

GROSSE POINTE CIVIC NEWS

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CITIZENS ASSOCIATION
OF GROSSE POINTE TOWNSHIP

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SITE JUGGLING BY SCHOOL BOARD DRAWS FIRE OF CITIZENS

"I wish this Board of Education would stop its 'child-play' and settle the business before it in a business-like fashion. As a taxpayer in Grosse Pointe and the parent of children attending school here, I believe I voice the feelings of a good many residents who are disgusted with the way you are dealing with the matter of locating junior high school sites.

"You have now had Dr. Spain, of the Detroit Board of Education, out here on three occasions to give you the value of his experience in site location. You have just questioned him for two hours on a matter which has been before you for consideration more than a year. It should be settled without more 'child-play.' Not only are you seeking to delay action with all the facts before you, including the recommendations of two other experts besides Dr. Spain and your own superintendent, but you have never even thanked Dr. Spain for his courtesy in coming to your meetings. I, for one, am ashamed, as a resident of Grosse Pointe, for your lack of common decency toward a gentleman whom you asked to help you reach a decision."

Bradley for Further Delay

Thus admonished by Mr. Albert E. Meder, 371 University Place, member of the firm of Beaumont, Smith & Harris, Attorneys, the Board of Education on January 28th passed a resolution accepting Mr. Spain's report and thanking him for his favor. Reconsideration was then voted of the Board's action last October in designating a block bounded by St. Paul, Cadieux, Kercheval and Notre Dame as a site for a junior high school. (This site, Mr. Spain declared in his report, was three-quarters of a mile east of the best and most central location—St. Paul and Audubon—for the

western junior high school district.)

At this point Mr. P. Hudson Bradley, president of the Board, declared that he did not want to take any action on the site matter until there had been more time to think it over. (Before any local political pressure had been brought to bear, the Board a year ago designated a site at St. Paul and Audubon but delayed acquisition in deference to local opposition. Last September the Board voted for a site adjacent to the present high school. In October it reconsidered the September action and voted for the Cadieux-Kercheval site.)

Cries from the audience of more than forty of "Let's have action now," brought the remark from Mr. Bradley that he was in favor of putting the matter to a vote of the people.

"The designation of a school site is not a matter for the voters to decide," Mr. Harold A. Strickland, 895 Westchester Road, an engineer, declared, addressing the Board. "That's one of the jobs the members of the Board were elected to do for the district. The law requires the Board to designate sites. You men have all the facts before you. It's time you stopped trying to 'pass the buck.' I don't care how close to my property or anyone else's property you may decide to put a school, but I do object to your putting it anywhere that will not be in conformance with the best interests of the children who are to use it. The children's interests should be your first consideration, it seems to me."

Side-Step No. 3

Thus pressed to a decision, the Board passed a motion by Trustee Julius L. Berns, seconded by Trustee Charles A. Parcels, designating a seven-acre parcel on Kercheval Avenue, adjoining and east of the present high school athletic field in Grosse Pointe Farms, as the site of a junior high school to serve all the

area from Windmill Pointe to the Country Club. They thus side-stepped the plain duty of the Board, as revealed by the studies and recommendations of four experts during the last five years, to locate a junior high school in Grosse Pointe Park in the vicinity of St. Paul and Audubon to serve the western district comprising the heavily-populated area between Alter Road and Fisher Road. The motion was supported by Trustee Fred Sutter and President Bradley. Trustee Charles A. Poupard refused to vote.

"That is not the right place for this junior high school, in my opinion," Mr. Poupard said. But, although Mr. Poupard had moved the acceptance of Mr. Spain's report, neither he nor any other trustee moved to designate a site in the vicinity of St. Paul and Audubon, as recommended by Mr. Spain.

At the next meeting of the Board, on February 4th, the Board again took up the junior high school site matter, voting to reconsider side-step No. 3 taken on January 28th. There the matter rests at present with no site accepted at all. A proposal by Trustee Sutter to have a committee of three school authorities, not heretofore called upon, make a new study for the Board was discussed but no action taken.

Delay Cost Put at \$50,000

The Board of Education's next meeting will be on Monday, February 18th—one year, two months and 19 days since the Board, on November 29, 1927, adopted Supt. Brownell's recommendation of a junior high school site in the vicinity of St. Paul and Audubon. The cost to the taxpayers of this unwarranted delay in acquiring the site has been estimated at approximately \$50,000 to date.

