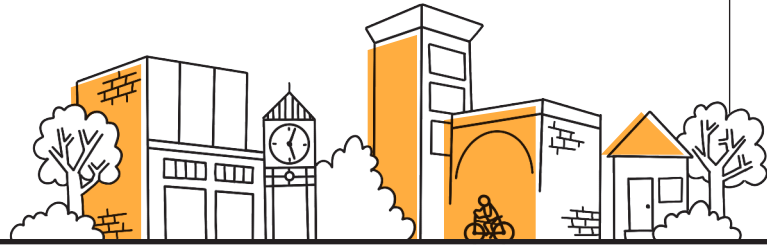


East Lansing Info

We bring East Lansing the news.



EAST LANSING POLICING

Police Oversight Starts, as Council Approves Command Officers' Contract

East Lansing's Independent Police Oversight Commission convened for the first time on Nov. 8 to decide procedural issues, debate how their independence informs their relationship with the East Lansing Police Department, and review use of force incidents from October.

The new eleven-member Commission unanimously elected administrative judge Erick Williams as the Commission's Chair after a nomination from Noel Garcia, who is a retired Lansing Police Department officer. Williams and Garcia served on the Study Committee on an Independent Police Oversight Commission, which laid the groundwork for the new commission.

... learn more on PAGE 6

www.eastlansinginfo.news

Vol. 1 | Issue 8

In continuous operation since 2014

DECEMBER 2021



BY ANDREW GRAHAM, City Desk Reporter and Editor AND ALICE DREGER, Publisher and Executive Director

As the year draws to a close, ELi is bringing you a look at what happened in 2021 in East Lansing along with a peek at what we think will be ten significant topic areas the ELi team will be covering for you in 2022.

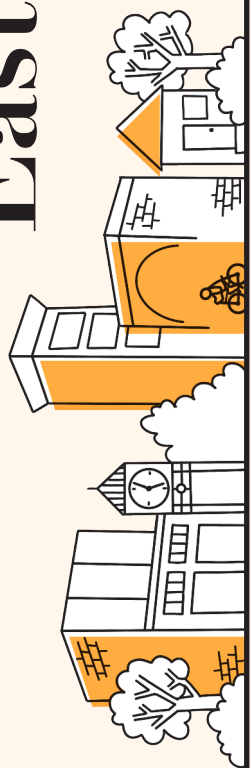
It's been a big year of reporting for our staff, as we've worked hard to keep you locally informed and empowered. The regularly-scheduled East Lansing elections have finally installed a fully-elected Council, replacing what had become a majority-appointee government. Now, the City continues to face serious challenges in terms of finances and infrastructure, and it's becoming clear that bigger rains are meaning bigger problems. Meanwhile, the stressors of Covid have not let up on our local healthcare infrastructure, public schools, and businesses.

So, what do we think we will be watchdogging for you in 2022 as we carry out our mission to bring East Lansing the news? Read on to find out.

... read the story on PAGE 4-5

East Lansing Info

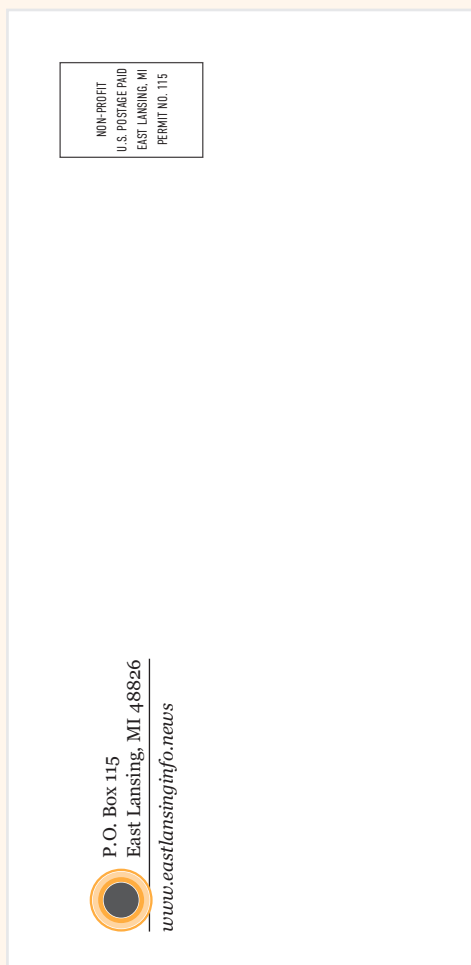
Reader-supported local news that matters.



What drives us at ELI?

We see our work as central to the democracy that is this community.

Our team works every day to monitor East Lansing City Government, East Lansing Public Schools, town-gown relations, the local economy, public safety, development, and the arts and cultures scene to bring you news and information that is meaningful, relevant, and timely. We live here, and we care.



P.O. Box 115
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ENVIRONMENT, DEVELOPMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

Ask ELi to Investigate

BY EMILY JOAN ELLIOTT, Managing Editor

ELi runs a regular service called "Ask ELi to Investigate." This year alone, we've answered over 200 questions from readers! Here is a sampling from our latest editions.

Q: I've read that several MI cities have re-engaged with Simple Recycling (textile and small household goods) after the COVID suspension was lifted. I understand that pick-up service has changed from regular curbside collection to individually scheduled collections through the service's website. I also understand that the new EL Environmental Services Administrator will be starting in December. It would be great to know if they have plans to re-start the service.

A: Prior to the pandemic, the City of East Lansing partnered with Simple Recycling. Residents could leave their clothes, shoes, and small home goods curbside in a special bag on their scheduled recycling day, but the recycling program was suspended in March 2020.

Simple Recycling's website does allow individuals to schedule personal pick-ups, but currently the website does not show any available pickup days for the 48823 zip code. So, ELi asked the City's Communication Coordinator Mikell Frey if the program will return in the future.

"[Department of Public Works] staff have been in contact with Simple Recycling concerning their proposed changes to services, but have been awaiting additional information from them," Frey told ELi. "The new environmental specialist

slated to begin working with the City in early December will be reaching out to them again."

Q: Isn't there road construction planned by the City of East Lansing on Burcham Drive, near the schools?

A: According to Interim Director of the Department of Public Works Nicole McPherson, "The Burcham Drive improvement project is an MDOT LAP (Local Agency Programs) project," and it is scheduled to start in spring 2022.

The construction will run from Abbot Road on the west side to Timberlane Drive in the east, meaning construction will occur near East Lansing High School,

... continued on PAGE 2

From the Managing Editor

Why a Paper Edition of ELi?



EMILY JOAN ELLIOTT
Managing Editor

Emily handles the day-to-day management of reporters and reporting at ELi. She works to make sure the ELi team maximizes the news we produce from the financial support we receive from readers.

If you're a long-time fan of East Lansing Info (ELi), you know that 2021 marks the first time in our seven-year publishing history that we decided to put out paper editions. We did this after a lot of strategic consideration. And the results have far exceeded our hopes!

We are reaching senior citizens in East Lansing at an unprecedented rate, including seniors who are mostly or entirely offline and who live in dedicated senior housing and nursing homes.

