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**90 YR. BELLE ISLE ‘LEASE’: ENTRY FEES GO TO STATE;
FED/STATE COPS TO PATROL; COUNCIL HEARING MON.
SEPT. 17, 1 pm**

- *“Has the time come to take to the streets and shut Detroit down—no cars in, no cars out?”*
- *90-year lease does not reserve new entrance fee for park improvements*
- *State police and others to join city cops patrolling the island*
- *Advisory board dominated by governor’s appointees.*



Detroit Mayor Dave Bing (r) stands at attention as Gov. Rick Snyder holds forth at press conference Sept. 12, 2012.

**By Diane Bukowski
September 14, 2012**



DETROIT – A proposed state “lease” of Belle Isle, the largest island park in the country, a “jewel” deeded to Detroit in 1873 and designed by the same architect who designed New York City’s Grand Central Park, is angering many here in the world’s largest Black-majority city outside of Africa.

The deal, announced by Michigan Governor Rick Snyder and Detroit Mayor Bing Sept. 12, would last for 90 years (including two

renewals), cost the state no rent, put newly-instituted entrance fees into the state’s general fund, have state and federal police patrol the island along with city cops, and leave Detroit citizens to pay off outstanding improvement bonds for the island.

There is no specific financial commitment by the state in the lease for improvements. The lease provides for an 11-member advisory board, with Gov. Snyder appointing or approving seven of the members.

The City Council must still approve the lease, and is set to hold a discussion on it Mon. Sept. 17 at 1 p.m. (Click on [CC cal09-17-12 – COW – Belle Isle](#)). Public comment is invited.

On April 4, Council passed the city's PA 4 "consent agreement," which includes the following language:

"Create park funding for Belle Isle while ensuring continued City ownership by designating Belle Isle as part of a cooperative relationship with Milliken State Park. This would include a long-term lease that would accrue the cost of the park's maintenance and improvements out of the Park Endowment Fund. We will partner with Belle Isle Conservancy and the City to implement a master plan for the island."



Detroit COO Chris Brown (I) with Bing advisor and PA4 co-author Atty. Mike McGee, and PMD Kriss Andrews at FAB meeting.

Bing would not discuss what will happen if the Council votes down the lease. Under the consent agreement, decisions of the Council and even the Mayor can be overridden by a Financial Advisory Board, Project Management Director Kriss Andrews, State Treasurer Andy Dillon, and Snyder.



A referendum to repeal PA4 is on the state's November ballot, temporarily suspending the Act, but Snyder and Bing have insisted that Detroit is still operating under the consent agreement, and that it will stand even if PA 4 is repealed.

"Belle Isle is a safe place for the kids," Jimmy Young (3rd from left) told VOD as he and friends played on island Sept. 14. "This is a place to come where kids can be kids. "We can be safe. There are no abandoned houses where

someone can jump out at you from, no broken glass all in the streets."

A young woman who identified herself as Ms. Hamilton said, "I could understand if the fee was going to maintain the park, but if it's not for that, it will make things worse. If they sell Belle Isle, they can sell the rest of the zip codes."

Jessica Care Moore, a nationally known poet from Detroit, was out enjoying the island with her son King Thomas Moore, who had just turned six.



Jessica Care Moore and son King Thomas Moore at closed giant slide Sept. 14, 2012.

Young King Thomas said, "I want the giant slide to be open." The famed slide on Belle Isle has been closed for several years, and it is not clear whether the state will re-open it. Many other children were seen approaching the slide, turning away disappointed when they saw the locked gate.



MDOT toll booths at Bluewater Bridge to all hours enjoying ourselves."

"I love Belle Isle, Moore said. "I've been coming here since I was a little girl. It's a public park that belongs to the city, and it should be free. I bring people here that I meet from New York City and everywhere. What else are they going to be looking for when they stop people at the entrance to pay the fee? And why do they close the park every night now before ten? When I got older, my friends and I would stay out here

Snyder, Bing, and George Jackson, president of the private Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC), glossed over specifics during a press conference Sept. 12, touting the deal as "an equal partnership."

"This city-state collaboration will return Belle Isle to its original beauty through major improvements and regular maintenance overseen by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources," Bing said. "It presents win-win situation for the City and the entire State, by preserving a historic destination in the City of Detroit."



Council members JoAnn Watson, Brenda Jones, and Kwame Kenyatta sponsored Aug. 1 rally to save Belle Isle from state take-over.



State trooper patrols Belle Isle in PR photo montage. families.”

