will be closed when it becomes impossible for sheriff's deputies to move from section to section. On warm summer weekends, sections of the park attract up to 40,000 people.

Novak suggested the committee urge the road commission to set a minimum 25 mph speed limit on Hines Drive and no parking/tow-away zones.

Young drivers "cruising" through the park at speeds much slower than the driver's posted 40 mph speed limit is a major cause of congestion when the park is crowded, according to sheriff's officials.

Parks Superintendent Edwin Mika said "40 to 60 percent" of Hines Drive has been posted with "no parking" signs.

TWO DEARBORN Heights homeowners, whose backyards abut Hines Park, urged the committee to close the park. The county manages the park "as an attractive nuisance," one said.

Gregory McMillan of Westland, who lives near the Hawthorne Ridge section of the parkway, said he, his wife and two children, "don't feel comfortable" sitting in their back yard.

"We undergo many insults and other kinds of things (from park visitors)," he

headquarters and a mobile mini-station, which will be in the eastern end of the park.

Prior to last weekend, 436 had been arrested in the park since May 1.

The vast majority, says Harrett, were for misdemeanors such as drinking, marijuana and disorderly conduct.

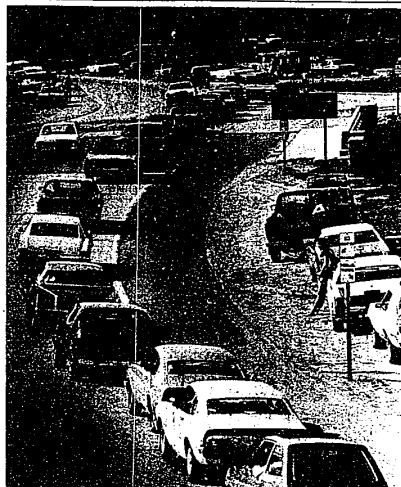
"ANYONE SEEN out there walking on the shoulder drinking is getting a ticket," Harrett said. People drinking on the grassy areas away from the asphalt shoulder aren't ticketed, he said. Those drinking on the shoulder are issued a ticket and asked to leave the park, Harrett said. If they don't leave, they're arrested.

The state's drinking law banning drinking by those under 21, upped from age 18 by voters two years ago, has attracted even more youths to Hines Park, Harrett said.

When the age was 18, park crowds were smaller Friday and Saturday evenings, he said.

Harrett expects larger crowds in Hines this summer because the unemployment rate is up and gasoline is more expensive.

The park, he says, "can't be a flood basin, a scenic area, a singles bar for the kids and a thoroughfare for people going to work, according to Lt. Thomas Harrett of the Wayne County Sheriff's Department."


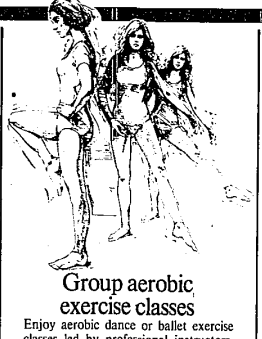






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SHAPE UP FOR SUMMER



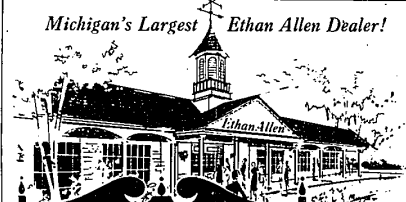
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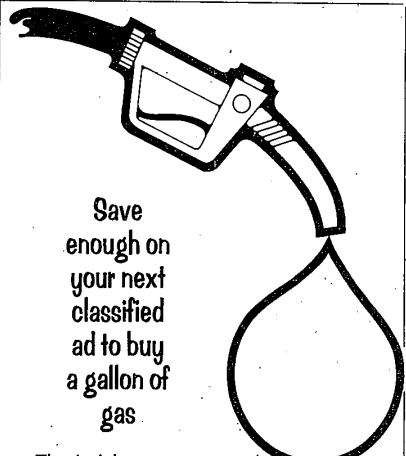
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