

At Your Service



A Newsletter for the Citizens of Midland, Michigan

March 2007

Dear Citizens,

Last year was an exciting time for the Midland community. Business expansion abounded, a major renovation project began at Ashman Court Hotel, community leaders explored ways to make Midland more inviting, and the Great Lakes Loons landed on the southwest side of the city.

At the direction of your City Council, the City of Midland played an integral role in these positive changes. In this edition of "At Your Service," we'll focus on a few high points and many of the City's accomplishments during the 2005-2006 fiscal year.

As you peruse this year's report, you may notice that we're taking a slightly different tack than in years past. Most of the articles highlight how the City is achieving goals set last year by Midland City Council. A specific Council goal will appear near most articles, then we will explain what the City is doing to meet it.

As always, we hope that this report sheds light on how your City Council is working for you.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the employees of the City of Midland, whose commitment, hard work, and safety-consciousness resulted in another successful year at the City.

We hope that you continue to participate and lend your support to the City's efforts to make Midland's future even brighter.

Sincerely,

Jon Lynch
City Manager

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Newer Technology Enhances Services

More and more, the City is embracing recent technological advances to enhance City services. This was evident in many ways in 2005-2006.

City of Midland Website... The City continues to look for ways to use technology to communicate with citizens and make access to information easier via the worldwide web:

Streaming Video: Streaming video, launched in October 2005, allows citizens with a broadband connection to the Internet to use their computer to watch a variety of City programming from just about anywhere in the world, 24/7.

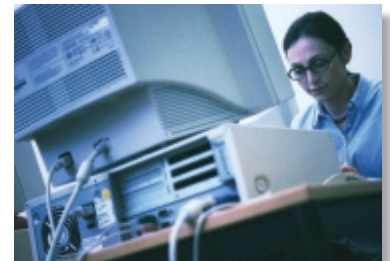
There are many pluses to this new service:

- For several years, Midland City Council and boards and commissions meetings, as well as other local government programming, have been viewable by cable subscribers on MGTV-5. Through streaming video, citizens without cable have the opportunity to watch City programming from the comfort of their desktop or laptop.
- Streaming video is ideal for those who are unable to attend videotaped City functions – such as Council meetings – in person.
- Streaming video is proving to be a great resource for City employees. Staff with Internet-connected computers can use the new service to verify such things as boards and commissions meeting minutes and research information covered during meetings. This saves on time, paperwork, and resources.

Making a good thing even better, the City was honored with a 2006 Michigan Municipal League Achievement Award for the new service.

Bid Packets Online: Companies interested in bidding on City of Midland projects can now find bid packets through the Purchasing Department's portion of the City's website.

Anyone can view the online packets, but in order to access a project's bid form on the site, vendors must first fill out an online form asking for their contact information. Purchasing uses this information to identify and then notify businesses about City projects that are likely to match that company's services and/or products. The contact information is also used to inform vendors about changes in bid specifications as the need arises.



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Enhance & Support Economic Development Efforts

Business and industrial growth in Midland has been very encouraging in recent years. That trend continued last year, in part because of the support of City Council.

Tax incentives are one of the primary ways through which the Council can help sustain and grow our community. Council approved 12 tax

abatements in 2005-2006 for projects that will result in \$50.6 million worth of new investment in Midland. These projects will also bring upwards of 55 new jobs to Midland, and retain another 308. They could also provide up to \$275,000 in new tax revenue for the city in just the first year of the abatements.

“We are competing for business on a global level,” said Midland Mayor Bruce Johnson. “Tax incentives are an effective tool that the City can use to encourage companies to choose Midland over many other communities that are vying for their business.”



Dow Diamond Stadium Nears Completion

The following companies received tax abatements last year: Dow Corning Corporation; The Dow Chemical Company; Caltech Industries, Inc.; the Apothecary Shoppe Pharmacies, LLC; McKay Press; and Dow AgroSciences.

