

OBSERVATION POINT

DISSENT

Here's A Big Parks Issue That Needs A Lot Of Help



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

It's only three short months to election day, and the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority will need plenty of citizen and civic group support to round out its unexcelled program.

In the Aug. 4 primary, you'll recall, Detroit voters approved leasing of Belle Isle, the 980-acre island park in the Detroit River, to the five-county HCMA.

Now the HCMA must (a) get the Legislature to put a quarter-mill property tax proposal on the ballot in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Washtenaw and Livingston counties and (b) get the voters to approve it.

NOT THAT ANY of us suburbanites really needs to get the modest tax passed to enjoy Belle Isle. Non-residents have been enjoying Detroit's park at Detroit's expense since 1879.

But the lovely old park has had some bad days, and it needs some new facilities and redevelopment that Detroit alone can't afford. Moreover, Detroit alone would be foolish to pay for it all, considering the regional nature of Belle Isle.

Besides, the Huron-Clinton authority has built all its excellent parks so far on the northern and western fringes of the five county region, far away from Detroit, and yet Detroiters have helped pay for and used the parks for 30 years.

THE MONETARY situation at a glance, as we get it from HCMA Director David Laidlaw, is this:

In 1940 voters in the five-county region approved a quarter-mill property tax to develop a series of large parks, that in effect, form a greenbelt around the metropolitan area.

Without raising the tax rate, HCMA has been able to develop Metropolitan Beach, Kensington Park, Stony Creek, Lower Huron, a picnic area on Cass Lake, and three smaller ribbon-like parks northwest of Ann Arbor.

They constitute eight of the best-managed, most efficiently run, cleanest parks you've ever seen, despite the most valiant efforts of the populace to trash 'em up. But I digress.

At first, most of the quarter-mill tax was used for land acquisition and development of facilities. In recent years, more of the money has gone into operations.

"We know from the TALUS studies that more regional parkland is needed," says Dave Laid-

law. "We'll have to double our acreage in the next 15 years just to stay even with the needs of the population. We need another two or three major parks -- not as big as a Kensington, but about the size of Stony Creek."

And so it's quite apparent that we'd need to come up with some more regional park funds anyhow, even without the Belle Isle problem.

WHAT THE HURON-CLINTON Metropolitan Authority is proposing is a 10-year, \$40 million redevelopment plan for Belle Isle plus some additional park development in the outskirts of the region.

This we could get for the low, low, bargain-basement price of a quarter-mill, which translates to \$3.75 a year for a \$30,000 house or \$2.50 for a \$20,000 house, if there are any of those any more.

Put another way, it's the price of one ticket to an "X" movie or 25 percent of the price to the Goose Lake Rock Festival.

The quarter-mill would raise \$4.6 million a year at the outset and more as our population and tax base increase. Thus, HCMA could undertake the Belle Isle plan and have other funds for fur-

ther development and operations.

There's no danger that the funds will be misused because as Dave Laidlaw points out: "We're a single-purpose authority, and people know if they vote money for parks, that's what they're going to get."

DEPENDING ON what the Legislature decides in putting the plan on the ballot, it's likely that all of our votes will be counted in one lump. No single county will be able to veto the plan if the majority in the entire region wants it.

HCMA still would have to negotiate a long-term lease with Detroit for Belle Isle. Laidlaw is hoping it can be done at a token rental fee, and he's a pretty thrifty suburbanite himself.

I pointed out at the outset that it's going to take a broad-based education program to tell the voters about the HCMA ballot proposal, and our conservation clubs, chambers of commerce, League of Women Voters chapters, Jaycees and others ought to consider this project. No "hard sell" should be necessary.

It'll be hard to say no to 30 years of excellent park management.



R.T. Thompson writes

Why Political Dirt Is Harmful

One often hears the statement, especially around election time, that politics are "dirty" and some politicians will use every tactic possible to gain a few votes.

Oftentimes these tactics involve taking whatever steps are necessary to discredit an opponent. In many instances these steps may be just short of libel and slander.

Then one hears such talk as: "everything is fair in love and politics."

Everything may be fair in love but politics is something else and it is our opinion that politicians should sit down after a heated campaign and evaluate for themselves whether all of the "dirty" thrown was worth the effort.

THE RECENT PRIMARY could be used as an excellent sample of just how far one goes in search of votes.

It is one thing to stand up before a crowd of frenzied followers and blast an opponent as the biggest blackguard in history. It is another thing to stand up with that same opponent on the speak-

ers' platform and make the same kind of statements.

Perhaps we are a bit naive about politics. Perhaps we don't understand that this all goes with the game and both sides are well aware of it.

But the fact remains that a politician can quickly forget what was said and what took place during the campaign after the votes are counted.

We have a very strong belief that the politician may forget but what about his followers who have swallowed all of that "dirty" he has been handing out.

We have discovered that they believe every word they hear. They flood the newspapers with letters to the editor ripping Candidate X from top to bottom.

Many of these letters have to be tossed in the waste basket for the simple reason they are jammed with libelous statements.

The real harm comes after the election when these rabid followers continue to harass and rundown the winning candidate, if it happens to be the one they didn't support.

There can only be one winner in any contest, be it politics, sports or what have you.

AND IN MANY CASES there is a group that refuses to accept defeat. Their man or their team wasn't beaten. The victor used unfair tactics, the loser or losing team was "robbed."

Perhaps, there will always be this kind of group. Perhaps

they never will understand that someone has to lose and someone has to win.

