

Detroit plans to plant thousands of trees to go green

By JOHN GALLAGHER
Detroit Free Press

DETROIT — In what may be the city's most ambitious ecological project ever, Detroit plans to plant tens of thousands of trees in two quarter-square-mile patches to show how greening strategies can improve life for everyday Detroiters.

Maurice Cox, the city's director of planning, told the Detroit Free Press the project will target two districts: the Fitzgerald neighborhood and the area in and around the old Herman Kiefer hospital complex.

Cox said every vacant lot within those quarter-square-mile districts would be either planted with trees or given some other "green" or "blue" treatment — rain-water gardens, fields of sunflowers, urban farms and more. It would be paid for largely with money from philanthropic foundations. The city will team with the nonprofit Greening of Detroit to get the work done.

The project represents a big bet that embracing green and blue strategies on a major scale will convert Detroit's vast expanses of vacant and abandoned land — estimated variously at 20 square miles to more than 30 — from a negative to a positive. "Land is our greatest asset," Cox said.

Economic development strategies usually involve new housing, retail, commercial or industrial projects. But the greening campaign will test — on perhaps the largest scale ever — whether widespread greening strategies can deliver an economic benefit as

real and significant as new construction. "We want to show that you can increase property values without building a single house in a neighborhood," Cox said. "Research shows that the greener the neighborhood the higher the property values, so we think we can have an impact on that."

Detroit and other cities have already been experimenting along these lines for years, with hundreds of community garden plots created in the city and projects such as Hantz Woodlands and the RecoveryPark farming project moving ahead. But the plan Cox describes would be bigger and more concentrated than any yet seen and could serve as a model for postindustrial cities worldwide.

The multiple goals include creating jobs by hiring and training residents as landscape workers, cutting air pollution, and keeping rainwater and snowmelt out of the city's already burdened sewer overflow system.

Training a workforce from among neighborhood residents will become a key part of the program. Rebecca Salminen Witt, president of the Greening of Detroit, said her organization plans to hire up to 100 residents from the districts this winter to have them trained and ready to do the landscaping work next spring and summer.

"Our goal is to recruit people from the neighborhoods where these things are happening," she said. "A change in landscape feels a lot better to you when someone from your neighborhood is chosen to do the

work." Academic research in recent years in cities such as Philadelphia has found a link between greening strategies and benefits such as crime reduction and improved health for residents.

"We think we can have an impact on safety and security, and impacts on illegal dumping," Cox said. "People generally don't dump on beautiful flower beds. There's a whole psychology about areas that are cared for, that appear that someone genuinely is taking care of it, stewarding that land."

With that in mind, the project will not appear "wild" as if left to nature, but will appear well-tended and planned, Witt said.

"It's going to create real significant ecosystem services" for residents, Witt said. "They're going to notice that the air feels cleaner, that the flooding is reduced, that their property values are going up."

Cox emphasized that point. "We're convinced that this is something that's going to make a visible difference in peoples' lives," he said. "They see it when they take a walk."

Deciding what happens with each vacant parcel will be determined in coming months after more talks with residents.

"We're not being real exact about that because we want to leave room for community engagement," Witt said. "If people want to see fields of sunflowers, we will find a way."

Getting buy-in from residents of the two districts is key to the project's success.



BREWERS DONATE

The Shiawassee County Area Brewers Society (SCABS) donated to Toys for Tots and the Salvation Army on Tuesday. SCABS made its annual \$100 donation to Toys for Tots, and \$280 was collected during the club's Christmas party. Seen here, from left, are Salvation Army board member Ed Hildebrant, SCABS President Greg Gerding, Toys for Tots coordinator Jerry Alcorn, Salvation Army Lt. Jonathan Tamayo and SCABS Vice President Eric Hildebrant.

Courtesy Photo

STATUE

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Art and Design in Grand Rapids, Ryan Leslie decided to build a public sculpture and found inspiration in Curwood, Nathan Leslie said.

Ryan Leslie even lived at a cabin in Roscommon for a time, his brother said, to hunt and fish in hopes of gaining insight into the personality of Owosso's favorite son.

