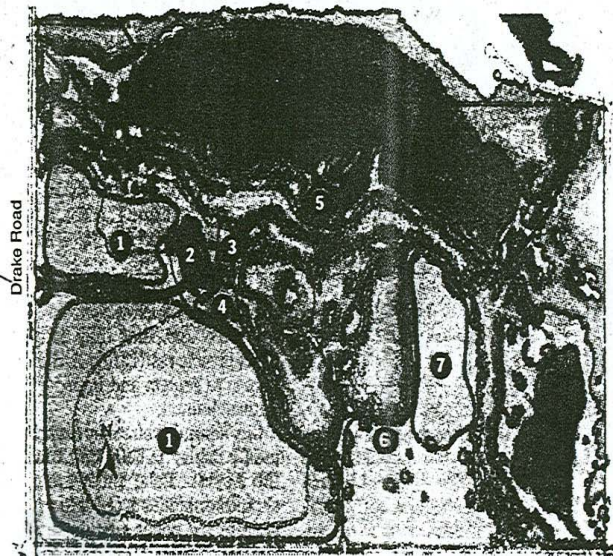


May 13, 2003
 Kalamazoo Gazette
 By Ed Finnerty

Asylum Lake development proposed

The city of Kalamazoo has proposed paved parking and trails, a research/education center, canoe launch and other changes for the Asylum Lake property off Parkview Avenue and Drake Road. An Asylum Lake Focus Group that has been working for years on plans for preserving the WMU-owned property opposes such extensive development.



Source: City of Kalamazoo

Parkview Avenue



- 1 Prairie restoration
- 2 Parking for buses and cars
- 3 Research/education center
- 4 Native plants garden
- 5 Canoe launch and overlook
- 6 Bike /pedestrian connection to:
 - Winchell Elementary School
 - Winchell neighborhood
 - WMU campus
- 7 Oak savannah restoration

KRIS KINKADE / GAZETTE

Stalemate persists on Asylum Lake

Lack of development plan frustrates city officials, preservationists.

BY ED FINNERTY
 KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Disagreement persists over how extensively the largely undisturbed Asylum Lake property on Kalamazoo's southwest side should be used for recreation.

Some Kalamazoo city commissioners expressed frustration Monday that more than four years since it was agreed to preserve the land from development, there is no written or philosophical agreement on how to go about it.

"It's very clear that there is going to

be an Asylum Lake Preserve. It's the details," Vice Mayor Hannah McKinney said during a City Commission work session on the topic Monday.

The 274-acre property at the northeast corner of Parkview Avenue and Drake Road, with its two lakes, wetlands, prairie fields and rolling, wooded terrain, was formerly a farm for Kalamazoo's state mental hospital. The state gave it to Western Michigan University in the mid-1970s with the restriction that it be used solely for public park, recreation or open-space uses.

In 1998, WMU accepted a package of community incentives to build its new engineering campus and Business, Technology and Research Park on the adjacent Lee Baker Farm. The

Please see **ASYLUM, B2**

© 1970-2004 KALAMAZOO GAZETTE.

All rights reserved.

Used with permission of KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

ASYLUM

From Page B1

incentives included a \$1.5 million endowment to be used to permanently protect the Asylum Lake property from development, reduce and reverse environmental degradation and develop passive recreational uses such as walking, running, bird watching and cross-country skiing.

A conservation easement will be used to set up protective covenants outlining what can and cannot occur on the Asylum Lake property. WMU is to retain ownership of the property but grant a conservation easement to the city, which will have responsibility for enforcing the easement.

City officials and the Asylum Lake Focus Group, a committee of 20 people appointed to work out details for the property's use and preservation, have major disagreements over what constitutes passive recreation.

The city administration created a drawing showing extensive, paved bicycle trails, an interpretative/education center, a parking lot large enough for buses, a boat launch and other development. Focus-group

members say such uses are far too intensive and that they instead favor prairie restoration and other efforts to protect and improve the natural habitat.

City administrators say that since public money is being put toward the Asylum Lake endowment, it should be made as accessible as possible to the wider community, including people with disabilities. They say paved paths, restrooms and other improvements will make the property attractive and accessible to more people.

"I don't think you have to blacktop it to make it accessible for people with a handicap," Commissioner Don Cooney said. "I'm all for accessibility... Bicycle paths and boating, that's a big jump for me."

Several focus-group members attended Monday's meeting, but none was allowed to address the commission under rules for work sessions. Invited members of downtown organizations addressed commissioners at length during a preceding agenda item, however, a difference in treatment that Cooney called "very troubling."

Focus-group members sent e-mails to commissioners over the past week outlining their perspectives on the Asylum Lake issue. Monday's meet-

ing, Mayor Robert Jones said, was intended to present background from the city administration.

"The controlling entity here, as I see it, is Western," Jones said, in pointing toward a resolution.

Robert Miller, WMU associate vice president for community outreach, told the commission that Western is maintaining a neutral stance and hopes to help find a solution acceptable to both the focus group and the city.

"I just wish we could get some public input, from both the students and perhaps the wider community," McKinney said. The vice mayor said she was concerned about how heavily WMU students, who will begin using the university's new engineering campus this fall, will use the preserve.

Assistant City Manager Dennis Durham said a joint meeting of city, university and focus-group representatives to try to hash out an agreement is possible.

Commissioner Mary Balkema said she supports bringing the interested parties together as soon as possible to try to hammer out a resolution.

"Certainly, we don't want to be talking about this another four years from now," she said.