

## **AN OPEN LETTER TO THE CITY OF MARSHALL AND ITS SURROUNDING TOWNSHIPS**

My first 21 years were spent three lots west of the Coast Guard Station on the pier in St. Joseph, Michigan. The home was a converted 4-room summer cottage, reportedly built from lumber pirated from a grounded schooner. My father was in the Coast Guard and there was an electric bell above our back door. My father spent 12 hours a day at the Coast Guard Station and, when at home, had to be there within five minutes of that bell ringing for a maritime emergency.

The River, at that time, was a toxic mess. The St. Joe River starts a few miles from Hillsdale, Michigan and winds its way through Southern Michigan, Homer, Tekonsha, Burlington, Menden, Three Rivers, south through Northern Indiana, picking up Mishawaka, Elkhart, South Bend and then north through Niles, Buchanan, Berrien Springs, Benton Harbor and St. Joe. Each city along the way dumped all of its raw sewage and industrial waste into the River and prophylactics float. That was my playground. At age 12, I would take my 22 rifle out on the pier, throw a bag of bottles into Lake Michigan, and proceed to "sink the German fleet". The beach was mine. There wasn't a sole on the beach for miles from Labor Day to Memorial Day and there was a half mile of sand dunes next to the pier. We would climb to the top of the lighthouse on the north pier and dive into Lake Michigan, when the wind was not blowing the pungent St. Joe River to the north.

I tell you all of this, because, when I now return to St. Joe, the pier, instead of being lined with dingy little houses, has multi-million-dollar homes built on it. The sand dunes I used to roam through with my 22 rifle, have three-story, million dollar homes viewing Lake Michigan. I have shed more than one tear looking at my former playground. Now those same people who caused me to shed more than one tear for the changes they have brought about, are complaining bitterly because the now public beach next to the pier is planning on building a pavilion.

Yes, change is hell, but the people enjoying their million dollar homes have just as much right to enjoy the St. Joe River and Lake Michigan as did I when I was a youth, and those who will enjoy the new pavilion have just as much right to enjoy the pier and Lake Michigan as do those who have built their homes on the sand dunes that used to be my playground.

Change is inevitable.

Now, people in Marshall Township who, like me, pay nothing to support their playground in the City of Marshall, are objecting to change.

Most of these people built or purchased homes in Marshall Township because they didn't want to pay City of Marshall taxes. Using the 2021 tax figures, I have compared the taxes paid per dollar of taxable value for the home of Richard Lindsey (the attorney for MAEDA), a single-family residence at the northwest corner of G Drive and 18 ½ Mile Road, and Jayne and my home, located at 616 East Drive in the City of Marshall.

The Lindsey tax bill comes out to \$.036747 per taxable value dollar. The DeGraw tax bill comes out to \$.053413 per taxable value dollar.

On a home valued at \$200,000.00, taxable value \$100,000.00, that amounted to a difference of \$1,666.60 in 2021. As taxable values increase annually in an amount equal to the inflationary rate, or 5%, whichever is less, this disparity continues to grow every year.

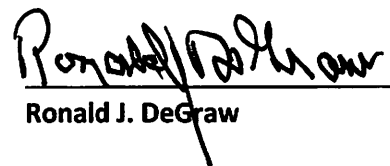
Every landowner in Marshall Township who conveyed their property toward the Mega Site, did so willingly. MAEDA does not have the power to condemn the property. The sellers can certainly act dissatisfied and I have witnessed some sincere tears from some of the sellers...but the bottom line, there was finally a large enough price paid for the property that dried the flowing tears.

Many of the residents of Marshall Township, not all, utilize the stores, the churches, the schools, the bars, the softball diamonds, the hospital, Franke Center, and other facilities in Marshall. They drive on the roads, they flush the toilets and contribute nothing toward the expense of maintaining the City of Marshall.

There has been a lot of talk about the loss of jobs when Eaton and State Farm left Marshall. People seem to forget, however, that during the same period of time, two Collins Aikman plants and Lear Corporation, an employer of, as I recall, almost 1,000 people, also left Marshall. Many of those employees lived in Marshall and the loss of jobs has caused a loss of population in Marshall. The biggest loss, however, was the loss of over \$400,000.00 of tax revenue each year from the real and personal property taxes paid by these companies. Eaton and State Farm tore down their buildings leaving vacant lots.

How does the City of Marshall replace this lost revenue? There has been very little new construction in Marshall since State Farm and Eaton left town. Tenneco has picked up some of the slack, but the loss of tax base and the inflationary spiral has placed Marshall in a critical position, as it continues to supply the services expected by its citizens at an ever-increasing cost, but with little increase in income. There were not enough funds in the general budget to fix the roads and a bond issue had to be passed, which increased the local real estate taxes even more.

Without growth, which increases the tax base, resulting in increased revenue, cities gradually lose their residents, schools decline and eventually merge into other communities, hospitals close, grocery stores and other businesses close and property values decline. There are dozens of communities in Michigan suffering from this malaise. I have good friends and clients who are opposed to the Mega Site. I understand their reasons and feel their pain, but the Marshall we know cannot survive without growth. We are now in a position where, if this project does not go forward, who else would look at Marshall as a potential site? Whether it is the sand dunes of St. Joe, or the farm fields of the Marshall area, change is inevitable.

  
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Ronald J. DeGraw