And we are also reaching more young people than ever before. It turns out that our social media circles don't overlap enough with younger residents, but our coffee habits do. (We drop free copies at Biggby, Foster, Blue Owl, Campbell's Market Basket, and so on.) Now, the Associated Students of MSU (ASMSU) is moving to provide funds to add ELi to the MSU Readership Program, which will mean even greater reach across Grand River Avenue for our reporting.

Thanks to the paper edition, we've also connected with Impact 89FM radio, which now broadcasts our weekly East Lansing Insider news podcast on Sunday mornings. We also were recently notified that MSU Archives had decided to archive ELi's paper and electronic versions.

"We want to ensure this important documentation of East Lansing is preserved for future generations," said Erin Passehl Stoddart, head of MSU Archives. "Accepting ELi resources into the Archives' collections ensures both the preservation

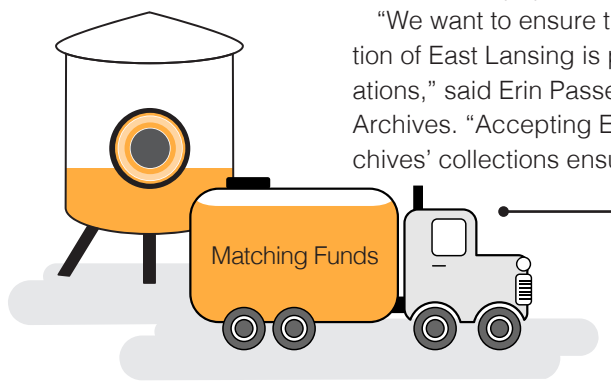
of content as well as provides additional avenues for everyone to discover and access ELi's reporting."

Perhaps most importantly, the paper edition has enabled us to explain effectively to members of our community why we need their financial support to keep this high-quality investigative news service going. We can see from people using the envelopes included with the mailed copies that we have had a critical breakthrough in terms of reaching people who can and will support honest, truly-local news production.

If you haven't donated to our 2022 Sustainability Campaign, please, consider doing so today!

You can find all of the ways to donate listed here on page 2. With your help, we have a shot at reaching our \$200,000 campaign goal, and every dollar you give will be doubled with matching funds if you give before Dec. 31!

Help us fill the "ELi Water Tower" so we can be here as your news brigade throughout 2022. Remember that about 90% of your donation goes to pay local people to bring the news. When you give to ELi, you give twice: meaningful jobs for your neighbors, and independent, nonpartisan news for everyone who cares about East Lansing. Thank you!



GIVE NOW WHILE WE HAVE MATCHING FUNDS: Before our 2022 Sustainability Campaign started, ELi obtained \$50,000 in matching fund commitments to help us encourage more donors to the campaign. Now we need your help to draw down those matching funds by contributing generously to ELi's mission of bringing East Lansing the news! Every dollar you give will be doubled as it goes into our "water tower" – the reserve fund that makes it possible for us to keep reporting steadily for you.

ASK ELI

(cont. from PAGE 1)

Marble Elementary School, and MacDonald Middle School. Pedestrian islands (for safer crossings) and sidewalks will also be installed, thanks in part to Safe Routes to School grants.

Q: What's going on with the former Sawyer Pontiac space at 1415 W. Michigan Ave.? Much landscaping is being done (a big improvement) and there appears to be some remodeling at the remaining building. I believe this was one of the designated dispensary sites for E. Lansing. Thanks for all of your good reporting.

A: According to East Lansing Planning & Zoning Administrator Peter Menser, Council approved a Special Use Permit (SUP) to establish a medical marijuana provisioning center at this

location in March 2019. That permit was extended by a year, and because construction technically started before the new expiration date of March 2021, the approvals are still valid.

Menser tells ELi, "The applicant started the project with the demolition of the principal building on the site, which concluded in August 2020. They also applied for an interior remodel permit for the remaining building on the site prior to the expiration of the SUP in February 2021. After meeting with the applicant [in early November], I understand they do intend to move forward with the medical provisioning center and will be applying for an adult use marijuana SUP to supplement the medical approval."

There are currently three operating medical marijuana retail operations in East Lansing: Skymint on the north side, Pincanna downtown, and Pleasantrees near Costco. Another operation near Costco was approved for the public land sold via eBay, but that has not yet seen construction. Applications for "medical marijuana" and "recreational marijuana" are approved separately by City Council, and not all the active operations have both types of approval.

How Will the City Spend \$12M in Federal Covid Relief?

AL HARGRAVE
Reporter

The City of East Lansing received half of its \$12.2M Covid relief funds through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) in May, according to City Manager George Lahanas, and now Lahanas is in discussions with the new City Council about how those funds should be spent.

Lahanas has said he wants the funds to be used in ways that address stresses caused by the pandemic and align with the City's strategic priorities.

As of now, his draft plan includes \$280,000 for the library (including \$80,000 for "A/V conferencing services"), \$1.75M to fix parking garages plus another \$1.2M to repave parking lots at parks like the soccer and softball complexes, \$1.25M for

Lahanas has said he wants the funds to be used in ways that address stresses caused by the pandemic and align with the City's strategic priorities.

the Abbot Road fire station, about \$2.7M for the Hannah Community Center including \$1M to "renovate existing meeting/conference space," \$2M to renovate City Hall, \$1M to help property owners install valves that stop sewers from backing up into their buildings, \$1M for "smart" water meters that enable the City to better monitor property owners' water usage, and \$250,000 for downtown business support.

Lahanas has told Council that should the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 pass, East Lansing might receive additional funds for infrastructure projects then. He also said that the State of Michigan has \$6 billion in federal Covid relief that it has yet to allocate.

"We don't want to miss opportunities," Lahanas told Council.

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Send a check payable to "East Lansing Info" to PO Box 115, East Lansing MI 48826-0115.



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Case Dismissed: Judge Throws Out Developer's Lawsuit Against ELI

ANDREW GRAHAM
City Desk Reporter

A defamation lawsuit against East Lansing Info (ELI) and its founder Alice Dreger brought by real estate developer Scott Chappelle has been summarily dismissed by Judge Joyce Draganchuk of Ingham County's 30th Circuit Court according to an order signed on Nov. 12.

During an approximately 40-minute-long hearing on ELI and Dreger's motion to dismiss the case on First Amendment grounds on Oct. 27, Draganchuk went point-by-point in her rejection of Chappelle's suit.

The exact reasons Draganchuk cited for each claim being protected under the First Amendment varied, but generally boiled down to the fact that most were simply true reports based on public records – including being based on Chappelle's federal criminal indictment for tax evasion and bank fraud.

The rest of the claims about which Chappelle was suing were either not statements made by Dreger, or, in the case of an essay Dreger published separately at the online discussion forum Public Response, were expressions of opinion based on fact.

"This is a reassuring victory for the First Amendment and for investigative journalism across the State of Michigan," said Brian Wassom of the Warner Norcross + Judd law firm, who represented ELI and Dreger.

"There was never any doubt that ELI's reporting was well-sourced and a fair report of public records," Wassom continued. "But in an environment where basic principles of free speech and the liberty of the press are under constant attack, it is profoundly gratifying when a court issues such a full-throated and well-reasoned endorsement of First Amendment values as this court did today."

Chappelle's lawyer arguing the motion on Oct. 27, Daniel Powell of Minc Law, was particularly animated during arguments for why the case should continue, but avoided addressing matters of fact. He claimed that "the truth would come out" if the case continued and the discovery process could take place and intimated that the work ELI and Dreger did (and does) was not in a journalistic capacity.