Snyder said, “One of the two gems in the City is Belle Isle, but it requires many resources from the city at a difficult time. Neighborhoods and other parts of the city need those resources. Phased improvements such as revamping the picnic shelters and restrooms will begin as soon as we get approval from the Council. A public safety plan will be put in place to make sure the island is safe for

Snyder refused to set a dollar amount on state investment or give other details of the improvements, also not included in the proposed lease document itself (see link at end of story to read entire document, not just executive summary given to media Sept. 12.) The lease does say that any improvements will be subject to the availability of funds.

PROPOSED BELLE ISLE “LEASE” DEAL

Term of Lease	State lease cost	State gets revenues from:	State also gets:	“Park sub-account” for Belle Isle	State pays:	Detroit gets:	Detroit pays:
90 years Two 30-yr. add-ons	\$0	<p>“Recreation Passport” @ \$10/yr,\$8/day</p> <p>Grants (public and private), endowments, special events, private leases, concessions, fees from vendors, contractors, licenses, permits (e.g. shelter), ads, sponsorships, etc.</p> <p>City must hand over all revenues from previous events still in city coffers.</p>	<p>Title to all city property on island.</p> <p>(City removes what state doesn't want.)</p> <p>M-DOT title to bridges and roads; state gets federal funds that would have gone to Detroit for upkeep.</p> <p>All right to contract, lease, make decisions, policies, etc.</p>	<p>ENTRANCE FEES not included--</p> <p>in sub-account to be established in “DNR state park improvement fund,” consisting of other island-related revenues.</p> <p>No city authority over account revenues, expenses, assets, liabilities; only yearly state reports.</p>	<p>No \$\$\$ amount listed.</p> <p>“Intent” for “phased improvements, alterations,” paid for from sub-account.</p> <p>Cost of new improvement bonds (not specified)</p> <p>**Entry fees go to state fund, not island improvements.</p>	<p>\$0 guaranteed</p> <p>Possession of improvements if it ever regains control.</p> <p>State cops, officials from Homeland Security, DNR, Coast Guard patrolling island and bridge with city cops.</p> <p>Loss of city job slots, contract controls</p>	<p>Continuing costs of previously-approved bonds for Belle Isle, supporting city depts. through 2035.</p> <p>Utilities (water, lights, heat) Infrastructure maintenance and improvement costs. e.g. new bonds</p> <p>Greenhouse operations costs.</p>

“Pastors, community leaders and citizens, has the time come to take to the streets and shut Detroit down—no cars in, no cars out?,” asked former mayoral candidate and community activist Jerroll Sanders in a column on her Facebook page.

“The taking of assets in Detroit is racism prima facie,” Sanders said. “In less than seven years, Michigan State officials, colluding with selected members of Detroit’s City Council, the City’s current and former mayors, and powerful backers, seized Detroit’s billion dollar art institute, billion dollar waterfront convention facility, prime golf courses, thousands of acreage of camp and park land, billion dollar water assets, billion dollar historical museum assets, as well as countless other properties and conferred them to suburban and personal corporate interests, often without providing one dime in return.”



Jerroll Sanders

Sanders recalled her childhood basking on the island’s beach, which has a gorgeous view of Detroit’s downtown skyline. During the warmer months, national family reunions, church, union and neighborhood picnics, concerts and other events fill the island. It is one of the few places left where Detroit youth can “cruise” on week-end night nights in a dating ritual that is decades-old and continues on major roadways in Detroit’s suburbs.



Tom Barrow

Asked whether the new joint “public safety” force might target Black youth from Detroit, Snyder said, “We just want to make the island safe for families.”

Tom Barrow, who also ran against Bing in 2009 and is appealing the election results to the U.S. Supreme Court, called for the people of Detroit to vote on the proposed deal. “Belle Isle is not a ‘tattered’ gem,” he said. “It is a city park which Detroiters enjoy immensely on warm days. My view is the island is owned and controlled by Detroit and should remain so. If the state wants to fix something up, tell us what it is and then provide a specific grant narrowly defined for that purpose. That is a partnership, not giving it to [the state] under some clever guise.”

In contrast, Detroit’s private Riverfront Conservancy, run by prominent corporate executives, received \$44 million in state and federal funds in June, no strings attached, to fix up the east riverfront across from Belle Isle.



The deal converts the island into a state park run by the Department of Natural Resources. Vehicle entry after March, 2013 ***Riverfront Conservancy runs Riverwalk.***

would require annual purchase of a \$10 state “Recreation Passport.” A previous law included an \$8 daily fee for non-residents, such as relatives attending family re-unions from out-of-state, but the daily fee is not mentioned in the new regulations.

