

Asylum Lake Area 'Available'

City, County Interested For Park, Open Space Use

By LANE WICK
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The city and the county of Kalamazoo, both eyeing the Asylum Lake property for possible parkland use, may be closer to their goals.

Dr. Joseph Denniston, superintendent of the Kalamazoo State Hospital which presently owns the property, has told The Gazette that he has informed the Michigan Department of Mental Health that the Asylum Lake site is "surplus" to the state hospital's needs.

Dr. Denniston, in a recent letter to acting State Mental Health Director Dr. Donald Smith, reported that the Asylum Lake property was "of no foreseeable use" to the State Hospital.

Dr. Denniston said that he will meet with Dr. Smith Sept. 11 to discuss the matter. He said it would be up to Smith to decide whether the property should be declared surplus to the needs of the state department and turned over to the state Dept. of Administration.

The Asylum Lake property, located north and east of the corner of Parkview and 12th St. in the City of Kalamazoo, was the former site of a number of State Hospital buildings. The area has not been used by the hospital for several years, and all buildings formerly there have been torn down.

While both the city and county of Kalamazoo have discussed jointly what they might do with the land if they could get it

around the lake is a likely eventuality — some other units may be interested in the land.

Dr. Denniston said Michigan State University has indicated it would like title to from 175 to 200 acres of the 400-acre parcel for agricultural studies. But MSU doesn't want the land around the lake, he said.

"Actually, we have been getting so many requests for the property," Dr. Denniston said, "and we see no use for it by us, that we informed Dr. Smith that it was surplus to us.

The next step is up to him."

State Sen. John Wejborn told The Gazette last week that he will introduce legislation to have the property turned over to local units here.

At present, State Hospital officials and city officials report there are numerous problems of trespass at the Asylum Lake site.

In the past, Kalamazoo City officials have indicated they'd like title to the Asylum Lake property for both park purposes and possible housing sites.

County officials, too, have indicated they'd like the property for park purposes. Both city and county officials have met to discuss their hopes, and City Manager James Caplinger says he hopes some joint usage of the site could be worked out.

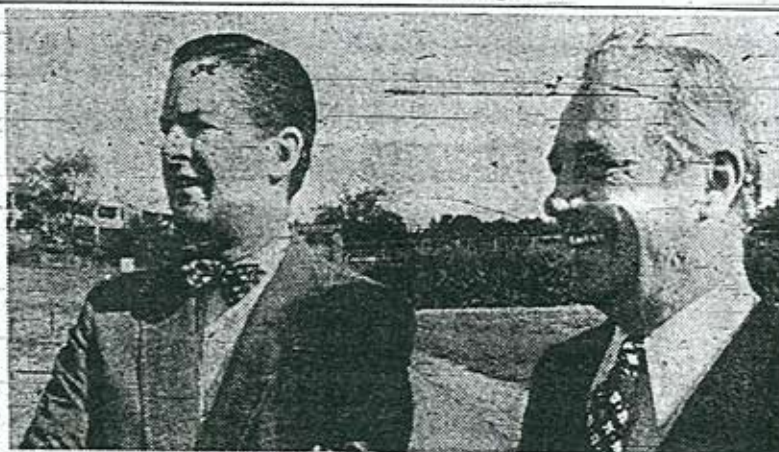
Former-KSH superintendent Dr. Clarence Schrier had supported use of some of the flat land south of the lake for a new children's unit.

But Denniston, his successor, has ruled that out. He said there is room for a new unit on the KSH "main campus," where some old buildings will be torn down, and a remote building would be extremely expensive because kitchen and heating plants would have to be duplicated.

Asylum Lake, about the size of Woods Lake with a larger adjacent marsh, is the headwater of a stream flowing into the Portage Creek West Branch. The other tributary flows out of the Atwater Pond area in Texas Township.

The state hospital owns all the frontage on Asylum Lake, and most frontage on Little Asylum Lake, which is just north of Parkview Avenue.

The two lakes and marsh provide a home for warm water gamefish and wetland birds and animals.



PRESIDENT TO PRESIDENT
— Kalamazoo College president George Rainsford (left) shakes hands with Western Michigan University's new president, John T. Bernhard, at a point where the properties of the two institutions meet on W. Michigan Avenue. Bernhard officially assumed the presidency

today, coming to Kalamazoo from Macomb, Ill., where he served as president of Western Illinois University since 1968. The new president is off to somewhat of a controversial start involving improvements to his home and office.