

Michigan, Thursday, May 14, 1970

School Board Hears Thurston Pond Hassle

By Owen Eshenroder
(News Staff Reporter)

Concern that the Thurston School Nature Pond might become a "small version of Lake Erie" from a pollution standpoint, charges that the Ann Arbor Board of Education "has completely ignored the citizen interest in their environment," and assurance from school superintendent W. Scott Westerman that nothing would be done to harm the natural area highlighted the public forum of last night's board meeting.

The controversy surrounding Thurston Pond began last Monday when heavy construction vehicles converged on the area and cut a 14-foot-wide swath through the woods from Bluett Rd. to the pond. This work was part of the new junior high school project across Bluett, as pipes were to be laid from the school site to the pond for the purpose of draining off some roof and seeded play area water into the pond.

Final plans call for this water to be kept to a minimum with the provision that every effort should be made to keep the water as free as possible of oil, salt and sedimentary pollutants that might drain off the parking lot in instances of unusually heavy rainfall.

After the work had been discovered by children and parents around Thurston who were afraid that the entire nature center, and particularly the pond, might suffer irreparable damage both from digging to lay the pipes and from fertilizer and other chemicals drained into the pond, a storm of protest went up, including student pickets around the pond.

At last night's meeting, there were reports that children had blocked bulldozers by standing in front of them, although John Hubley, assistant to the superintendent for community services, called such reports "dramatic myths."

Amidst a swarm of phone complaints and quick petition drives, Westerman did, however, declare a two-day moratorium on further work at the pond. During this time, a group of 10 people met to inspect the site and review development plans.

Included in this group were John C. Rosemergy, science coordinator to the administration; Mel Larson, chairman of the Nature Center Committee of the Thurston PTO; Robert High, assistant to the site planner-expediter; and William Browning, administrative consultant in conservation and outdoor education.

In a report read at the meeting, Rosemergy stated that the board was attempting to avoid as much destruction of trees in

the natural area as possible, was sensitive to the citizen's desire to maintain the area in its present state, but had apparently not done enough to make its plans clear to residents around Thurston before moving the construction equipment in.

Rosemergy also explained that High had determined that for a cost of \$700, soil removed from the pipe trench could be hauled out of the woods for preservation and then hauled back to fill the trench once the pipe was laid. "By not putting the soil from the trench in the woods," he said, "destruction of wildflowers and other plants could be reduced substantially."

Westerman confirmed that he had authorized this expenditure

and stressed that the swath through the trees would not exceed the 14 feet already cut.

The superintendent was unable to escape the wrath of several ecology-minded citizens in the audience, however, and was criticized for his failure to better inform the public of development plans previous to starting work in the area.

Five children paraded to the microphone to express their fears that the Thurston Pond might be ruined by pollutants contained in the drainage water entering the pond. The youngsters said that their reaction to the sight of bulldozers in an area they had been taught not to "vandalize" was natural since nothing had been ex-

plained to them concerning the work.

Conservationist Doug Fulton lambasted the board for its "stupid" action in not informing residents near Thurston of its plans, and urged the board to consider a total site plan to avoid similar difficulties in the future.

Westerman assured all present that no further work would be done on the site until further study was made to insure the safety of the Thurston Pond and Nature Center, and also expressed his concern that some of the heavy equipment on the site had been reported vandalized in the last couple of days.

(Other school board news appears today on Page 51)

C. H. Good Only Incumbent In City Schools' Election

Ann Arbor School Board trustee and vice president Charles H. Good is the only incumbent seeking re-election to the board when his term expires in June.

President of Adaptive Devices, Inc., Good resides at 1421 Roxbury with his wife and three children. He is a graduate of the University and has his master's degree in business administration.

He issued the following statement after filing his petition with the board:

"In the three years I have served on the Ann Arbor Board of Education, I have seen a constructive evolution towards more effective serving of the needs of all students, regardless of their circumstances or their goals.

"I see the school administration as dedicated to improvement of the system, which means change. While this change is viewed as too fast by some, too slow by some, and misdirected by some, I am convinced that the direction is right and the pace is practical.

"The school administration has made positive steps toward improving credibility in times which try the patience of teacher, student and citizen alike.

"Evidences of advance planning include the management survey of Ernst & Ernst, the



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building cost studies by Colbert & Karafilis, and preparation for the June 8 bond proposal, in five parts, which has more substantive background data to support the request than ever before.

"Evidences of a commitment to improved communication are the procedure by which the Dress and Grooming Policy was evolved by PTO representatives, students and teachers working together. Also, while the conflict received most of the public attention, the responsible communication between student, teacher and administration during the disruptions at the high schools was the most important result. The

appointment of a community services director has served to make the board more aware of community concerns by helping the members of the community in making their concerns known.

"While it is important to have credibility, the main function of the public schools is to prepare our youth to go on in life and deal with the world as it is. The life in the student community is much like the life in any other community. It requires responsibility and it requires freedoms. Both are essential.

"There is a need for more emphasis on the adequacy of instruction at the primary level, since a superior primary program has the potential of preventing learning difficulties which may otherwise occur, and such difficulties would cost much more to try to remedy later on in the schools or in the community.

"I am pleased to have been a part of the school system for the last 3 years and seek to continue because I feel that I can help to continue the responsible direction in which the system is moving.

"I support and urge a yes vote on all of the June 8th ballot issues as a positive means towards providing a meaningful education in what I consider difficult times."

Before Public Session

ROSEMERGY