But it's high time that politicians took score of their actions and conducted campaigns that are honorable and forget about the backbiting tactics that leave a very bad taste in the mouths of most electors.

One doesn't have to run down and cut up an opponent because he is old or because he is in a wheelchair. There may come a time when the shoe is on the other foot, when that politician is old and perhaps crippled...then one wonders how he would feel when the same "dirty" tactics are used against him.

We feel it's time for thought and we believe many voters have the same feeling.

Tim Richard writes

Bad Guys of Music

It would be nice to be able to praise the atmosphere of Meadow Brook and the performances of the Detroit Symphony and violinist Itzhak Perlman, but the money-grubbing and bad manners of Meadow Brook's officialdom makes that physically impossible.

Consider the recent visit of our party of four to the Oakland University grounds for a concert. We had purchased \$16 worth of advance tickets to the pavilion, supposedly entitling us to unserved chairs.

But there were no chairs. Every one was filled. Quite obviously, the promoters of the Meadow Brook Festival had sold more tickets than they had seats.

POLITELY We explained the situation to the men at the ticket office. Curtly we were told there were two chairs but that they wouldn't hunt out seats for us at this point because we were late.

Well, in the first place, it simply wasn't true that there were chairs available. In the second place, we weren't late; we had timed our arrival for 8:10

p.m. and had spent 25 minutes in a traffic jam of concert-goers on Walton Road and another 10 minutes hunting vainly for seats.

And in the third place, even if we could have found single chairs, it might have meant crawling over 40 or 50 people because there are an insufficient number of aisles in the pavilion.

This remark was greeted with a rude sneer, although we held our tempers. Indeed, the only four-letter word we used was "seat."

Refused a full \$16 refund, we offered to settle for a compromise -- a refund of the difference between pavilion seats and the informality of sitting on the grass.

The men at the ticket office agreed, but when they gave us \$6 back, one sarcastically remarked: "If you can't find seats on the grass, it's your own fault."

THERE WAS INDEED space on the grass, but so many tickets had been sold that about 350 to 400 persons spilled over the crest of the hill and could see nothing.

I myself managed to get within sight of the orchestra, however. I don't know how far away I was, but let me put it this way: By the time we could hear Perlman's down-bow, he was already on the up-bow. (Sound travels at -- what? -- a thousand feet a second?)

We talked to another angry couple who had purchased pavilion seats in advance and were unable to find seats. Like us, they had purchased them at Hudson's, and the lady said:

"Did you pay cash? You shouldn't. I never do. Always charge your tickets in case anything goes wrong."

At first, I thought it would be unfair to punish Hudson's for the greediness and boorishness of the Meadow Brook people. On the other hand, maybe the handsome and influential Joseph L. Hudson Jr. would be better able to persuade the bad guys at Meadow Brook to mend their methods and manners.

Meanwhile, I know of at least six music lovers that are boycotting the Meadow Brook Music Festival.

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By PARKER ERVIN
Plymouth

I wish to offer my dissent to a Dissent column by Sherry Kahan in the Observer August 5:

Her remark that "we Americans are a very violent country," implies that our country is more violent than others. I suggest that to gain perspective she open a history of the world covering only the last 200 years (since that period roughly parallels the life of our nation) and let her find a country that, judging from criteria of violence and injustice, is without sin.

Will it be France which, a dozen years after our own revolution, made mass holiday spectacles of the beheading of their 16th Louis and his queen, along with their servants and their sisters and their cousins and their aunts? Will it be Russia which disposed of its royal family (in the present century) by grouping them into a small basement room and pumping bullets into them including, as always, women and children?

And shall we pause here, for a long moment of silence to consider the millions upon millions of utterly innocent people who were not despotic rulers or exploiters but who nevertheless met violent deaths there and around the globe to advance the banner of the hammer and sickle?

I ALSO SUGGEST that the student of violence examine the saga of Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich.

How about Ireland in 1920, 21 and now? Or how peaceful has life been in the so called "banana republics" south of our border? And the noises heard from the Middle East today do not sound like exercises in brotherly love.

The Boston Tea Party, so stirringly deplored by Miss Kahan and many of our contemporaries, seems like a very weak cup of tea when framed against the backdrop of violence around the world.

The Dissent column in question also made the statement that the Boston Massacre of 1770 was an important step in our own nationhood. To this I thoroughly agree, but for a different reason. It seems to me that the significance of the Boston Massacre lay in the fact that the British soldiers who fired on the crowd that snowy day were defended in court by lawyer John Adams -- a foremost architect of the new republic. And in the singular action of Adams rests the thesis of the American Revolution.

For the founders of that republic were no howling window breakers and hurlers of bombs. They were thoughtful, deliberate, realistic men, articulately aware of their own weaknesses and in deed, of all human weakness as well.

The 56 signers of the Declaration included many young men -- 18 were still in their 30s, three were in their 20s; only one (Ben Franklin) was a really old man. The group included farmers, merchants, lawyers, medical doctors, large landowners, one former indentured servant, and the "agitator", Sam Adams, whose friends bought him a suit and a horse to help him put on a good front at the assembly.

They were, largely, men who had the most to lose. They laid it all on the line and many of them lost it -- their homes sacked and burned, their families captured (some dying in jail) or scattered. Not one of the 56 recanted.

It is good for us to remember these things because it is becoming a kind of badge of honor to lambast our nation's past, thereby confusing her present issues and certainly compromising her future. Yet despite the thunderous accusations of injustice to minorities, inequities, violence, etc., etc., I note that the world's "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" still come knocking at her door.

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