The fourth in this winter's lecture course at Grosse Pointe High School, is to be given by Guy Maier of the music department of the U. of M., Friday, February 22nd, 8:30 p. m.

Grosse Pointe Civic News

Grosse Pointe, Mich.

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BOND ISSUE DEFEATED IN GROSSE POINTE PARK

On Monday, January 14th, the voters of Grosse Pointe Park, 413 to 394, put their emphatic stamp of disapproval on the \$750,000 bond issue proposed by the Village Commission for purchase and development of an 11-acre beach-park site at the foot of Trombly Road. A three-fifths majority was required for approval; not even a simple majority was obtained.

Following the election, the Commission ordered its attorney to withdraw the condemnation suit which had been instituted last September to acquire the property for the proposed park in advance of asking approval of the huge expenditure by the voters. The condemnation proceedings had been completed to the final argument stage, incurring an expense to the village of some thousands of dollars not yet tabulated to cover the court costs of all participants, which must be borne by the village.

When asked last fall by Civic News why the expensive condemnation procedure was begun before approval of the park expense had been obtained from the voters, President Alfred J. Garska and the Commissioners declared that the Commission wanted to know exactly what the property would cost before submitting the bond issue to popular vote. (What the Commission would or could do in case the owners of the proposed site were awarded some half million dollars damages and the voters later refused to approve the expense, the officials declined to say, expressing confidence that the voters would approve their action.) Criticism of the officials' conduct published in

the last several issues of Civic News was ignored and questions asked were left unanswered.

Hazy Plans

Then, early in December, without waiting for completion of the condemnation suit which did not get into court until December 15th, the Commission ordered a special election for January 14th on a \$750,000 bond issue. With only hazy plans on what was to be done with the three-quarters of a million dollars of taxpayers' money, the Commission started to spend that money and only then placed its case before the voters asking approval for a blanket expenditure.

Had the Commission proceeded in a businesslike way, as men in charge of a \$36,000,000 private enterprise would proceed, there would have been no trouble getting approval for a reasonably-priced private park, sensibly planned and in keeping with the high character of the village. There was and still is an overwhelming public desire for access to the lake in Grosse Pointe Park, as well as for other suitable recreation facilities.

The Citizens' Association has been paid the high compliment of being charged by politicians with responsibility for defeat of the park bond issue. If publication in "Civic News" of the facts in the matter and comment thereon contributed to the defeat of this park proposal, the Association is happy to be accused again of serving the taxpayers well and faithfully.

Recreational Survey

The Citizens' Association believes that the recreational needs of Grosse Pointe Park and of the whole township ought to be given painstaking consideration by experienced recreational authorities to the end that wise, practical and economical facilities for healthful outdoor exercise by adults and children be conveniently located. To work out a suggested program of action along these lines for the guidance and consideration of officials and residents, the Citizens' Association has asked Mr. Clarence E. Brewer, Commissioner of the Recreation Department of the City of Detroit, to make a study of Grosse Pointe's problems and to recommend a program to care for present and anticipated future demands. This Mr. Brewer

has consented to do without cost, as a favor to a sister community in metropolitan Detroit. His report is expected to be ready for publication in the next issue of Civic News.

SEWER AND HIGHWAY PROBLEMS IN FARMS

Voters in Grosse Pointe Farms will be asked on March 11th to approve a \$612,000 bond issue to carry out a program of sewer construction for the closing of the Black Marsh Ditch recommended by the village's consulting engineers, Hubbell, Hartgering and Roth, and adopted by the village council on February 4th.

The plan provides for a 13-foot, high-level barrel in the ditch from the pumping station at Kerby Road to Fisher Road, estimated cost \$275,000; permanent pumping station at Kerby Road, estimated cost \$188,000; low-level sewers on the south side of and parallel to the ditch from Fisher Road to the village limits at Lochmoor, \$149,000. Permission has been obtained from the Wayne County Drain Commission to close the ditch from the village limits to Kerby Road without construction of a closed drain in that section, which is north of the pumping station.

The village council on February 4th directed the clerk to make arrangements for a joint meeting with the Board of Wayne County Road Commissioners to discuss the county's proposal to build and landscape a 120-foot thoroughfare, costing an estimated \$600,000 to \$700,000, to replace the present 18-foot Lake Shore Road "bottle-neck," providing the village obtains the necessary right-of-way in dedications by property owners (as has been done in Grosse Pointe Shores) or otherwise as may be necessary. The road commission has expressed a willingness to make a survey of the proposed 120-foot route, without obligation to the village, if the council requests that such work be done, to facilitate an accurate study of the road problem.