"He asked me, 'How do you think I should start making a sculpture?' And I said, you should find someone you admire and see where that takes you," said Nathan Leslie, a fellow sculptor who works as a furniture designer. "Life is about initiative, doing something without being told to do it. Ryan took the initiative and tried to follow in (Curwood's) footsteps."

Not long before his death,

Ryan Leslie completed a 1/8 scale sculpture inspired by a famous photograph of Curwood taken after he caught a 15 1/2-pound northern pike on the Upper Peninsula's Cut River.

Familial favoritism aside, Nathan Leslie said, it was a standout piece for a first-time sculptor.

The new statue was constructed by a well-respected firm in North Carolina and at just over 6 feet tall, Nathan Leslie added, "it's exactly as (Ryan Leslie) would have imagined it."

"The proportions are right on the money. It's really impressive. I think that when people see it they're going to say, 'Wow, that's pure American culture right there, he really captured it.' I can't wait to see it go up."

Wheeler is waiting for word

from city officials to determine exactly where it will be erected. He said Leslie hoped to have it stand in front of Curwood Castle, but the Owosso Historical Commission's Project Director Robert Doran said that may not be possible due to the castle's status on the National Register of Historic Places.

Regardless of where it goes, Doran said, it will be appreciated for generations.

"From what I've seen, it's a gorgeous statue. It's one thing to be able to take people inside the castle and show them pictures, but to be able to see a life-size version of the man is truly special," Doran said.

If a location can be agreed upon by the end of winter, Wheeler said, the statue could go up as early as next spring.



Courtesy Photo

THIS 1923 PHOTO of James Oliver Curwood was used by Ryan Leslie to inspire a sculpture of the author.

WARMTH

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Want to volunteer for Walls of Warmth?

Volunteer training sessions: 5 to 6 p.m. Thursday, and noon to 1 p.m. Friday, Monday and Dec. 28
Where: The Owosso City Church and Shiawassee HoPE office, 121 W. Exchange St. in Owosso
Contact: (989) 413-7342

the Shiawassee Family YMCA is good for three showers per week. If guests need a place to stay that night, they can check in with Walls of Warmth again.

Guests must be accompanied by an adult if they are under 18. They will not be required to attend church services, and don't have to be Christian.

Those who are open to the idea will be paired with a "navigator" from Shiawassee HoPE who will work with them to over-

come the barriers keeping them in poverty.

"We hope our guests can connect with someone who can be a support to them and help them with their challenges," Webster said. "Walls of Warmth is not just a place to stay."

Above all, guests will be treated with dignity.

"All of us are valuable people," she said. "We tend to see people in terms of their success, but God values us all the same. We need to see the human dignity of each person."

In addition to the host churches — who are not being

named for security reasons — other churches, organizations and individuals are supporting Walls of Warmth, which was inspired by a similar program in Isabella County.

For example, on Tuesday employees at the 66th District Court in Corunna donated \$300.

"It's so cool to see churches and the community coming together and working together," Webster said. "We feel God is providing in so many ways. We're having a great time."

For more information, call Webster at (989) 494-6910.

Lawmakers OK tax breaks to lure mega-data center to Michigan

By DAVID EGGERT
Associated Press

LANSING — A major data center developer said it will expand into Michigan after securing tax breaks approved late Tuesday by lawmakers and that are expected to be signed into law.

The legislation exempts Nevada-based Switch and its "co-located" clients from paying sales or use taxes on servers, computers and other equipment for 20 years at a planned mega-data center campus near Grand Rapids. The tax incentives also will be available to about 40 existing Internet data centers in Michigan.

The data center industry, as a whole, must add 400 jobs by 2022 and a total of 1,000 jobs by 2026 for the tax exemptions to continue under amended bills passed 61-46 in the House and 26-12 in the Senate at the end of lengthy sessions.

Switch, which has more than 8 million square feet of data centers in Las Vegas and Reno, will make Michigan the site of its first facility in the eastern United States. The company in November announced plans to build a 2 million-square-foot "Supernap" campus in Gaines Township contingent on approval of tax breaks it needed to even the playing field with 22 other states.

Switch said construction planning and work will begin immediately. The center, to be based in a pyramid-shaped building that once housed office furniture maker Steelcase's research facility, will be operational by the end of 2016.

