

# Research park fee to aid Asylum Lake?

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Tenants of a proposed research and business park on Kalamazoo's southwest side could be asked to pay an annual fee to help preserve the nearby Asylum Lake property, says City Commissioner Alexander Lipsey.

Lipsey serves on a special City Commission task force that is monitoring the project Western Michigan University is proposing at Parkview Avenue and Drake Road.

The WMU Board of Trustees is expected to act on the park proposal in the spring or early summer.

Lipsey discussed the special fee following Monday night's commission meeting at which neighborhood residents voiced strong opposition to the park project.

About 100 residents attended the meeting and commissioners were presented with petitions signed by 1,630 residents opposing the project. Nearly all the speakers who addressed commissioners criticized the project, saying it would increase traffic, lower property values and adversely impact Kalamazoo's "Walden Pond" — the 274-acre Asylum Lake property.

The idea of assessing a fee to tenants in the business park to help pay for maintenance of the Asylum Lake property was suggested to the task force by Willard Rose, director of the Kalamazoo Nature Cen-



Lipsey

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## PARK

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ter, Lipsey said. The Asylum Lake property north of Parkview is not included in the park project.

"I feel the idea has some merit if we can put it together and still make the project feasible," Lipsey said. "I think it would be an excellent start to making sure Asylum Lake would be preserved ... while having an ongoing funding source.

"If we wanted to approach this project as an example of how good a research business park could be for the environment, this would be one extra thing we could do to demonstrate that."

The business park would be developed on 319 of the 600 WMU-owned acres in the area over the next 20 years, according to a consultant's recommendation.

The park would be made up of the 54-acre Colony Farm Orchard, west of Drake Road in Oshtemo Township, and the 265-acre University Farm in Kalamazoo, bounded by Parkview Avenue, U.S. 131 and Parkview Hills.

Besides the special fee, the commission task force is exploring new zoning classifications which regulate permitted uses for a business park. The city currently has no such zoning designation.

The consultant has recommended that the park include research and development, business, and light industrial zoning, although critics fear the park will

primarily house industry. A Foreign Trade Zone for international business also could be located there.

"Asylum Lake property is too unique, too valuable a resource to be impacted by a proposed industrial park," said Gary Newton of 2227 S. Rose.

Lipsey said the task force, headed by Commissioner Edward LaForge, will meet with WMU to discuss ways that the city's concerns can be incorporated into the final recommendation to the WMU board. The task force already has met with several city neighborhood associations and environmental groups.

The City Commission supports the park concept but has said more information is needed.

Project opponents say the open space should be preserved and that other project sites should be explored, including vacant land on Kalamazoo's North Side. But WMU and Kalamazoo officials say there are no other viable locations in the city for such a park development.

While critics easily outnumbered supporters at the meeting, the park project was praised by two Kalamazoo businessmen.

"Some businesses require a campus-like setting, and some won't consider other sites on the North Side or other parts of the city" said Alan Wright, owner of Wright Coating Co. on Kalamazoo's North Side and a member of the city's Economic Development Corp., which has endorsed the project.