Powell and Chappelle's other attorney in this case, Christopher Cataldo of the Jaffe Raitt Heuer & Weiss law firm, did not respond to a request for comment from ELI.

On Oct. 27, Wassom made a brief opening argument before Powell's response. He pointed out that it was time to dismiss this

suit, which was first filed on April 5, to negate the "chilling" effect a pending lawsuit can have over a news organization.

After Powell finished his response and argued for the suit to continue to trial, Wassom opted not to elaborate further, as Powell hadn't addressed any matters directly in the filings.

At this point, Draganchuk went through the suit filed by Chappelle and explained how each claim brought fell short. She also explained how it was not improper for ELI to report on the federal indictment against Chappelle against the backdrop of his redevelopment work in East Lansing, as some of the same companies involved in Chappelle's failed City Center II project are named in the federal indictment.

The suit was originally filed by Chappelle's attorneys in Washtenaw County and was moved to Ingham County at ELI's request. It was then assigned to Judge Wanda Stokes' court, then moved to Draganchuk's business court. Chappelle's attorneys tried to get it back to Stokes' court, but in an Oct. 13 hearing in which Draganchuk said the plaintiff's actions "smacks of judge shopping," Draganchuk ruled to keep it in her court.

In response to a request for comment from ELI after the Oct. 27 hearing, Powell sent a press release which opened with a bolded topline proclaiming that a prior, unrelated defendant – Eliot Singer – had issued a retraction and apology to Chappelle. (Singer's retraction and apology is not a new development, having occurred in July 2021.)

The rest of the release echoed various arguments Powell had unsuccessfully brought before Draganchuk. It attempted, as Powell has in the past, to assert that Dreger and ELI based its reporting on false information while not making any specific claims and despite Draganchuk's comprehensive rebuttal of similar arguments.

"There's nothing new here," said Wassom, ELI and Dreger's attorney, about the release. "Mr. Chappelle and his team can complain as much as they like about ELI's reporting being 'false' or 'defamatory.' But repetition doesn't make those accusations accurate. They aren't, as the court has already ruled."

Responding to the press release, Dreger said, "Eliot Singer can retract his opinions. No one can retract the facts."

"We will not be intimidated," Dreger added. "We will continue to serve this community with news."

Chappelle's criminal case is set for trial in May 2022. He faces an eight-count federal grand jury indictment. If convicted on the bank fraud charge, he faces up to 30 years in prison.

NEWS BRIEFS

ELPS Leaders Explain and Support Decision on Holidays



The East Lansing Public Schools Board of Education and Superintendent Dori Leyko have elucidated the process on the decision to end parties for Halloween and Valentine's Day in ELPS elementary schools in the face of parent pushback and national media attention. ELI's Emily Joan Elliott reports that even EL City Council members reported being contacted with aggressive language about the school district's move, as the issue became nationally controversial. Speaking on behalf of the elementary school principals, Marble Elementary School Principal Josh Robertson told the school board that the conversations this year about ending in-school celebrations for the holidays were initiated by elementary school administrators and based on conversations with teachers. Leyko stood by the decision-making process despite some parents saying they wished they had been consulted through surveys or meetings of parent councils.

People Facing Chemotherapy Get Help from Local Support Organization



Jack Timothy Harrison reports for ELI that Mary Jo Wegenke started The "You've Got This" Project to give hope to adults with cancer and to provide them with cost-free treatment starter packs of helpful products as they undergo treatment. Having had breast cancer herself and now almost five years cancer-free, Wegenke told ELI she founded the nonprofit to "pay it forward." The idea for the organization and treatment starter packs it distributes expanded after a neighbor was diagnosed with cancer. Although primarily operating in the greater Lansing area, "You've Got This" packs have been sent out to 13 states, and about ten packs a month go to the Breslin Cancer Center. Breslin nurse practitioner Ryan Gennette, who teaches classes for people preparing for chemotherapy, serves as the chief medical advisor for the nonprofit.

Man Seen with Gun Leads to Emergency Alerts



A man entered the Admiral gas station on E. Grand River Avenue just east of McDonald's on Nov. 8, and "brandished" a handgun, according to a series of MSU public safety alerts. Gunshot sounds led to more alerts, as ELI's Andrew Graham reported for our readers. The incident was the latest in a number of serious incidents around the City of East Lansing in 2021. Early in the morning on Oct. 31, emergency workers responded to a person seriously injured by gunfire in the area of C.V.S. downtown. In late September, another incident in the same area left one person with "significant" stabbing wounds. And in late July, a shooting occurred in that same area. Incidents of violence have not been exclusive to downtown. On Oct. 30, police responded to two people dead from gunshot wounds at a house on Halter Lane in the City's Northern Tier, in what police have suggested was a murder-suicide. In August, a shooting occurred at a Whitehills residence, and in May, a shooting at The Quarters (north of Lake Lansing Road) left six people injured.

What Has East Lansing's "Percent for Art" Law Cost and Brought to the City?

AL HARGRAVE
Reporter

In October of 2014, East Lansing's Ordinance 1339, better known as "the Percent for Art Ordinance," passed through a City Council vote of 3-1. Besides allocating some public money each year to public art projects, this relatively unusual local law commands private developers who redevelop properties in East Lansing to devote one percent of their total project costs to public-facing art.

Under the law, developers have three options: (1) install new public-facing art onsite; (2) donate art to the City of East Lansing; or (3) donate funds to the City's Public Art Fund. Failure to complete this requirement can mean a developer is denied final approval of a project by City inspectors.

The total "art charge" is capped at \$25,000 for each project, and not every project is subject to this law. Development projects exempted include projects with a total cost under \$500,000, residential projects with fewer than four units, renovation projects that come in under \$2.5 million, and projects whose fulfillment of the ordinance would be contrary to other laws.

Meanwhile, the law also requires that there "shall be appropriated [to the Public Art Fund] each year by the city council an amount equal to one percent of the cost to the City's general fund of all public facilities or city capital improvement projects unless public art is not legally permissible

due to the constraints imposed by the funding mechanism." This money is drawn from existing tax revenues and then specifically diverted to the Public Art Fund.



Scan for more about this story.

Photos by Dylan Lees, Natalie Rose, and Raymond Holt for ELI



"The embedded art on the Valley Court Park-facing side of 300 W. Grand River Ave. marked the first art installed under East Lansing's Ordinance 1339.



L: This seven-foot-tall statue, by artist Jonpaul Smith, is located along Coolidge Road. | R: Artist Lauren Asta in front of the mural she completed with funds contributed by the developers of the Center City District project.

1%
The amount private developers who redevelop properties in East Lansing are required to devote (of their total project costs) to public-facing art.

Since 2014, developers of eight qualifying projects have chosen to install art onsite:

4 Sculptures | **2** Murals Painted | **1** Theater Improvements

* And one developer spent half of their funds installing a sculpture and the other half donating art to the City.