More about tax abatements can be found at right.

Collaboration A Key to Success: Along with tax incentives, effective collaboration between the City and several local groups has contributed to the community's recent economic successes. The City partners with economic development organizations such as Midland Tomorrow, the Midland Area Chamber of Commerce and the Midland County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Midland Tomorrow continues to serve as the economic development arm of the City of Midland, working closely with City staff to attract new business investment. The non-profit corporation also introduces potential developers to Midland's many assets: a local government that's easy to work with; available property in the city; ready infrastructure to support development; proximity to major transportation routes such as I-75; and closeness to major chemical manufacturers.

Council also supports the Service Sector Development Program, an initiative between the City of Midland and the Chamber of Commerce. The program began in August 2005, and utilizes advertising campaigns, promotional materials and various programs to entice retail, restaurant, and service-related businesses to Midland.

The program is already proving to be successful: during the 2005-2006 fiscal year, 28 new service sector businesses opened in Midland, and five businesses completed major expansion projects.

Another goal of Council is for the City to work with the Convention and Visitors Bureau on efforts to bring more tourism events to Midland. Last year, staff from the organizations were

successful in bringing two larger-scale sporting events to Midland: a tri-state skating competition and the Mid-America Conference softball tournament. At least four major sporting events are planned for 2007 and 2008.

The Great Lakes Loons are sure to be a home run for the area's economy. With that in mind, City Council has made it a priority to support efforts to leverage the excitement surrounding the stadium to bring more development to downtown Midland. Even though the Loons' inaugural game has yet to be played, there is already increased interest in the downtown area thanks to the new Dow Diamond stadium.

Downtown Midland is also reaping the benefits of state-funded technical expertise and services. A Michigan Main Street (MMS) Program designation – part of Governor Jennifer Granholm's Cool Cities initiative – was awarded to the Downtown

Development Authority in mid-2005. Since then, there have been five major building improvements in the downtown district, and six new businesses have opened. In addition, a loan program for upgrading building facades was implemented last year.

All of this spells success for Midland.

Tax Abatements: What They Are/Why They Work

What They Are... Companies can apply for industrial property tax abatements for projects that involve renovating and/or expanding existing manufacturing plants or building new plants within designated industrial districts. Midland City Council considers industrial facilities exemption certificates for two types of projects:

1. Rehabilitation projects: the assessed value of property is frozen at the level of assessment prior to improvements to – or the replacement of – obsolete buildings or personal property (such as machinery). This results in a 100% exemption from property tax on the value of the improvements for up to 12 years. However, during this time, tax revenue from the remainder of the property is retained.
2. New plants and/or machinery and equipment: property taxes are reduced to about 50% for a period of up to 12 years.

In both cases, once the abatement period is over, companies must begin paying taxes at 100% of the property's assessed value.

Why They Work... While tax abatements mean deferring tax revenue in the short term, the community benefits in the long run:

- Tax abatements often give Midland the competitive edge over communities around the world that are vying for the new or expanded business.
- Jobs are gained and saved.
- New development can spur economic activity in other parts of the community.
- Once a community like Midland becomes home to one or more of a company's plants, it can be easier to keep those facilities in town.

Making Public Spaces Inviting Places

City officials were involved in a unique initiative last year. Through Project for Public Spaces (PPS), community leaders came together in the Spring of 2006 to explore something called placemaking. This planning concept emphasizes the importance of making public places – like the Farmer’s Market – more vibrant and appealing.



The City is a proponent of placemaking because of what it can do for economic development – attractive public places make for an attractive community to which companies and tomorrow’s innovative business leaders want to flock.

Ideas generated during PPS meetings are helping to chart a course for Midland’s future. Many new plans are in the works to help revitalize pockets of the city and build up existing public spaces. For example, one idea involves constructing more non-motorized pathways. Not only are bike paths and walkways pleasing to the eye and good for health, but they can also be effective at tying public areas together – a goal of placemaking.