Proponents of a 55-foot Lake Shore Road to be built and maintained at village expense are combining this proposal in a petition to acquire right-of-way for the Lake Shore Road sewer, money for which was voted two years ago this summer.

TOWNSHIP ORGANIZATION

Article No. 9

The justices of the peace, of which there are four, are elected one each year, to secure continuity of office, for a four-year term. They represent the courts of first jurisdiction in rural areas. (In cities they are limited to minor civil actions, while the criminal branch is taken over by the police judge with a slight increase in authority.) As judges their action is very definitely outlined by statutes and except in very minor civil actions and breaches of the peace, their action is generally subject to appeal to the Circuit Courts. By virtue of their office, the two justices of the peace whose offices soonest expire are members of the township board, a crude provision of combining the judicial and legislative functions, perhaps without any other parallel in our government. The justices are compensated by fees paid for their services, with no portion of their support paid by the township funds, except for attendance at the township board meetings for which they are allowed \$5 a meeting. Thus the time spent on township matters amounts to the time required for a meeting of the Board, about two or three hours in an evening.

Four constables elected yearly are the officers of the justice courts. They are employed to serve the writs issued by the justice either in criminal actions or civil suits. They are paid on a fee basis; they do not serve as police officers.

The state constitution provides for election of all the officers heretofore mentioned and also a commissioner of highways. Since the township lost all territory requiring highway maintenance, through the incorporation of the five villages, this office has been abolished in Grosse Pointe.

(This article completes the series on our antique township organization. In the next issue of Civic News, we will begin a series on "Functions of the Township Officers." The first article will be on "Assessing.")

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE SCHOOL BOARD?

Grosse Pointe is blessed with a Board of Education whose members are far above the average in ability, honesty and public spirit. Why, then, cannot this intelligent group of elected public servants conduct the affairs entrusted to it in a busi-

nesslike manner, in a reasonable length of time and without undue burden to its own peace of mind as well as that of the taxpayers?

In 1924 the Citizens' Association made a study of the administration organization of the school system, suggesting changes in methods and procedure, many of which have since been carried out to the benefit of the district and the Board. A detailed budget is now in use; audits are made regularly; the business department has been separated from the Board personnel (with the exception of a few of the treasurer's duties which have not yet been absorbed, due partly to the fact that the annual meeting continues to vote more than a nominal salary for the treasurer and he has to do something to warrant getting the salary); the teachers' committee has been abolished, and all recommendations come direct to the Board from the superintendent. It is true that certain Board members are still bothered by some local residents who want jobs and who are not content to let their merits be judged by the proper employes of the Board, but that is a trustee's own fault if he mistakenly encourages anyone to expect him to use the influence of his high office in a special matter that has no bearing on the efficient conduct of the schools.

Antiquated Procedure

The faults that remain to be corrected are due to:

1. The fact that the antique system of conducting Board business still lingers on, unnecessarily. Instead of insisting on being relieved of all detail work by its paid employes, the Board spends hours and hours threshing out minor matters. If details were properly delegated, the Board could attend to all its business in an hour or two, once or twice a month. Imagine the board of directors of any hundred-million-dollar corporation spending a half hour of its valuable time discussing the merits of a piece of equipment costing a few hundred dollars and haggling over where it ought to be purchased. Imagine a board of directors bowing its better judgment and knowledge of the facts in a proposed location of a factory to the clamor of a few stockholders who for selfish reasons would rather cripple the whole industry than have a factory located most conveniently for its customers.

2. The fact that local politics are still permitted to influence Board action, although the trustees are elected by the district at large and take an oath to serve the whole district and not any particular part of it in preference to another part.

Expert Advice Disregarded

3. The fact that the Board presumes to know more about purely educational matters than the experts it hires to advise it. Imagine a client telling his lawyer how to conduct a technical matter, or his doctor how to perform a certain operation. School trustees presumably are elected because of their interest in seeing that the school system is properly administered in accordance with the highest educational standards, not because of any expertness or experience in educational matters. They are elected to apply their good judgment to school business, regardless of how they acquired that judgment.

This is first of a series of articles that will appear in Civic News on the subject of "What is the Matter with the School Board?" Subsequent articles will survey specific cases bringing out the points made above and will suggest remedies in a constructive program.