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Nixle provides emergency alerts for the East Lansing area. Text your zip code to 888777 for mobile alerts from ELPD. To sign up for MSU's emergency alerts, text the word MSUALERT to 888777.

the BIG NEWS

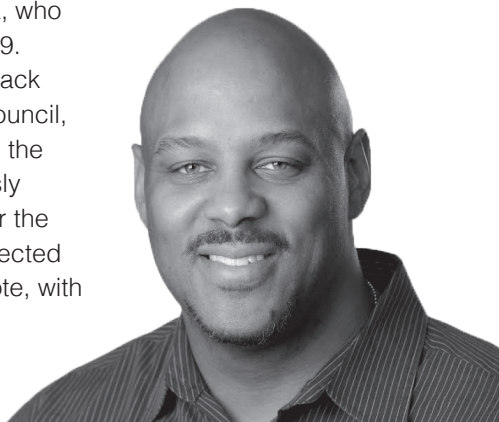
in East Lansing

01

East Lansing has its first Black mayor.

Three new City Council members were sworn in on Nov. 9, with Ron Bacon, Dana Watson, and George Brookover coming in (in that order) as the top vote-getters in the Nov. 2 election. Those three join Jessie Gregg and Lisa Babcock, who were elected to Council in Nov. 2019.

Bacon and Watson are the first Black people elected to East Lansing's Council, and after the swearing-in on Nov. 9, the five members of Council unanimously elected Bacon to serve as Mayor for the next two years. Gregg was again elected Mayor Pro Tem, this time in a 4-1 vote, with Brookover voting for Watson.



02

This Council will have a lot to do.

Right off the bat, the Council needs to decide who to pick as the next City Attorney, as the previous Council decided to move on from the Foster Swift law firm. Foster Swift had been operating under a contract capped at \$500,000/year excluding special litigation services, and until a new City Attorney starts, the City will be paying Foster Swift an hourly rate of \$225 with no cap on the total.

The new Council will also have to decide how to manage the evaluation of the City Manager, which hasn't occurred since George Lahanas was awarded a new four-year contract in September 2020. Babcock and Bacon had been tasked with that job, but there has been no apparent movement forward.

Among many challenges with which he's had to grapple, Lahanas has been dealing with pushback from some City employees who have found the ongoing intensive anti-racism training to be problematic in duration and content. Employees have been leaking ELi letters in which Lahanas demands that employees behave better in the sessions being run by external consultants.

Those consultants conducted a cultural climate survey under the \$153,000 contract, but the City tells ELi it has no copy of that. Lahanas has declared an effort to make East Lansing an "anti-racist city" and, with Council's blessing earlier this year, created a new Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, directed by Elaine Hardy.

Under the City Charter, the only two positions for which Council is directly responsible are the City Manager and City Attorney. That said, the Council does also have some indirect power over the rest of the City Staff, because it is responsible for approving budgets that shape the rest of the workforce. It's also worth noting that revenues and expenses have been relatively unpredictable because of Covid.

03

The City's financial woes are going to remain a big issue.



As ELi reported, the City's pension debt continues to grow, with the unfunded portion now reaching about \$100 million. Lahanas is defending the awarding of new pensions as necessary to hiring good workers, but the City's financial problems remain a concern among residents, especially homeowners, based on ELi surveys and public comments submitted to Council.

Additionally, the City is currently facing several big lawsuits that have already cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and could cost a lot more if the City loses.

Brookover ran on a platform of keeping the City out of "petty" lawsuits, but the City has no choice but to deal with ongoing lawsuits, including one suit brought by the Nichols law firm under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) seeking Council members' texts about police officers accused of racial bias.

The Country Mill suit is expected to see a ruling soon. In that case, owners of an apple farm have argued they were unjustly banned by the City from participating in the market because of their Catholic religious stance

against gay marriage at their Charlotte wedding-hosting business. About \$200,000 in taxpayer funds has been spent by the City on legal defense in that case alone.

The class action suit against the City for the BWL franchise fee is also expected to see resolution soon. If the City loses that case, it will likely forfeit more than one million dollars in revenue per year, and may have to pay back a large total to BWL customers in East Lansing. The plaintiffs are arguing that the Council essentially illegally instituted a tax via BWL bills.

As we report in this issue, the City is likely to obtain around \$12 million total in federal Covid relief funds with most of it likely going to public facility repairs and upgrades. And the City might be getting a not-significant payment out of a national suit in which the City is a co-plaintiff against makers of prescription opioids. Also, with the passage and signing of the one-trillion-dollar federal infrastructure bill, the City could also get additional funds for infrastructure projects — that remains to be seen, though.

And people here do want infrastructure repairs.

04

While the statewide outcry continues to be about potholes, in East Lansing, the bigger area of concern is water infrastructure, namely the storm and sanitary sewer systems. People are tired of dealing with flooding and are now seeking answers and solutions. Flooding has hardly been limited to the hard-hit Glencairn neighborhood, and southern Chesterfield Hills is coping with a persistent smell of poop — an odor homeowners there say has only gotten worse since the big Michigan Avenue sewer rebuild.

City management is looking to deal with these issues, and also to try to reopen the Family Aquatic Center (which has fallen into disrepair), and fix problems at the Hannah Community Center, City Hall, and the Abbot Road fire station.

Spending on the parks and trails is being helped by grants from Ingham County and the State, but some of that spending remains questioned in terms of the details as people debate what East Lansing can really afford.



05

The Library is becoming a source of dispute.

As the City spends about a million dollars on a new round of repairs to the East Lansing Public Library, the library millages are coming due in 2022. Council is empowered to decide whether to renew one of those millages, but the second one would require voter approval, and there is talk around town about looking instead into the option of having East Lansing join the Capital Area District Library (CADL).

Usually library millages pass without much discussion in East Lansing, but this year could be different. There's likely to be a lot of open debate about how best to support this locally-beloved institution.



HELP SHARE THE NEWS Send tips@eastlansinginfo.news or to ELi, PO Box 115, East Lansing MI 48826-0115.

“Placemaking is here to say.”

06

East Lansing has addressed the economic impacts of Covid-19 in myriad ways, ranging from eliminating certain fees for business to imposing a moratorium on water shutoffs as when around a thousand customers fell behind on their bills.

Among the most notable (and popular) endeavors the City undertook to address the Covid-related economic downturn was its placemaking campaign. Led by Community Economic Development Administrator Adam Cummins, the efforts resulted in a variety of spaces and programs designed to get people downtown, safely, to help sustain businesses and vendors. A farmer’s market was held in the M.A.C. Ave. parking garage, a welcome back event greeted MSU students for Fall 2021, and then there was perhaps the most popular of all: The Albert EL Fresco.

This involved a portion of Albert Avenue between M.A.C. Avenue and Abbot Road being closed to cars and turned into a pedestrian-friendly space with seating and other amenities. The EL Fresco — more specifically the decision by Council to discontinue it just prior to MSU students returning — even came up during the Council candidate forum hosted by the Associated Students of MSU (ASMSU).

At that time, then-candidate Bacon declared that “placemaking is here to stay.” He said his hope is to reopen the EL Fresco early enough in the calendar year for MSU students to use it toward the end of the Spring 2022 semester, so the City has some idea of what that crossover would be like. The original decision to discontinue the EL Fresco after Aug. 15 stemmed from a worry about the presence of thousands of students stressing police resources too thin to deal with an area already causing problems.



Albert EL Fresco



Farmer’s Market

09

And then there’s the big context: the environment.