The City has been proactive in bringing new pathways to life. During 2006, City crews assisted the Entranceways Initiative Task Force in the planning and construction of two paved walkways:

- One begins at the end of the existing walkway at the end of Rodd Street at the Tittabawassee River. It extends easterly along the river to State Street, runs along State and Buttlers streets, and intersects with the Grand Curve Parkway.
- A second walkway extends the Grand Curve trail from Washington Street along James Savage Road to Saginaw Road, where it crosses under US-10 to Patrick Road and runs along Patrick until just east of Illinois Street. Future plans include extending the trail near Illinois into Stratford Woods Park.

Non-motorized pathways are also covered in the city’s recently revamped Master Plan. The plan includes a City Pathway Network, which will connect existing trails to form a continuous loop around the city. (See *Master Plan article on Page 4.*)

Little Leaguers Request Big Changes for Park

In April 2006, Northeast Little League officials asked the Parks & Recreation Commission to consider converting the softball field at Plymouth Park to two diamonds suitable for Little League play. Those who signed a circulated petition in favor of the request wanted all League ballfields located in the same general vicinity so families could go to one complex for games of multiple family members and players could compete on fields that are similar in condition. The league currently plays at Plymouth Park, the Ashman Street fields, and various elementary schools.



The Little League request came at about the same time a group of community leaders were exploring a planning concept called placemaking (see above article). One of the areas the group identified as needing some improvements was Plymouth Park.

Armed with information shared during placemaking sessions and input from Little Leaguers, City staff developed a plan that includes the two new Little League fields and pedestrian trails, and eliminates the westerly road in Plymouth Park.

(cont. on Page 4)

Cooperative Spirit – and Water – Flows Between City and Townships

Some of Midland’s neighbors to the north are in the process of tapping into the City’s water system, following the September 2005 Council approval of two new water service agreements.

Water will soon be flowing to new connections in Mills and Larkin townships.

The two new agreements were initiated by both townships at about the same time. Larkin wanted to extend its existing water service area to include the northern-most part of the township. (A portion of Larkin had already been receiving City water through a separate agreement from 1997.) In the case of Mills Township, the community no longer wanted to rely on well water as its sole source of water.



Crews work on water main installation

The Mills agreement required the cooperation of all three entities to make it happen. Mills is north of Larkin Township and does not share a border with Midland. Because of this, a plan was developed to use new and existing water lines in Larkin Township that would carry the water from Midland to Mills.

“This project is a perfect example of what can be accomplished when communities come together to meet similar goals,” said City Manager Jon Lynch. “The City is pleased to help our neighbors make an important investment that will help protect the health of township residents and the future of those communities, while maintaining the City’s interests.”

In addition to Mills and Larkin townships, the City sells water to Homer and Midland townships through retail service agreements. The City also provides water to Jerome and Lincoln Townships and the Village of Sanford, all of which are in Midland County Water District No. 1.

Memorial Raised for Law Enforcement

On a cold, windy day in May 2006, local officials and citizens gathered in front of the Midland Law Enforcement Center to witness the unveiling of a granite memorial and cobblestone courtyard that had been constructed to honor past and present law officers.

Michigan Court of Appeals Judge Bill Schuette presided over a dedication ceremony to celebrate the new memorial, which was more than a year in the making. Mayor Bruce A. Johnson, Midland County Board of Commissioners Chairman James Bradley, Midland Chief of Police James Q. St. Louis, City of Coleman Police Chief Larry Nielsen, and Midland County Sheriff Jerry Nielsen each took a turn at the podium to remember and thank the men and women who have served our community through law enforcement. Funding for the \$14,000 memorial came from private donations involving community businesses and citizens.



