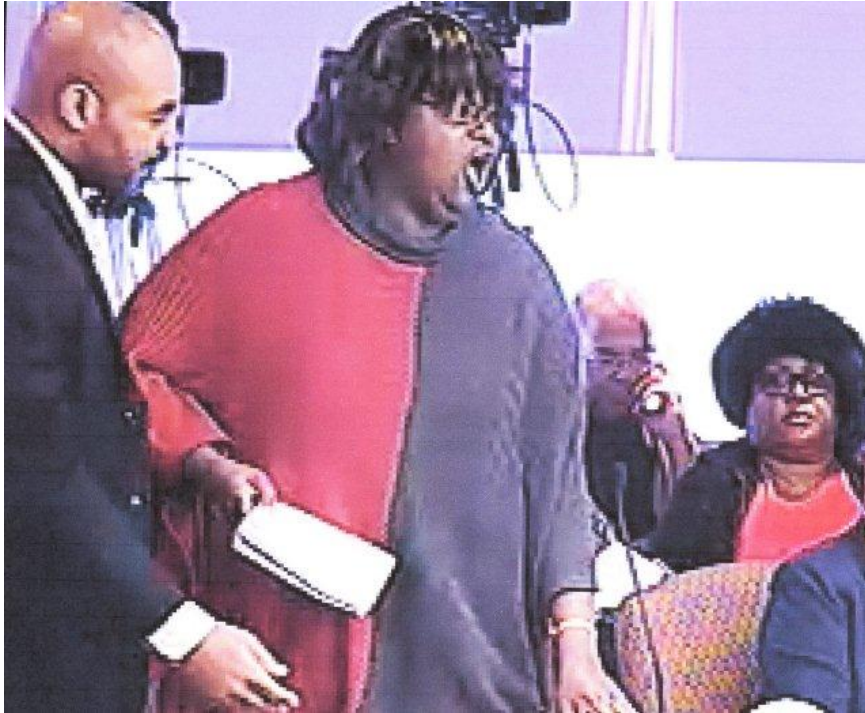


VOICE OF DETROIT <http://voiceofdetroit.net>

Editor, Reporter Diane Bukowski, P.O. Box 32684 Detroit, MI 48232

Direct Line: 313-825-6126 Direct Fax: 313-557-1576 email: diane_bukowski@hotmail.com

PEOPLE RISE UP AGAINST 'LEASE' OF BELLE ISLE, COMMITTEE VOTES 'NO;' COUNCIL STILL TO MEET MON. JAN. 28 2 PM, TUES. JAN. 29 10 AM



Council cop removes Nancy Montgomery who opposed lease

Committee majority votes down lease, but 'public' hearing to be held Mon. Jan 28 at 2 p.m., Council vote Tues. Jan. 29 at 10 a.m.

Council has failed to do due diligence on title search of island; it may not belong to the city government, but remain a "public commons"

City cannot "lease" what it does not own

By Diane Bukowski Jan. 26, 2013

DETROIT – The City Council Rogue Six appear hell-bent on approving a state land grab of Detroit's most precious jewel, Belle Isle, despite a committee's 2-1 vote Jan. 24 against a 30-90 year state "lease" of the island. Council members Kwame Kenyatta and JoAnn Watson, who sit on the Neighborhood and Community Services Committee, voted "No," outweighing Committee Chairman James Tate's sole "yes" vote.

The public passionately supported Kenyatta and Watson, boiling over in anger, only to have police force many out at Tate's order. They condemned the Council Six for giving away most of the city's assets, even comparing them to the "Anti-Christ" and telling them they had "sold their souls to the Devil."

Tate announced that the committee will hold a "public" hearing on the proposal Monday at 2 p.m. in Council chambers.



James Tate

He specifically excluded use of the Council auditorium, claiming the public has not been properly “respectful” to the Council. ***(VOD has repeatedly objected that this violates the state Open Meetings Act, as the public is forced to wait in the hallway if the few seats in Chambers are full.)***

Tate said he expects to bring the proposal to the full Council Tues. Jan 29 at its regular 10 a.m. meeting in chambers.

Council Rule 9.14 states, “Matters assigned to a Formal Session or to the Committee of the Whole shall require a majority of the members of a committee in order to be sent to the Formal Session, as introduced or amended by the committee.”



Council members JoAnn Watson, Kwame Kenyatta

Kenyatta and Watson boycotted a presentation by state officials and George Jackson of the corporate-run Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) following the committee meeting, leaving no quorum for other Council members attending to discuss the proposal.