The lease does not include revenue from the so-called “Recreation Passports,” which would be substantial, in any fund set aside for Belle Isle improvements. It would set up “sub-account” for the island in the state’s park management fund as follows:



*“During any term of this Lease, Lessee [the state] will collect, receive, and administer, subject to applicable law, all revenue generated or earned from grants, endowments, special events, fees collected and revenue generated or earned from sponsorships, advertising, and cooperative ventures (collectively ‘Park Revenue’). **PARK REVENUE DOES NOT INCLUDE RECREATION PASSPORT REVENUE.**”*



Many go to Belle Isle to fish in the river and its ponds and streams. DNR regulations require those fishing in state parks to purchase fishing licenses, at costs ranging from a daily \$7 to \$42. (Click on [DNR fishing license-info 274655 7.](#))

Possession of such licenses is restricted. It involves carrying one’s state ID in addition to the license at all times, and producing it upon the request of a state conservation officer. Such officers are actually certified state troopers according to the DNR website. (Click on [DNR Fishing License Requirements.](#))

The lease additionally says that all unspent revenues the city has collected for the island until now (that includes rthe Grand Prix, APBA Hydroplane races, breast cancer walks, suburban bicycle marathons, Free Press Marathon), and all city equipment and property on the island, will go to the state.

Funds directed to Detroit from public and private agencies including the federal government will now also go instead to the state instead for administration by the DNR.

These include funds like those from the EPA for the upgrade of the Blue Heron lagoon, shown in photo above.



The EPA is also re-developing Belle Isle's south fishing pier and has granted other funds to Detroit for Belle Isle in the past. These would go to the state under terms of the proposed lease.

Bing earlier railed against any 90-year lease of the island, and is presenting this option as a 30-year-lease. However it automatically includes two 30-year renewals unless the city opts out when the time comes.

Snyder said during the press conference that bonds for improvements to Belle Isle will be proposed and paid for by the state.

However, the state is not assuming payment of outstanding bond debt for Belle Isle (part of the City's Recreation Department), and any other city department which has instituted improvements on the island.



This picnic shelter near the beach was totally renovated only last year. Snyder claimed an advantage of the lease would be shelter improvements, but a VOD tour of Belle Isle Sept. 14, 2012 showed most shelters in good repair.

Detroiters approved bond proposals which included upgrades that would include Belle Isle in 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2009.



According to documents from the city's Fiscal Analyst Irvin Corley, proposals for "Museums, Libraries, Recreation and other Cultural Facilities" totaled \$197 million. Bonds for Public Lighting were \$72 million, for Transportation \$46 million (city buses operate on Belle Isle), and public safety \$219 million (Detroit police have a station on the island).

Those amounts do not include interest rates for the bonds, most of which are to be paid on by the city through the year 2035. Detroit Water and Sewerage (DWSD) bonds would add to the total.

It is not clear exactly what amounts of these bonds have been expended on Belle Isle alone.

The lease leaves Detroit with the continuing responsibility for maintenance and improvements of all utilities on the island, except for the improvements necessitated by future state projects.



DWSD facility on Belle Isle.

That includes water, lighting, and heat for facilities like the island's "casino" and the Detroit Yacht Club, which pays \$1 a year for land it uses, launching yachts and boats for the well-to-do from its docks while hosting social events as well.



Ironically, according to historical documents, the City gave eviction notices to the Yacht Club and the Detroit Boat Club in 1969 because they would not admit Blacks. When they relented, they were allowed to continue

their \$1 a year lease payments.

Now the state wants to lease the whole island for nothing. To fund Belle Isle improvements, why not have the state pay back the \$220 million it owes Detroit, and have the Yacht Club pay market-rate rent for its prime location?

To access documents in article highlighted in blue, or related documents and articles listed below, press Control and click while online.

[Belle Isle lease proposal](#)

[Belle Isle Bing release](#)

[FSA Consent Agreement 4 4 12](#)

<http://voiceofdetroit.net/2012/09/14/belle-isle-in-detroit-is-our-last-dance/>

<http://voiceofdetroit.net/2012/08/05/save-belle-isle-save-detroit/>

<http://voiceofdetroit.net/2012/07/30/occupy-belle-isle-stop-the-takeover-of-detroit/>

<http://voiceofdetroit.net/2012/07/30/belle-isle-belongs-to-us-2/>