Provide Orderly Planned Growth

In late 2005, the City's Planning Department set out to update Midland's Master Plan, a land use policy document that builds on current plans to manage growth, development and redevelopment in Midland. With guidance from planning consultants LSL Planning, Inc., City staff, citizens, and the Midland Planning

Commission worked at developing a comprehensive, up-to-date plan that takes into account where development and redevelopment might occur over the next 10 years.

Key components of the new plan are described at right.

Citizen Involvement High: As is usually the case, Midlanders did not disappoint when asked to get involved in revamping the guide that will impact our community's neighborhoods, economy, environment and character:

- In early 2006, citizens went above and beyond the City's expectations when 47 Meetings in a Box were hosted in area homes and businesses. Close to 400 citizens were involved in small group discussions about what they felt could be Midland's priority issues for the future.
- Citizen feedback was gathered from two town hall-style Meetings in a Box sessions held at City Hall in March 2006.
- Nearly 80 Master Plan Changes & Choices surveys were filled out last spring.
- Based on information gleaned from Meetings in a Box and surveys, two Community Workshops were held in May 2006 to get more specific guidance from residents about the direction they would like the City to take on priority Master Plan issues.



Meetings in a Box materials, ready for use

Little League Diamonds (cont. from Page 3)

In total, the plan was revised twice to meet the Little League's needs and many of the concerns voiced by Plymouth Park neighbors:

- No plans are in place to light the fields.
- There are no plans to create a press box or location for a loudspeaker, though portable public announcement systems could be used during some special games, much in the same way PA's are currently allowed in the park's picnic shelters.
- League officials will monitor the diamonds to ensure that things like noise levels and litter are kept under control during league play.
- The diamonds will be available for public use when Little League games are not scheduled.

The plan was approved by the Parks and Recreation Commission and then City Council in early August.

City staff are currently looking into possible funding sources, including grants and the City's budget. The proposed changes could cost about \$250,000 and will likely be implemented in phases.

Community input went back to City staff and LSL Planning for thorough review and analysis.

As decisions were made on what to include in the first draft, information was shared and discussed during Planning Commission and special meetings held on the topic.

A first draft of the new plan was first presented to the public during two public meetings held in early February 2007. Input from these meetings will be analyzed and changes made before the draft is reviewed during a joint Planning Commission/Council meeting in April. Surrounding townships and Midland County will have 90 days from that meeting to review the plan, with adoption by the Planning Commission and Council expected sometime in summer 2007.

Nuts and Bolts of the New Plan

Midland's future land use guide has a more thorough transportation plan, including a new map for non-motorized pathways. An additional map designates possible uses for land outside the city limits. The map – something new in this revision – will help guide City Council in making rezoning decisions about land that's annexed to the city.

Another map lists the city's street hierarchy and what types of access management strategies should be considered when designing new roadways.

The new plan outlines how an extended rail trail will eventually loop around the city, and the impact utilities and development could have on natural features.

The document includes more descriptive language about goals and objectives for implementing the Master Plan. It also stresses the importance of planning the next steps to take to update the zoning ordinance and Parks and Recreation Master Plan so they reflect new information in the Master Plan.

Check It Out! The first draft can be found in electronic form at www.midland-mi.org or in hard copy form at the City's Planning Department and the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library. Call Planning (989-837-3374) with any questions.

Cities Celebrate Anniversary

Midland gave six Handa, Japan, government representatives the red-carpet treatment when they visited our community in May 2006 to celebrate Handa and Midland's 25th sister city anniversary.



Midland City Council members greet Handa visitors

The three-day visit included a formal ceremony to commemorate the milestone anniversary, tours to various locations around Midland, and welcoming and farewell dinner celebrations.

The sister city relationship began in 1981 to strengthen ties between Midland and a Dow Chemical Company manufacturing facility in Handa. The two cities' friendship blossomed over the years into a cultural exchange between Midland and Handa citizens that includes an annual student exchange program.

More on the sister city relationship can be found at www.midland-mi.org.