The City is looking at ways to reduce its carbon footprint with innovations like the anaerobic “poop digester” at the sewer plant. Solar panels are being installed around town. We’re seeing more bike lanes than ever before. But some want much more intensive efforts at reduction of greenhouse gasses, and more data brought to bear on actions that feel symbolically “green” but may not be in fact (like curbside recycling of some materials).

Some people are also tired of what they see as too much tree-killing, but a new survey of the City’s canopy might tell us in 2022 whether we’ve really gained or lost biomass. One thing is clear: the deer seem really happy to be living here and are eating well. We’re hearing about them from all over town — even near downtown. The City tells ELi they’re planning another (controversial) firearm cull with the aim of killing at least 100 deer.

Increasing population density downtown was supposed to involve people, not deer — and, all jokes aside, downtown is far more populated by humans than it was ten years ago. More projects are on the way in the downtown area, too, with the MSUFUCU office building being built in the next few years. Plus, there is expected to be development around Valley Court Park.

The upside of this growth has included new businesses moving in to serve the increased traffic, and more people to support businesses and the City’s parking system. The downsides are the conflicts about noise, parking, rent prices, regulations, and the question of what downtown should be like at various times of day.



Gary Caldwell for ELi

TAKE THE SURVEY



Do ELi a favor: Take the City’s “Deer Management Survey” by using this QR code or going to www.surveymonkey.com/r/eastlansingdeersurvey. We will then use the Freedom of Information Act to collect the data for our reporting on the deer and the City’s approach to the burgeoning herds.

07

Speaking of the issue of violence and policing...

As is true nationwide, gun crimes and violence are up in East Lansing from last year to this year. While it used to be fairly rare for ELi to report shootings, stabbings, and the like, the Ann Street Plaza area seems to have become something of a magnet for trouble, particularly on the weekends.

The matter is made even more complex by tensions regarding recent attempted police reforms in East Lansing. City leadership has moved in the direction of seeking less policing in general — an approach that hasn’t thrilled residents who want more enforcement of laws like speed limits.

ELPD has also shifted towards using a social worker and Neighborhood Resource Specialists for lower-risk interventions aimed at addressing issues of mental health or quality of life. East Lansing also now has a new Police Oversight Commission, bringing an additional layer of

scrutiny to the police and their policies and practices.

The recent post-game property destruction may well function as something of a test for just how much less prosecution and policing people here will tolerate. Mayor Bacon and Mayor Pro Tem Gregg have both called on MSU to be more responsive to the “couch-burning culture” and general issue of drunkenness and related obnoxious behaviors off-campus. MSU President Sam Stanley has said he supports prosecution of crimes, but town-gown relations look likely to remain strained at least while suspects in the Oct. 30-31 fires and car-flipping are still being identified.

As ELi has reported, East Lansing Public Schools have also been struggling with problems of student conduct. Teachers and parents report that problems are up, with some expressing frustration over what they see as lack of adequate discipline or racially-biased discipline.

Watch for a lot of debate — and maybe some new policies — on housing.

08

Redevelopment continues apace around East Lansing and neighboring communities, but that doesn’t mean that everybody is happy with what’s being built. We expect continued discussion of housing in East Lansing, with particular attention to what many perceive as the unmet needs of seniors, families with school-aged children, and people with lower incomes. This discussion may well lead to some new housing policies out of the new Council, too.

There’s talk in particular, among City Planning staff and the Planning Commission, about rezoning downtown to allow for the building of townhouses and small apartment buildings where older houses now stand in the circle around the downtown area.

10

We know from experience that we can’t predict what else might be big in 2022. But as long as ELi is funded, we will keep you in the know!



The new eleven-member Commission unanimously elected administrative judge Erick Williams as the Commission's Chair after a nomination from Noel Garcia, who is a retired Lansing Police Department officer. East Lansing School Board Trustee Kath Edsall was named as Vice Chair in a split vote.

EAST LANSING POLICING

Police Oversight Starts, as Council Approves Command Officers' Contract

HEATHER BROTHERS

City Desk Reporter

East Lansing's Independent Police Oversight Commission convened for the first time on Nov. 8 to decide procedural issues, debate how their independence informs their relationship with the East Lansing Police Department, and review use of force incidents from October.

The new eleven-member Commission unanimously elected administrative judge Erick Williams as the Commission's Chair after a nomination from Noel Garcia, who is a retired Lansing Police Department officer. Williams and Garcia served on the Study Committee on an Independent Police Oversight Commission, which laid the groundwork for the new commission.

Kath Edsall was named as Vice Chair in a split vote. Edsall also serves as a trustee on the East Lansing Public Schools Board of Education.

The Commission divided about whether to invite ELPD to attend the meetings.

Garcia was among the first to endorse inviting an ELPD member to attend meetings on a regular basis. Edsall was in strong opposition to a constant police presence at Commission meetings, arguing that people may be intimidated.

Edsall received strong pushback from Shawn Farzam, an account executive for an insurance agency, who said that all present were adults and should be able to speak their minds regardless of who was present at an open meeting.

Commissioner Amanda Morgan, who is a social worker, said having officers at meetings would be a time for the police to hear concerns from the public, and Commissioner Robin Etchison, a retired General Motors employee, said it would be good for officers with the "authority" to implement changes to hear the Commission's recommendations.

Commissioner Ernest Conerly, a middle-school teacher, argued that the Commission should be careful not to "alienate" the police and instead work to build a bridge between the community and officers, saying that officers are community members as well.

Edsall questioned what it meant for the Commission's independence by having a police officer in the room while the Commission looked at sensitive topics like complaints against the police.

"How is that transparent?" Conerly asked in response. He argued the police need to give their side on complaints and that the police perspective should be integral to the commission's processes.

After a lengthy debate, the Commission did unanimously agree to a motion that would invite an administrative member of ELPD to attend meetings to respond to specific agenda items, with the understanding that this approach may be amended in the future.

ELPD's use-of-force reports were criticized by commissioners.

Twenty incidents of use of force were documented during October 2021, with 18 involving human suspects. The other two involved officers putting down wounded deer with firearms. (ELPD classifies any instance where an officer unholsters their weapon as a "use of force.")

As this monthly data was presented for the first time, several members of the Commission came prepared to critique how the information was

presented to the panel. The names of the officers involved in the use of force incidents were not included in the report. Several commissioners pointed out that the absence of that information was in violation of Ordinance 1503, which established the Police Oversight Commission.

According to the ordinance, "The [use of force] report shall include at a minimum, a brief description of the incident and the names and demographic data about the officers and members of the public involved in the incident."

Several Commissioners argued that recognizing patterns in officer behavior is important to the group's mission. Commissioner Sharon Hobbs, who is a clinical psychologist, pointed out that if several incidents involved the same officer, then that would be something the Commission would need to investigate further.

Shelli Neumann, the City staff liaison to the Commission, said that the format of the report was identical to what ELPD gives to City Council and that the process to compile the data is labor-intensive since there is no database from which to pull the data. Neumann told the Commission that this was a "first try."

The format of the reports was also a problem for commissioners. Each incident is listed with a brief description of the event, the date, and the gender and race of suspects and officers involved. Commissioner Benjamin Hughes, an education specialist, pointed out that this format did not make it easy for the Commission to evaluate patterns, so he compiled a spreadsheet to better analyze the data.

