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By Tom Haroldson

# Man raises concerns over WMU park plan

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A Kalamazoo man says he is concerned a proposed Western Michigan University research and business park could seriously damage the environment and ecology of the Drake Road-Parkview Avenue area.

Mark A. Hoffman of 924 Pomeroy said he had been using the Asylum Lake wildlife preserve area for more than a decade and for weeks had been studying and investigating the proposed research park.

As part of his investigation, he has discovered that land for part of the project may take a legislative proclamation for it to be used.

"I'm concerned about the incredible amount of environmental damage that could occur if Western develops that area," Hoffman said. "I'm in favor of the economic development. I'm just opposed to the location."

He said he was concerned that water runoff from the development and streets and parking lots would contaminate the nearby Asylum Lake, Little Asylum Lake and a connecting system of streams, some of which flow into nearby Parkview Hills.

"Even careful installation of sewers and curbs will not prevent runoff and the possible industrial pollution from reaching the wetlands at the base of the hill on both Drake Road and Parkview Avenue," said

Hoffman, who has been in touch with WMU officials about his concerns.

In addition, he said, the development will require an extensive expansion of the streets in that area. The additional traffic will add to the environmental detriment and damage to quality of life in that southwestern corner of the city of Kalamazoo, Hoffman added.

Hoffman said he had also learned that the Colony Farm Orchard land between U.S. 131 and Drake Road — proposed as phase one of the project — has public restrictions placed on it when WMU acquired the property from the state in 1975.

The deed restrictions specify that the land can be used only for "public park, recreation or open space purposes" unless the Legislature says otherwise.

Hoffman said he had pointed that out to state Sen. Jack Welborn, R-Kalamazoo, who has asked the Legislative Service Bureau to investigate the land's restrictions.

Richard Burke, vice president for regional education and economic development, is out of town and the Kalamazoo Gazette could not reach him for comment.

Burke is an organizer of the proposed development, which was presented in a report by Hammer, Siler, George Associates of Silver Springs, Md., a consultant hired by WMU and the CEO Council of Kalamazoo County to study its feasibility.

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