Develop & Maintain the City's Infrastructure

One of City Council's 2006 goals was set in direct response to what citizens had to say about a much-used portion of Midland's road system – Eastman Avenue near the Midland Mall.

During the Community Budget Roundtables in January 2005, Midlanders mentioned traffic congestion – specifically along

Eastman – as the number one thing they would change about Midland if they could.

Council heard residents loud and clear. Only two months after the Roundtables, traffic engineering firm DLZ Michigan, Inc. was hired to study the traffic patterns and congestion issues along Eastman from Wackerly Street to Commerce Drive and develop options for optimal long-range improvements. What resulted was a comprehensive report that included three long-term (20-year) solutions that were proposed to the public in December 2005:

- *Boulevard with Indirect Left Turns:* Project would involve widening Eastman to construct a boulevard with indirect left turns and making traffic signal improvements along the corridor. Estimated Cost: \$11.8 million
- *Boulevard with Roundabouts:* Project would include widening Eastman and adding roundabouts at the intersections of Wackerly, Airport, Joe Mann and Commerce Drive. Estimated Cost: \$10.4 million
- *One-Way Pair:* Project would involve transforming Eastman into a one-way, northbound street and constructing a new southbound one-way street behind businesses that front on the west side of Eastman. Estimated Cost: \$12.7 million

Extensive information about each alternative was made available to citizens, and Midland residents were encouraged to provide their input on the proposals through surveys and during a one-time Meeting at the Midland Mall.

Both public involvement methods proved successful: more than 100 residents came out to the mall, and an overwhelming 700 Roadmap Response Surveys were filled out and subsequently reviewed by the City.

On the surveys, citizens listed what they felt were the pros and cons of each proposed solution, with many responses including suggestions for other shorter-term, less expensive options.

Based on this valuable input, City Council asked DLZ to analyze the citizen-suggested proposals and report back on possible solutions that would meet set criteria: solutions had to work for the near future (the next 10 years); they had to complement any proposed longer-term traffic improvements that might be

considered at a later date; options had to be practical; and they had to cost less while making a noticeable difference in traffic on Eastman and in the mall area.

In September 2006, DLZ reported to the City Council that six additional shorter-term solutions met the above criteria:

- *Phase-in of Boulevard with Indirect Left Turns*
- *Phase-in of Boulevard with Roundabouts*
- *Phase-in of One-Way Pair*
- *Implementing a Smart Signalization System*
- *Constructing a Full Interchange at Waldo Road*
- *Postponing a Major Improvement until Traffic Reaches A Designated Unacceptable Level of Service and/or Reevaluation in a Designated Number of Years*

After the additional ideas were presented, Council brought the issue before citizens once again in the form of the Eastman Avenue Design Series. A total of 69 residents took part in the three-day series of meetings during which the nine proposals were discussed and consensus built on which improvement option would work best for the community.

Design Series participants recommended that Council consider implementing a 10-year solution that involved widening lanes at the Eastman/Airport Road and Eastman/Wackerly Street intersections. Participants also asked Council to consider installing a smart signalization system and implementing access management measures for roads in the mall area, as these solutions could further increase capacity along the busy corridor. This 10-year fix could complement a longer-term improvement plan that might be needed if traffic continues to increase.

The City Council agreed with the citizen suggestions, and a plan was set in motion to implement the 10-year solution, which has an estimated price tag of \$3.8 million.

In January 2007, traffic engineering firm DLZ was hired to begin design work for the roadway improvements. In the coming year, City staff will work with DLZ on field surveys, preliminary designs, and the beginning of the right-of-way acquisition process. If all goes as planned, construction could begin in late 2009, with completion set for December 2010.



Design Series participants pore over proposed changes for Eastman



City engineers explain potential Eastman traffic solutions during Meeting at the Mall



Maintain & Improve the Existing Quality of Life

the previous fiscal year. Before 2005-2006, however, criminal offenses had steadily declined over an eight-year period.