CAMPAIGN FOR SUPPORT OF CITIZENS' ASSOCIATION

Within the last few months the Citizens' Association of Grosse Pointe Township has been largely instrumental through formation of sound public opinion in (1) saving the Village of Grosse Pointe Park the expense and inconvenience of an undesirable public park project that was being saddled upon the taxpayers by the Commission in a very unbusinesslike fashion; (2) preventing the Board of Education from being stampeded by petty local politics into establishing a junior high school site nearly a mile distant from the center of the district it is designed to serve.

These are only two instances of the service to taxpayers being constantly performed through the non-partisan activities of the Association. It was organized in June, 1923, by about thirty residents of the township who believed an independent citizen organization could be of service to the community. The by-laws provide that no person holding an elective office or any can-

(Continued on Page 4, Col. 1)

didate for office shall serve as a member of the Executive Board. This Board meets weekly in the Fort Shelby Hotel for luncheon and a business session.

Meetings Open to Public

Any resident is welcome to attend these meetings at any time, and all who can conveniently do so are urged to be present. (To insure that luncheon preparations may be adequate, it would be well for those planning to attend to apprise the executive secretary in advance by writing or phoning Mr. B. E. Meyers, 51 West Warren, Detroit, Columbia 1600. The Board meets Friday noons at 12:30 p. m.)

In fulfilling its objects, the Association undertakes various activities that have been of definite value to Grosse Pointe residents:

1. It prints and distributes monthly issues of Civic News, the official publication of the Association, which deals exclusively with items of municipal interest and is mailed without charge to residents of the township.

2. In 1924, the Association undertook a study of the administration organization of the school district that has since resulted in changes in methods and procedure such as a detailed budget, separate business department and abolition of the teachers' committee, whose interference with appointments once seriously threatened to retard improvement in the life-blood of the school system.

\$3,300 Saving

3. Published annual reports of the School District at cost, saving

the taxpayers more than \$3,300.

4. To promote governmental efficiency, advocated uniform traffic laws for all villages, improved municipal budgets, and proper zoning regulations.

5. Questioned the legality of a school board member serving as business manager and advocated a business department separate from the elected personnel of the board, a step which has been accomplished.

6. Criticized the School Board's engagement for an elementary school job last winter of an architect who designed a high school with space for 2,100 pupils when instructed to design one for about a thousand, and who failed to recommend borings and testings on the high school site, resulting in more than \$100,000 in extras on this and other items on what started out to be a job costing approximately a million dollars.

7. Is now making a recreational survey of township, and also a study to determine contagious hospital needs.

This brief review indicates the work that has been undertaken, including community problems that affect each resident of the township and that could not have been undertaken except by the combined efforts and financial support of public spirited persons.

Subscriptions Invited

The funds with which the Citizens' Association is operated are raised by voluntary subscription, the classes of membership being: active members, \$1 to \$10 per year; sustaining members, \$10 to \$25 per

year; contributing members, \$25 to \$35 per year. Sustaining members have contributed the greater part of funds received. Memberships of any amount up to \$35 per year are welcome. An increased number of subscribers is needed from among the many supporters who appreciate the value of the Association's work but who are not yet members, and from among the many new residents of the township who have perhaps only been waiting for someone to approach them for a subscription. (The township comprises the villages of Grosse Pointe Park, Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms, Grosse Pointe Shores and Lochmoor.)

There are at present upwards of 5,000 residents on Civic News' mailing list, almost a four-fold increase in little more than twelve months. To get in touch with each individual personally is a well-nigh prohibitive task for the time which the Executive Board gives gratis to the affairs of the Association. Therefore, the Board asks that even though you may not have been approached by a director you take the liberty to telephone any member of the Board you wish for a personal talk on what the Association is trying to do for the community.

The Board trusts that there will be a ready response to its present campaign as there is much valuable service that may be performed in addition to what is being done if the funds necessary to finance it are forthcoming. Checks may be mailed to C. H. L'Hommedieu, Treasurer, 612 Union Trust Building, Detroit.

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Citizens Association

OF GROSSE POINTE TOWNSHIP

51 West Warren Ave.

Detroit, Mich.

"Public business should be transacted in public. Any other course, if followed to its logical conclusion, means the ultimate overthrow of every democracy in the world. No democratic government can continue to endure if its public business is transacted behind closed doors."

—Senator George W. Norris.

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