(See earlier VOD story at <http://voiceofdetroit.net/2013/01/23/bing-and-detroit-council-set-to-give-belle-isle-to-state-let-the-people-vote-council-meets-jan-24-1-p-m-jan-28-29/> for details of “lease.” Officials including State Department of Natural Resources Chair Keith Creagh, DEGC chair George Jackson, and others essentially reiterated those details during their presentation.)



Water Park in Oakland County

for Belle Isle, plus a water park proposal, with substantial investors right here in the city who are ready to support this proposal.”

Kenyatta prefaced his motion to deny the “lease” proposal with a trenchant declaration. “There has not been a fair hearing of what the city needs to do with Belle Isle,” Kenyatta said. “We have had a number of proposals and need to put out a request for proposal (RFP). I got call from the same people who put a multi-million proposal on table. But no one from Jackson’s office has contacted them. There is another proposal for an entrance fee which would stay in Detroit. [Under the state proposal], the fee is not used for Belle Isle. There has been a \$600,000 infusion of grants

Kenyatta continued, “You say it’s about revenue—I say it’s about something else. [Former] Mayor [Coleman] Young was opposed to a fee, but at least if we have a fee, let

it come back to the city . . . This is not a takeaway, it's a giveaway. We have not done everything possible to bring revenue for Belle Isle. You haven't tried. You'd rather turn it over to someone else."

Kenyatta said the state of Michigan has "never shown any love for the people of Detroit," instead wanting to take away departments like Workforce Development, D-DOT, Public Lighting and Water.



"This is about the people," he said. "The city is not going to die over \$6 million [currently expended to maintain Belle Isle] or go into bankruptcy, but we will go into moral bankruptcy if this is approved. By the end of this year, this Mayor won't be in office. Have a little courage and commitment, this is greater than a budget deficit. Our sons and daughters go to this

Kids do the hustle at Belle Isle party in 2012. park; it is owned by the people of Detroit. We may not be here in 30 or 90 years, but the people and children will still be here, they will outlive us. [Keeping Belle Isle] will not break the bank, but this proposal will break the Detroiters' spirit of and bankrupt the people."

He added, "We don't work for the state, we work for the people that put us here, for the children, the elders, we have a duty to perform due diligence. If we do this, shame on us, this will be a disgrace to ourselves and to this body of leadership."

In the "lease proposal," the state has not committed to any specific monetary amount of improvement. Sfate DNR Director Keith Creagh verbally threw out a figure of \$20 million in bonds during the Jan. 24 meeting, but it is nowhere in the lease document. It is miniscule in comparison to the annual \$6 million the city spends on the island, which amounts to \$180 million over 30 years, and a half-billion dollars, \$540 million, over 90 years.



"I thank Councilman Kenyatta for his wonderful stand on behalf of the people of Detroit," Councilwoman Watson chimed in. "Belle Isle is a jewel, part of our heritage, our culture. It has been a ***Keith Creagh of Michigan DNR*** haven for our babies; it should not become a haven for the rich. This giveaway is also illegal since the state owes the city money."

Detroiters present angrily condemned the Six for even considering the proposal, and called for a people's vote. As usual, some were forced to wait in the hallway because the chambers were filled.

“Why are we here, why are we even discussing this,” asked Chris Griffiths, 81, a respected city activist whose husband was Ernie Griffiths, a substance abuse counselor at the now defunct Detroit Health Department. “The charter says we can’t enter into an agreement with someone who owes the city. The Council Six are like disciples of the Anti-Christ, and you are going to have hell to pay.”



Chris Griffiths

Councilwoman Saunteel Jenkins primly responded, “It is ridiculous to call anybody sitting at this table the anti-Christ.” Someone in the audience replied, “If the shoe fits, wear it.”

The Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary defines “Anti-Christ” as “a great antagonist expected to fill the world with wickedness but to be conquered forever by Christ at his second coming.” The Epistles of John connect usage of the term to helping Christians “discern true teachers: by their ethics, their proclamation of Jesus in the flesh, and by their love.”

Councilman Kenneth Cockrel, Jr. got into shouting matches with two members of the audience, taking issue with a speaker who condemned his mayoral administration’s sale of the water department’s Oakland Macomb County Interceptor without a vote of the people.