“While an increase in complaints is never desirable, we feel that the city’s long-term downward crime trends are more indicative of the safe, tranquil community in which we live,” said Police Chief James St. Louis.

As in past years, the city’s Crime Index remains relatively low for a community of our size. The Crime Index is composed of selected offenses used by state and federal agencies to gauge fluctuations in the overall volume and rate of reported crimes.

Last year saw some positive changes in juvenile-related crime numbers. Criminal complaints involving youth 16 and under decreased for the third straight year. Helping lower the numbers was a marked reduction in juvenile retail fraud cases: 30 instances were reported in 2005-2006 – nearly half what they were the year before (59). Reported liquor violations also were cut in half, with 17 instances being reported in 2005-2006 compared to 38 the year before.

Areas of challenge with youth include property crimes, which were up 45 percent – 121 cases were reported last year compared to 67 in 2004-2005 – and assaults, which went from 38 reported incidents in 2004-2005 to 47 last year.

The department works at combating problem areas by being visible in the community, utilizing aggressive patrol and investigative procedures, and offering programming that emphasizes community cooperation and awareness.

Traffic Report: Roadway crashes were up 5.5 percent compared to the 2004-2005 fiscal year, with non-reportable roadway crashes (those not requiring a report) up 34 percent. Despite this, an important department goal was met; there were 12 percent fewer reported personal injury crashes last year.

The department’s Traffic Services Unit continues to be an effective way to address traffic enforcement issues in Midland. The Unit is comprised of two officers devoted exclusively to traffic issues in the city. These officers concentrate on enforcement at high accident intersections and areas where citizens have complained about speeding vehicles.



In addition to the Traffic Services Unit, all Midland patrol officers actively focus on traffic through enforcement campaigns held throughout the year. Midland’s 15 trained school crossing guards also continue to be dedicated servants to the safety of our youth near school zones.

In line with goals to reduce personal injury accidents, the department’s community relations unit inspects child safety seats and trains parents on how to operate them. In 2005-2006, there were 183 car seat inspections, and 37 car seats were given to parents who could not afford to purchase them.

Despite a slight increase in reported criminal complaints, Midland Police Department statistics show that 2005-2006 was another year in which Midland remained the safe, pleasant community it is known to be.

Criminal complaints were up 8 percent last year compared to

Midland firefighters were busy last year, with the Fire Department responding to 11 percent more calls for service (4,282 total) than the previous year. Of those calls, more than half were for rescue and medical services.

Calls for fire response totaled 92 last year, down slightly from the department’s previous year total of 96.



Of last year’s 92 fire calls, 40 were for structural fires. This is a relatively low number compared with statistics from many neighboring communities. The lower numbers can be at least partially attributed to the fact that many buildings in Midland are newer – and therefore, more likely to be up to code – than those in nearby communities. Many Midland businesses also place a high emphasis on safety training for their employees. This safety-consciousness spills over to an employee’s home life.

Calls for hazardous materials incidents were up 45 percent last year. This is likely due to the high amount of vehicle accidents to which the department responds. If anti-freeze or oil spills during a vehicle accident, the incident is considered a hazardous material call. Likewise, a chemical release or tanker spill is considered a hazardous material incident.



Firefighters train for Haz Mat situations

Fire Department personnel are able to meet these types of incidents head-on because of in-depth training conducted throughout the year. All uniformed firefighters are trained to recognize and evaluate hazardous materials incidents. They can decontaminate victims and emergency responders, and are trained to safely secure emergency scenes.

More than half of the personnel in the department are certified as hazardous materials technicians. This training is beneficial when dealing with incidents involving chemical releases and/or contaminated areas.

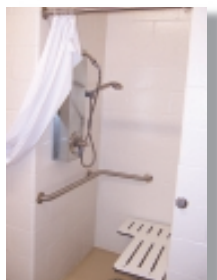
Fire Station 1 Overhauled: Fire Station 1, at 816 E. Haley Street, was remodeled in 2005-2006.