The Commission also asked for other information to be provided, including the ages of those involved in incidents and whether a social worker was present on scene.

They asked Neumann to pass along their requests for corrections and to invite a member of ELPD to speak at the next meeting on how the use of force policy is applied and on ELPD's progress in implementing an early warning system (a database that can help the department identify patterns in individual officer's behaviors).

The Police Oversight Commission will meet next on Monday, Dec. 13.

Council approved the Command Officers' contract.

The City Council approved a new contract with the Command Officers Association of Michigan (COAM), the police union that represents eleven sergeants and lieutenants in the East Lansing Police Department, in a 4-1 vote at the Oct. 19 meeting.

At the meeting, Council member Lisa Babcock asked to move the item from the consent agenda to the business agenda to allow for discussion before the vote, a motion then-Mayor Jessy Gregg opposed.

Gregg wanted to approve the contract staff had arranged. Bargaining began in May 2021, and the contract as approved will be in effect until June 30, 2023. The contract includes a 2% wage increase for FY22 and a 3% increase in FY23.

During Council's discussion of the matter, Babcock pointed to some things she saw as lacking in the contract, including no explicit mention of barring officers from membership in known hate organizations or what occurs when officers fail to meet the set of standards outlined in the contract.

"We know, from real life experience, how much hinges on the contract and how much hinges on our ability to respond to, what I would like to call unthinkable incidents, but incidents that do happen. And when

those incidents happen, we need to have a stronger document than this," Babcock said.

"This is the time to do it. This is what we were elected to do. We were elected to stand up for the people of the City of East Lansing and, whether they come in for the day, whether they live here, or are driving through, we need to have a response, we need to have the right to respond, we need to tell folks that we will respond for them," Babcock continued.

Gregg disagreed with Babcock's assessment, saying, "I think it's not a fair characterization to say that we've done nothing, because we have not had success in changing specific clauses within this contract."

Gregg went on to say that the Council has focused on policing policy, like use of force, rather than at the contract level.

Council member Dana Watson expressed her hope that the Oversight Commission will help Council with ideas of how to make changes to policing in the City.

In his remarks, now-Mayor Ron Bacon highlighted the national context that surrounds issues of policing, arguing that "bad actors" won't necessarily follow the rules of the contract no matter how many are put in place. He acknowledged there is still a lot of work to be done in East Lansing on this "complicated issue" and pointed out that law enforcement officers are under the heightened scrutiny of the public in 2021.

"The nation's watching," Bacon said. "The nation's fatigued."

The contract was approved in a 4-1 vote by Council, with Babcock the sole dissenting vote.

"The nation's watching. The nation's fatigued."

- Mayor Ron Bacon

NEXT MEETING

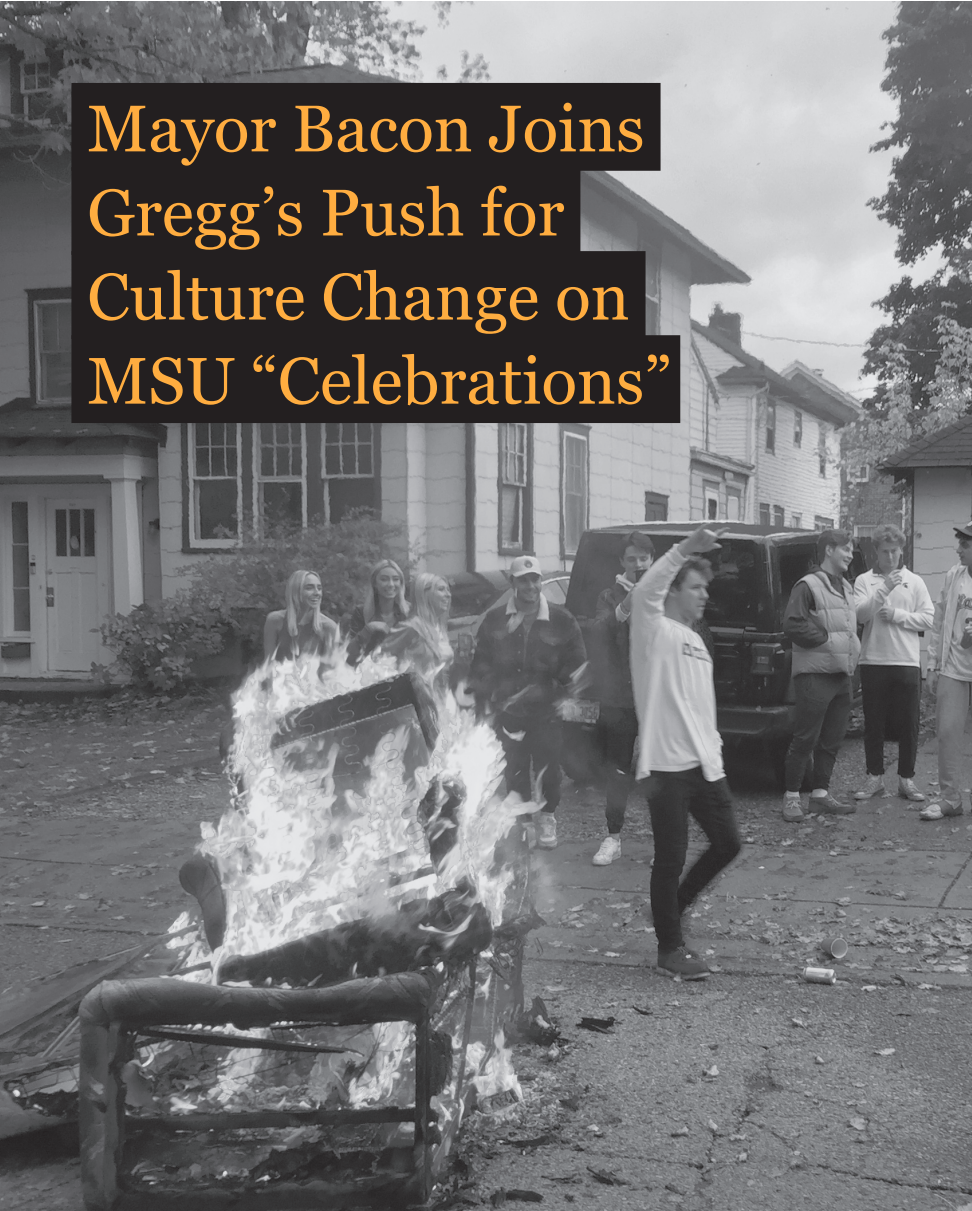
The Police Oversight Commission will meet again on Monday, Dec. 13, to discuss the use of force reports from both October and November and possibly to hear from ELPD on these matters.



Officers enter the East Lansing Police Department.

Dylan Lees for ELI

Mayor Bacon Joins Gregg's Push for Culture Change on MSU "Celebrations"



ALICE DREGER
Publisher + Reporter

"Once again the actions of a few bad actors have blackened the reputation of MSU with national and international headlines showing bonfires and Spartan fans kicking in car windows. I am sure that the vast majority of the student body finds this behavior to be heinous and unacceptable but unfortunately they have now been lumped in with the campus culture that includes violence and vandalism."