“We didn’t give it away, we sold it because it collapsed on us twice, it was not an asset, it was a liability.” He referred to the 14 Mile Rd. collapse of the interceptor in Sterling Heights in 2004 after the city hired private inspectors.

The City Charter, however, contains the following language, “The City shall not sell or in any way dispose of any property needed to continue the operation of any city-owned public utility furnishing water and sewerage service, unless approved by a majority of city voters voting on the question at a regular or special election.”

Kenneth Cockrel, Jr. Identical language appears in the Charter with regard to D-DOT and the Public Lighting Department, both of which the state legislature has now subsumed into “authorities” with the approval of the Council.

Jocelyn Harris of the Jefferson Chalmers Citizens District Council (CDC), whose neighborhoods border the Detroit River, said the CDC voted unanimously against the lease.

Jocelyn Harris on Jefferson Chalmers CDC says they voted against a Belle Isle “lease.”

“I have lived on the riverfront for a long time,” Harris said. “There is a wealth of knowledge and ability in Detroit [to take care of Belle Isle]. All I could hear [during official testimony] was a police state on Belle Isle. Our young people look for opportunities to enjoy themselves there. I see a great possibility of that not happening in the future. The State of Michigan does not have a track record in favor of Detroit.”



Jocelyn Harris

Before being forcibly removed by Council police at Tate’s direction, Nancy Montgomery (at top of story) declared, “Belle Isle was deeded to the citizens of Detroit. You are not allowing a legal opportunity for us to vote on this. No one can tell me you cannot find that deed. The people pay property taxes; are you going to reduce our property taxes [if you give away Belle Isle?] The state wants the Belle Isle endowment from Washington DC, too. There are no guarantees for jobs for Detroiters in this lease.”

Know all Men by these Presents that I Alexander M. Campau of the City of Detroit Wayne County Michigan in consideration of one dollar do hereby agree and bargain to sell, transfer and convey unto George C. Langdon for the sum of Fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) Within Six months from the date hereof all my right title and interest in and to the Island known as Belle Isle situated in the Detroit River, Wayne County, Michigan; the said \$50,000 to be paid in five equal annual installments with interest on unpaid installments at the rate of Seven (7) per cent per annum, payable annually.

Alex M Campau

at Detroit February 18th 1879
 The period for the fulfillment of above contract in hand entered in Detroit 2nd 1879.
 20 July 1879

Deed of Sale for Belle Isle in the Detroit River 1879

The Council’s Research and Analysis Division (RAD) earlier warned that a property title search of Belle Isle should be done to ensure that the city has title to the whole island without restrictions.

So far, VOD has not seen such a report. Records reviewed by VOD so far include a handwritten deed executed by Alexander M. Campau for his portion of Belle Isle, dated Feb. 18, 1879, for \$50,000. However, it is made payable to George C. Langdon, not to the City of Detroit. Langdon was Mayor of the City, but the

deed does not refer to him in that capacity. ***If the City does not have full title to the island, it has no authority to lease it.***

VOD is researching the remaining deeds, located at Liber 17, folios 605, 612, and 617 and Liber 221, folios 152, 154 and 159 according to historical records including Clarence Burton's ***History of Belle Isle***, part of his book, ***The History of Detroit, 1701-1922***. There is also a deed recorded for the land between East Jefferson and the Detroit River at the approach to Belle, located at Liber 290 Folio 145.

According to Burton's history, land on Belle Isle was granted to Campau and others by the King of England before the Revolutionary War.

Whether such grants can be considered valid today could certainly be legally questionable. Burton's History of Belle Isle also confirms what University of Michigan Prof. Tiya Miles says in her article, posted on VOD at <http://voiceofdetroit.net/2013/01/26/belle-isle-is-black-land/> . ,



Ojibwe settlement on Sault St. Marie, Michigan

“In the 1700s, Ojibwe groups shared access to the island, which they called White Swan (Waabizi or Wanabizi in the Anishinaabe language) with French settlers. In the French colonial period, Hog Island (Isle aux Cochons), as Belle Isle was then known, was used as a **public commons** where settlers loosed their livestock, mainly hogs, to roam freely.”



During that era, according to Burton's history, Detroit residents repeatedly beat back efforts by individuals to lay claim to the island. If the City has no authority to lease Belle Isle, it is logical that it should be returned to its time-honored status as a public commons not under control of the state OR the City Council Rogue Six.

Also later during that era, Chief Pontiac rose up with his people and slaughtered many English invaders of the area, including those living on Belle Isle.