

LOCAL NEWS

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Stalled project baffles residents

BY JENNIFER DEKON

More than a decade after the federal government first drafted plans to build a firing range for U.S. Customs agents, the site at the foot of Ambassador Bridge remains a mostly vacant lot.

And a sound-deadening fence begun at least four years ago alongside the lot remains unfinished.

Community leaders say the lot is an eyesore as they try to clean up their Detroit Mexican Town neighborhood and attract buyers for new homes being built near the bridge, a gateway for five million cars and trucks crossing to and from the United States every year.

The leaders say they cannot understand why the \$1.5-million project has been stalled for more than 10 years.

The Hubbard-Richard Citizens District Council said it asked Sens. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and Spencer Abraham, R-Mich., several months ago to look into the situation, but didn't get a reply. The General Services Administration, the federal government's property management agency, is in charge of the project.

"We tried to go through the process — first we contacted the GSA, trying to be very polite about it. Then we decided our representatives would go to bat for us, and unfortunately, none has returned our calls," said Raymond Yancez, chairman of the district council.

Levin's spokeswoman, Tara Ardington, said the senator's office has no record of the group's letter. Abraham's spokesman, Joe McMonagle, said Tuesday that the senator's office contacted GSA after it got the letter, but had been waiting to hear back from the agency. On Tuesday, Abraham's office contacted the GSA and the Detroiters.

The enclosed firing range was to have been part of a new \$1.5-million cargo facility, which opened at the bridge in 1992. A GSA official traced the delay to problems with land acquisition, but said construction of the range could begin this spring. The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said GSA finally bought the property last year. However, the project's cost has risen by 50 percent, due mostly to a redesign and inflation.



KAREN ANDERSON/Detroit Free Press

Several other redevelopment projects are also under way or proposed for the neighborhood: \$100 million in traffic improvements at the bridge; a 65-unit senior apartment to be funded by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development; the renovation of St. Anne School; and a proposed welcome center and shops at the bridge.

Elizabeth Dunn, a GSA spokeswoman, said the agency is aware of the lot's appearance and has cleaned it up as necessary. "We certainly have an interest in keeping the area clean," she said.

The vacant lot is a reminder of the plight that neighborhood activists are trying to overcome. "It's just an awful sight," Yancez said. "Here we've been trying for years to clean up our community and we're finally doing some new housing."

Staff writer Jennifer Dekon can be reached at 1-313-223-4542.

Staff writer Joe Sutnick can be reached at 1-313-223-4547.

Boot for abortion dissenters opposed

Issue shouldn't be GOP loyalty test, 3 say

BY HUGH McDIARMID

Three top Michigan Republicans are among those trying to block party members who want to deny GOP support to candidates who oppose a ban on partial-birth abortions.

Chuck Yob, Betsy DeVos and Sharon Wise oppose abortion and support bans on the controversial abortion procedure, but they argue that the party shouldn't make the issue a litmus test for its candidates.

The potentially divisive issue involves a formal resolution submitted to the Republican National Committee and has been the subject of debate in party circles since just before Christmas. It is scheduled for a showdown at next week's winter meeting of the 165-member committee in Palm Springs, Calif.

Yob, of Grand Rapids, who chairs the RNC's Resolutions Committee, said Tuesday he has been "overrun" with calls from reporters and fellow committee members.

"I tell them all that I'm for a negotiated resolution to this — a compromise," he said. "It's all for the ban on partial-birth abortions, but I'm not interested in throwing the Christine Todd Whitman out of the party."

Yob referred to the New Jersey governor who supports abortion rights and opposes efforts to ban the procedure known formally as intact dilation and extraction. Her position has angered many party leaders and prompted the resolution.

Yob said he would vote for the resolution if it came before the full Republican National Committee unchanged, but in the interest of party harmony he supports those, including GOP National Chairman Jim Nicholson, who want to fillet the proposal.

That may not be easy, he warned. "The folks on that committee, they're pretty conservative," Yob said. "They make me look like a liberal."

DeVos, chairman of the Michigan GOP and a national committee member, let it be known on Tuesday that "she opposes the resolution and plans on leading an intense, full-fledged fight to stop it," said party spokesman Greg McNelly.

"She believes she is in a good position to influence the outcome because of her credentials as a right-to-life advocate," he said. "Michigan's third national committee member, Wise of Owens, said Tuesday that she supports a compromise despite her strong feelings that abortions, especially partial-birth abortions, are wrong."

"I have a real problem telling other Republicans the candidates they select are not acceptable," she said.



Betsy DeVos



Sharon Wise



Chuck Yob

Defendants' ills delay conspiracy trial 2 weeks

TRIAL, from Page 1B

Two more trials of nine other alleged mobsters and alleged associates — all named in a 1996 indictment spanning 30 years of alleged crimes — will follow.

Other defendants pushing or past retirement age include Jack Tocco, 70, Anthony Zerilli, 69, and Anthony Corrado, 61.

O'Meara said he would withhold a decision on whether to sever Giacalone from the first trial pending additional medical reports.

"We'll have to see how he's doing," O'Meara said, but cautioned the trial of other codefendants would go forward.

"I can't see a set of circumstances delaying the start of the trial beyond the 27th," he said.

Tocco, of Clinton Township, was charged in the indictment with 13 counts, including racketeering, conspiracy extortion and obstruction of justice.

Giacalone, also of Clinton Township, was charged with 14 charges of racketeering, conspiracy and extortion.

Federal and state investigators claimed in 1978 that Giacalone was Detroit's top syndicate enforcer, or street boss, in charge of seeing that the orders of the top management were carried out.

On Monday his brother Vito (Big) Jack Giacalone, 74, pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy and faces a 6½-year prison term.

Staff writer Joe Sutnick can be reached at 1-313-223-4547.

Council wants to get down to business

COUNCIL, from Page 1B

to storm victims. Archer later adopted the plan.

Archer also cited an analysis done for the council on the prospective casino bidders. He said the analysis reflected factors that weighed in his selection of the finalists.

In this term, the council will vote on at least two major proposals being worked on by the mayor's office. They include development agreements for three casino operators and plans for a \$60-million federal loan to demolish the city's abandoned buildings.

If Archer continues with his plan to relocate city offices to the General Motors headquarters, the council will have final say on the plan.

The council potentially could shape several key pieces of legislation, many of them carryovers from last term.

The completion of an ethics ordinance for public officials, as mandated by city charter.

The completion of a privatization ordinance that sets guidelines for city agencies, as dictated by city charter.

An ordinance that would extend benefits to domestic partners, which was brought to the table by Councilman Clyde Coveland.

A proposed ordinance by Tinsley-Williams to regulate billboards advertising alcohol and tobacco.

Said it is unique like the one that found the crooner delaying a public hearing that many residents want to disappear.

He said that as president, having a more proactive council minus the personality politics is a goal he expects to meet.

"I expect us to earn an A this term," Hill said. "We intend to do our job."

Staff writer Darri McConnell can be reached at 313-222-6678.

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