The \$146,200 project involved constructing a combination barrier-free restroom and women’s locker room. A new workshop for equipment maintenance and repair replaced an area previously reserved for a hose tower. More square footage was allotted for office space, and a larger training room was created.

The new training room was in big demand last year, with firefighters using the room for some of the 8,852 hours of in-house training logged in 2005-2006. Fire Department personnel also logged 432 hours of training through conferences and seminars.

Nothing beats a cool pool on a hot summer day. And what better way to spend warm weather days than frolicking in the newly renovated Plymouth Park Pool?

Midland's only public outdoor pool received a makeover in time for the summer 2006 swim season. The pool is now 12 feet longer in the shallow area, creating a zero depth entry that's perfect for children. The depth of the pool's deep end was increased to accommodate competitive racing with starting blocks, which makes the pool eligible to host a more diverse array of swim meets. Special spray features also were added to make splashing around more enjoyable.



The pool building also saw some big changes. An enclosed lobby replaced the open-air lobby of the former building, and there are new showers and changing facilities with spacious handicap accessible dressing rooms.

The improvements went over swimmingly last summer, as attendance of recreational swimmers increased from 18,017 to 23,552.

The torch still burns bright for a unique competition between residents of Midland and Sarnia, Ontario.

In July 2005, the MichiTario Friendship Games celebrated 20 years of bringing the two cities together to enjoy physical activity, good-natured competition, and social interaction. An estimated 500 people participated in games held in Midland during MichiTario's silver anniversary year.

MichiTario – named for Michigan and Ontario – is coordinated by a committee from Sarnia and, locally, with the aid of the City's Parks and Recreation Department. The games are fashioned after the Olympics: an annual three-day event includes an opening ceremony, scheduled competitions, and a closing ceremony.

More than 10,000 athletes have participated in the games since they began in 1985. The annual event alternates between Midland and Sarnia.

The 2007 MichiTario Friendship Games will take place in Midland. Call 989-837-6930 for more information.



Soccer is a staple of MichiTario games, as is baseball, softball, hockey, and golf.

Central Park a Central Topic in 2005-2006

While Midlanders embraced their new, three-rink civic arena on Fast Ice Drive, the question of what to do with the former arena in Central Park was a topic of much community discussion last year. At the crux of the conversation was how a portion of the 18-acre park where the old civic arena stood would be used in the future.

The Parks and Recreation Commission conducted a thorough public process to solicit recreational uses for the old building. After evaluating several alternatives, the Commission concluded that there were no financially viable recreational options and that the building should be demolished and the land returned to green space. While the City Council agreed that recreational uses couldn't cover the cost of maintaining the structure, Council decided to seek proposals for other possible uses. Two proposals were received: one for an Expo Center, and one for a senior living center.

After reviewing the options and gathering citizen input, Council decided to pursue negotiations with The Villas at Central Park LLC, the company interested in developing a senior housing facility. However, before any plans could proceed, the City Charter required that 60 percent of Midland's electorate would have to approve the sale, and voters would need to agree to discontinuing the 4.6-acre site as park land.

A ballot proposal was developed for

the November 2006 General Election that asked voters if they would allow the sale and land use change. To help citizens make their decision at the polls, concept designs showing the property with the senior housing facility and without it were made available for review. Additionally, a brochure was mailed to Midland households outlining the ballot proposal and what a yes or no vote would mean.

On November 7, the fate of the old arena and park land was decided. 54 percent of voters cast their ballot in favor of changing the property's use and selling it, while 45 percent voted against. While those in favor represented the majority, the numbers did not add up to the 60 percent needed to allow for a sale of the property. As a result, the proposal failed.

With the decision made, the City moved forward with demolition plans. The arena building is currently in the process of being razed, and the former Central Park Pool will be filled in. This work is expected to be complete by April.