"We look forward to working in partnership with Michigan to attract the largest companies in the world to the Switch ecosystem here in the Great Lakes State," Adam Kramer, Switch's executive vice president of strategy, said in a statement.

Switch's 1,000 clients include eBay, Google and Amazon. The demand for data centers, especially large ones, is being fueled by cloud computing and an increasing reliance on outside firms to provide computer infrastructure for businesses because of cost, security and other reasons.

JAIL

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tremendously helped."

Committee chairman Hartmann Aue said the staff additions should be contingent upon the revenue from Genesee County remaining at or above the 2015 funding level.

"I was looking for some way to make it understood that we're tying these positions to the revenue so if revenue dips, we can't keep the position," he said Monday.

Willson said overtime costs for corrections officers jumped this year after the county cut \$1.5 million from the sheriff's office budget — which led to the layoffs of 14 deputies. Undersheriff Doug Powell previously said higher-paid employees moved to other positions such as court security and the jail because of a clause in union contracts.

"The road patrol that went into the jail, they're all senior officers, so their vacations are high. That puts our overtime budget up," Willson said.

Additional jail staffing could cut down on those costs.

The proposal was approved by the Finance and Administration Committee Monday, moving it to today's Committee of the Whole meeting for further discussion. A final decision could come Thursday.

"I just want to thank you and commend you on the smart budgeting and what you've done to generate the revenue here," Aue told Willson Monday.

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| Abba's House Christian Fellowship..... | www.abbas-house.org |
| 521 E. Williams, Owosso | Scroll to Churches RLCI |
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| 101 S. Beach St., Bancroft | Pastor Bob Forsyth |
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| 331 Clark St., Chesaning | Pastor Ilko Tchakarov |
| Christ Episcopal Church..... | 723-2495 |
| On Fayette Square, Owosso | |
| Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints..... | 723-8656 |
| 1588 N. Hickory St., Owosso | Bishop Fred B. Brown |
| Community Evangelical Presbyterian Church..... | 725-6930 |
| 951 Riley Rd., Owosso | Pastor Don Galardi |
| Corunna United Methodist Church..... | 743-5050 |
| 200 W. McArthur St., Corunna | Rev. Janet Lerner |
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| | gracepointe-mi.org |
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| 204 Main St., Morrice | Pastor Bob Forsyth |
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| Owosso Seventh Day Adventist Church..... | 723-7390 |
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| Perry Church of the Nazarene..... | 517-625-3400 |
| 3100 W. Ellsworth Rd., Perry | Pastor Tim Harmon |
| Perry Congregational Christian Church..... | 517-625-6106 |
| 130 E. Second, Perry | Pastor John Walworth |
| Redeemer Lutheran Church..... | 725-5442 |
| 2510 N. M-52, Owosso | Pastor David Woodby |
| Spiritual Episcopal Church of Owosso..... | 989-277-3851 |
| 610 Clinton St., Owosso | Service - 10:30 |
| St. Mary Catholic Church..... | 855-288-6704 |
| 700 E. Columbia Dr., Durand | Fr. Jonathan Perrotta |
| St. Mary Catholic Church..... | 517-625-4260 |
| 509 Main St., Morrice | Rev. John M. Bosco |
| | stmymorrice.org |
| St. Paul's Episcopal Church..... | 743-4190 |
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| 219 W. Oliver St., Owosso | Rev. Brian F. Heidt |
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| Trinity United Methodist Church..... | 723-2664 |
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| | trinityumcowosso.org |
| Vernon United Methodist Church..... | 989-288-4176 |
| 202 E. Main St., Vernon | Pastor Gerald Sever |

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The Argus-Press

Published daily except on generally accepted holidays by The Argus-Press Company.
PERIODICAL POSTAGE PAID AT
OWOSSO, MICHIGAN.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS PAYABLE IN ADVANCE

Delivered by carrier: one year \$119.00, six months \$65.00, three months \$35.00, one month \$12.50. Subscriptions in arrears: \$13.00 per month.

Delivered by mail: one year \$235.00 six months \$125.00, three months \$65.00, one month \$24.00.

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