So wrote Jessy Gregg to Michigan State University President Sam Stanley along with "MSU notables and East Lansing Representatives" about her take on what happened in East Lansing on Oct. 30, 2021, after MSU beat the University of Michigan in football. Mayor Pro Tem Gregg, serving at the time as Mayor of East Lansing, rode with East Lansing Police on that day and saw for herself what was happening around town.

"We need to push back on the toxic celebration culture that results in your students and fans drinking themselves into the hospital, flipping cars and throwing glass bottles at our police responders," her letter continued.

On Nov. 9, Ron Bacon was elected by Council as



Mayor Ron Bacon

the new Mayor, with Gregg again elected to the role of Mayor Pro Tem (substitute Mayor). Asked by ELi for comment, Bacon told ELi, "I am in support of the statement and positions taken by Mayor Pro Tem Gregg."

"We will continue to encourage and persuade the university to partner with us in demanding a cultural change particularly surrounding major events," Bacon added. "MSU and East Lansing must both project and promote a united front against destructive, malicious and dangerous actions. This will be a high priority as we prioritize the safety of our community, visitors, and our entire public safety apparatus."

President Stanley issued a statement about campus safety which included this: "MSU continues to work with our partners in East Lansing to identify those who took part in recent vandalism and arson, and we offer our commitment and support to the City of East Lansing to work together to maintain a safe off-campus community. Students who are identified as participating in illegal activities will be subject to our student conduct code and will be held accountable for destructive behavior."

The raucous events of the Oct. 30-31 weekend ultimately affected the entire region, as emergency services from surrounding areas swept in to provide aid. John Foren, spokesperson for Sparrow Hospital tells ELi that that "we had a surge of [emergency room] cases and a much higher number of alcohol-related cases that entire weekend."

And it's not as if the hospital emergency room was in the middle of a lull going into the game and Halloween. According to Tiffani Dusang, Director of the Sparrow Hospital Emergency Department, "The Sparrow Emergency Department remains very busy caring for extremely ill patients. Every room and hallway space is consistently full."

Asked if ambulance runs to the hospital were impeded by the crowds, traffic, and widespread fires on Oct. 30, East Lansing Fire Chief Dawn Carson told ELi that her team of firefighter-paramedics "were able to handle all our calls without delay" in terms of medical response. Responding to dozens of fire calls amounted to another problem altogether.

In advance of the big game on Oct. 30, Congresswoman Elissa Slotkin used the high-profile event in an attempt to raise money for her reelection campaign. She began a solicitation letter this way: "It's that time of year again. The chill in the air, tailgating with loved ones, warming yourself by the...couch fire."

Slotkin's letter went on to say people shouldn't really burn couches, but her joking around about it speaks to the degree to which some see the practice as sort of inevitable. Slotkin's office has not responded to a recent ELi request for comment.

But ELPD is definitely pursuing charges according to Captain Chad Connelly. Police are currently poring over videos and photographs from the events to identify and question suspects. The City



Mayor Pro Tem Jessy Gregg

of East Lansing and ELPD have also published multiple social media posts asking the community for help identifying suspects.

Connelly told ELi, "We see this behavior and these crimes as a serious concern for our community, public safety and well-being of all who reside in or come to our community."

In Michigan, arson charges require that the burned property be valued at \$1,000 or more or that the offender have a prior conviction, but Connelly told ELi that police may alternatively bring a charge of Malicious Destruction of Property (MDOP), which can be prosecuted as either a misdemeanor or felony, depending on the circumstances.

Did changes to the Disorderly Conduct Code play a role?

While Aaron Stephens was Mayor, Council changed the City's Disorderly Conduct Code, partly with an eye to preventing police from bringing what Stephens and others saw as unnecessarily severe enforcement of the kind that could allow for the introduction of officers' biases. At the time, concerns were raised about whether these changes might impede officers' ability to deal with "celebratory couch burning."

But Connelly tells ELi, "While the disorderly code may have some changes, illegal activity such as MDOP and Arson can still be policed."

Earlier this year, Stephens told ELPD he did not want to see tear gas used ever in East Lansing. And while one MSU student told an ELi reporter that she saw police at Cedar Village on Oct. 30, with tear gas canisters, Connelly told ELi that wasn't the case.

"ELPD does have chemical munitions," Connelly explained, "but only uses it in cases of extreme unrest if authorized by the Chief of Police. No tear gas was utilized at all," on Oct. 30. "This person may have mistaken other tools as tear gas. There was no tear gas on scene at all."

In 2019, ELi ran an interview with Deputy Police Chief Steve Gonzalez in which Gonzalez described innovative techniques ELPD was using to disperse big post-game crowds. This time around, though, the scene at Cedar Village was poorly controlled, with a car flipped and other significant destructive behaviors breaking out within large crowds.

Asked what was different this time, Connelly explained, "The major difference appeared to be crowd size, various locations and demeanor." According to him, "This crowd was more destructive in nature. In my opinion if you weigh the crowd size and demeanor, our approach worked, but the challenge was the widespread destructive behavior."

Asked about whether he was concerned about officers' safety, Connelly answered, "There are always increased officer safety concerns, along with concerns to the public's safety during these events. Fires, cars being flipped and damaged, things being thrown into crowds always presents an increased risk of injury to us and those we serve."

And now, Connelly told ELi, "Our Investigative division is actively working these cases and tips are coming in."

East Lansing's First Woman Fire Chief Sworn In

AMALIA MEDINA
Student Journalist

Nearly 30 years ago, Dawn Carson, the newly appointed Fire Chief for the East Lansing Fire Department, was working in emergency medical services (EMS) at Grand Ledge Ambulance Services, in physical therapy at a local hospital, and as a Certified Athletic Trainer for Mason High School.

But then she saw an ad in the paper that said the ELFD was looking to hire a new paramedic and firefighter. Because she has always loved helping people and grew up watching "Emergency!," Carson decided to quit her jobs and become a full-time student at Lansing Community College. There, she completed her paramedic and firefighter training. Shortly after, she was hired at ELFD.

"I became a firefighter because I wanted to help

people," Carson said in an interview with ELi. "We are not strictly firefighters at ELFD. We are also paramedics. Much of our job is providing EMS to our community. EMS was my passion before I decided to go all in and get involved in firefighting. I love the fire aspect as it is physical, challenging, and requires you to work seamlessly as a team."

Carson was sworn in on Oct. 5 at City Council before a room packed with supporters, including members of Carson's family and the ELFD team. She brings with her her experience as Interim Chief and a master's degree in organizational management.

"Upon becoming chief, my role is not the boots-on-the-ground, but rather overseeing the business of the department," Carson said. "I want to continue maintaining the quality services that are provided by our department to the community, and my



Andrew Graham for ELi

East Lansing Fire Chief Dawn Carson was sworn in at City Council on Oct. 5, 2021, with her parents Harold and Karen Carson in attendance.