Restoration of the park land will take place in a manner consistent with the concept design that shows the land without a building on it. As part of that effort, phasing and funding plans will be developed.



The old arena when open (far left) and now, in the demolition process (near left)

Newer Technology Enhances City Services *(cont. from Cover)*

Online Forms: A variety of easy-to-use interactive and downloadable forms on everything from electrical permit applications to yard waste bin order forms were added to the City's website last year.

Interactive forms can be filled out online and returned to the appropriate City department with the simple click of a Submit button. Downloadable forms are available for those documents that require a signature. Most downloadable forms can be filled out online, then printed out, signed, and returned to the appropriate department.

Optical Scan Election Equipment...

During the May 2006 School Election, city of Midland voters had their first chance to experience optical scan voting, when Midland County updated its voting system to a state-wide standard system that complies with federal law.



Optical scan equipment lets voters mark their ballot choices on a paper form using a pen or pencil. Using the optical scan equipment, voters insert their completed ballots into an electronic tabulator, which reads and stores ballot totals. The machine also alerts voters of potential problems, such as voting for too many candidates in a race or cross-voting during a primary election.

There are many advantages to the new system, including the fact that it provides voters with a ballot that can be reviewed before it is cast. The system helps protect voters from unintentionally spoiling their ballot, and it makes for quicker compilation and reporting of election results. The new system also allows officials to conduct recounts from a tangible document created by the voter.

Grace A. Dow Memorial Library... Technology is playing a bigger role in service offerings at Midland's only public library:

- The list of DVDs and books on CD and MP3 is growing.
- More and more computer-oriented classes, programming and services are available.
- Patrons can now access downloadable audiobooks, and the library's eBooks selection was expanded last year.
- Wireless Internet was added at different "hot spots" in the library last May.
- An adaptive technology computer was added for those with disabilities.
- The library's website is updated regularly, and new features are added to provide around-the-clock services to residents from their home or business computers.

Although the library's e-services will continue to grow, a vital print collection will continue to be a priority to meet the needs of those who prefer ink on paper.

Library Awarded: Last year, the library was honored with the State Librarian's Excellence award, a competitive award given annually to just one library in Michigan for exemplary public service.

In addition to the great honor, the library received \$5,000, which was used to reupholster furniture that's been relocated on the mezzanine.

The library received the state award in part because of collaborations with other organizations. In 2005, the library sponsored programs with the Midland Area Chamber of Commerce, Delta College, the Midland Genealogical Society, AARP, the Library of Michigan Foundation, the Michigan Humanities Council, and UNICEF.

Expanded e-services is another reason the library was applauded for its excellence (*see above*). Outstanding youth-oriented services could be another reason. A special Harry Potter Day was held last year, as well as a Once Upon a Time Day, the annual Touch-A-Truck program, Teddy Bear Picnic, and the Children's International Fair during National Library Week. Teens participated in the Volunteer program during the Summer Reading Program, and the Teen Advisory Board helped plan teen activities throughout the year.

New Equipment Aids in Police Efforts

No Horsing Around with New Mustang: This past year, Midlanders may have seen something sleek and shiny on the streets of Midland: a Ford Mustang that was purchased in 2005 for the Traffic Services Unit.



People are quick to notice the sporty vehicle when it's coming down the street. This recognition helps encourage drivers to slow down and obey traffic laws. It also offers an opportunity for communication: youth especially are interested in talking to officers about the 300-horsepower GT.

The car replaced a Crown Victoria, the car that most police officers use. The Mustang was comparable in price to a new Crown Victoria patrol car, but it accelerates faster and allows for more abrupt turns.

Protective Gear Helps Keep Officers Safe: Another type of crime-fighting equipment was purchased after the police department received a \$1,800 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice in August 2005. The Police Department matched the federal grant to purchase 42 new bullet-proof vests. The new vests, made of Kevlar, are more effective at stopping bullets than Zylon, a material that has been used in most older vests.



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