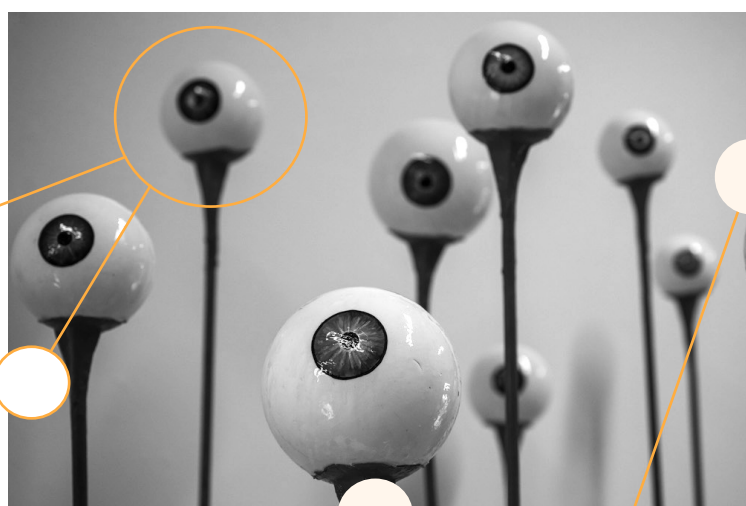
goal is to be the best supervisor and department head I can be."

In addition to being excited to be chief, Carson is also looking forward to being the first woman appointed as fire chief in this region. Carson also told ELi she is especially eager to work with the "outstanding group of paramedics and firefighters who provide excellent emergency medical services and fire protection to the community."

"I am excited to be given the opportunity to serve as chief of ELFD," Carson said. "I have held myself to a very high standard from the day I was hired. I always try to do better than the day before. I accept that there will be challenges, but that is what makes us grow and become better people and leaders. I am excited that I can be a role model for women of all ages and to show that through hard work, you can pursue anything."



MSU Museum Exhibits Examine Technology's Tracking, Tracing of People



SARAH SPOHN
Arts + Cultures Reporter

From now through Dec. 11, the MSU Science Gallery is presenting *Tracked & Traced* at the Michigan State University Museum. Fifteen exhibits are on display in the MSU Museum's Main Gallery, with three additional exhibits scattered across downtown East Lansing and MSU's STEM Teaching and Learning Facility. Collectively these works examine user data, the sharing of personal information, surveillance, and ethical considerations in today's technological world.

This is the first exhibit since the MSU Museum reopened in September after closing for the pandemic. Museum and Science Gallery Director Devon Akmon spoke to ELi about how the exhibition came to be, through Science Gallery and funding from MSUFCU.

Akmon told ELi that the Science Gallery was created in Dublin, Ireland, to break the traditional museum mold by bringing art and science together to explore critical ideas. Science Gallery began to grow across the world, and today there are nine affiliated members worldwide, one of them being the Science Gallery at MSU, the first one in the U.S.

Akmon explained that Science Gallery "was basically formed to engage 15-25-year-olds around thought-provoking and contemporary ideas and things impacting the world."

Science Gallery put out an open call to artists, technologists, scientists, and researchers from around the world to submit an idea for this exhibition.

"For 'Tracked & Traced,' we had almost 200 submissions, and only 15 got selected to be in the final exhibition," Akmon said.

Among the 15 exhibitors is Abhishek Narula, Assistant Professor of Electronic Art and Intermedia & Experience Architecture in the Department of Art, Art History, and Design.

The exhibits explore how the devices and tools we use, like search engines, social media, apps, fitness trackers, and retail loyalty programs enable the tracking and tracing of people. There are four sub-themes within the exhibition, which utilizes displays and interactive screens.

"One looks at surveillance capitalism, the idea that data has really become the most valued commodity, in the ways in which our personal data is collected, shared, and utilized by companies and government," Akmon said. "A second subtheme is looking at how surveillance technologies increase inequities in the marginalization of select communities."

Akmon said the other two sub-themes are a bit more optimistic.

"One is looking at how we can reclaim our own

personal agency in light of prevalent surveillance throughout the world," he said. "And lastly, one looks at the actions we can take to actually thwart some of the surveillance technologies."

"We don't want this to say that all surveillance is bad. We know there's a lot of surveillance that is bad, but there are a lot of amazing things we're seeing too, like the tracking of genomes or the ways we're tracking the pandemic in the scientific community," said Akmon. "Surveillance can be both beneficial and harmful, and that's what we're really diving into."

Given the relevance of the topic today, Akmon said the exhibit is especially important for young people, especially college students.

"We know this has a lot of impact on the communities we serve as an institution," he said. "We want to create space to educate people and have them think critically on the impact it's having on their lives, but also how they can maybe gain a little bit of agency on how to push back on some of these things."

As for the three additional exhibits embedded in the community, two appear in the new STEM Learning & Teaching Facility on campus. Through partnership with the East Lansing Arts Council, the exhibit "Street Ghosts" showcases images of people on display up and down Grand River Avenue at the same spots Google Street View captured their locations.

The exhibition also coincides with about 10 public programs, including virtual and in-person events, like panel discussions, workshops, and film screenings. Ultimately, the goal of the exhibition is to start conversations, including those facilitated by the Science Gallery's mediators.

"One of the really neat things about Science Gallery is that we have mediators, who work in the gallery and facilitate dialogue with our guests," Akmon told ELi. "They're not like your traditional museum docent; they ask questions."

Aloha Cookin' Brings Hawaiian and Korean Delights to East Lansing

BY SARAH SPOHN
Arts + Cultures Reporter

A mahalo – the Hawaiian expression of gratitude – is in order for Aloha Cookin'. Honolulu native Chris Hong spoke to ELi about why he brought the new Hawaiian restaurant to East Lansing's downtown, near campus.

"I moved back to the states this year to start Aloha Cookin' with my family," he said. "The stars of the restaurant are my amazing parents, who do the cookin'."

"My parents immigrated from Korea to Hawaii in the '80s," Hong explained, "and they opened their very first restaurant there in 1991. After moving to the mainland, they worked at a number of Japanese and Korean restaurants, a few of which they owned. But with Aloha Cookin', we wanted to return to our roots."

Friday, Oct. 8, marked the opening day, and the buzz has been very positive. The restaurant offers appetizers, classics, barbeque, seafood, curry, Korean entrées, saimin and ramen, musubi and Kimbap, wings, desserts, drinks, and à la carte sides. Main entrees include rice and sides, and range from \$11 to \$18. Other items range from \$6 to \$10.

"People have been very welcoming," Hong said. "Many come to our restaurant with curiosity and excitement to try new dishes. We've had customers from Hawaii as well, and it's an amazing feeling when you're told the food tastes just like home."

The new restaurant offers a varied selection of Hawaiian favorites, including saimin, loco moco, kalua pig, and musubi. Hong said the food's melting pot of flavors reflects the Hawaiian culture's diversity and harmony. Given the wide-ranging backgrounds of this community, East Lansing made for a fitting spot.

Hong's sister also started attending MSU last year, which made opening the restaurant even more of a family affair.

"We wanted to bring some aloha to Michigan, where there aren't very many Hawaiian restaurants," he said.

So far, one of the most popular dishes is the Huli Huli Chicken, which Hong said is a great introduction for those who haven't tasted Hawaiian cuisine before.



Photo courtesy of Aloha Cookin'
Huli Huli chicken from Aloha Cookin'

LEARN MORE

The MSU Museum is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tickets are free, but registration is required. Masks are required indoors for all campus visitors.

VISIT

Aloha Cookin' is located at 350 Albert Ave. and is open Tuesday through Sunday for lunch and dinner. They offer takeout and delivery. Call 517-657-7963.