



# KALAMAZOO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

In the Pursuit of Extraordinary Governance...

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Tuesday, April 19, 2022

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## **Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners Move Forward in Acquiring Landlocked Cottage Property within Prairie View County Park**

*Public access and risk management listed as reasoning for decision*

**KALAMAZOO, Mich-** The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners voted to move forward with acquiring the landlocked cottage property located within Prairie View County Park during the Board of Commissioners meeting on Tuesday, April 19 with an 8-3 vote. The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners determined it was necessary to acquire the property so that Prairie View County Park project stated in 1960 could finally be completed and used for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.

The plan has always been to incorporate the property into Prairie View County Park, becoming public park land, and returned to its natural condition consistent with the surrounding lakefront. Since the creation of Prairie View County Park in 1960, Kalamazoo County has worked on conserving and restoring the Park's natural features. What was once former pastureland and farmland is now mature pine and oak forests. Native Michigan prairie restoration is also underway on 20 acres in the heart of the Park. The Park is home to white-tailed deer, great horned & barred owls, bluebirds, monarch butterflies, the endangered Mississauga rattlesnake, eastern box turtles, red fox, and many other native Michigan creatures. Bald eagles, loons, and large flocks of waterfowl call the Park home for short or extended periods. The natural wonders and park features are enjoyed by over 230,000 annual park visitors to Prairie View County Park.

The County accepted a proposal in 1963 from the five families who then owned the landlocked property. The agreement reached gave the County the first option to purchase the property before it could be transferred to anyone other than the last remaining survivor of the ten original owners. Kalamazoo County Government has faithfully abided by the contract terms with the original owners for nearly 60 years. Upon the passing of the last original owner in 2019, the County has attempted to finalize the contractual terms agreed in 1963.

The Mission of Kalamazoo County Parks is to provide responsible stewardship and preservation of our green space and historical resources with recreation, relaxation, and learning opportunities for everyone. Having privately owned property in the midst of a public park poses the following concerns:

- The need to maintain a private .85 mile drive through the heart of Prairie View County Park for private access to this parcel.
- Future park use and improvements cannot proceed without considering how to maintain and work around private access for the benefit of private property.
- Difficulty in ensuring public access/use for all Kalamazoo County residents and visitors.
- It is contrary to the terms of the legal agreement reached between the County and the original owners to be promised to transfer the property to the County if they were allowed to keep it during their lifetimes.
- Uncontrolled access to county park property and facilities with keys that must be issued.
- Limitations for future park planning
- Negative impacts on and Gourneck and Hogsett Lakes

“This agreement is nearly sixty years old, and the County has upheld its responsibility as outlined in the agreement. We must preserve our public parks and ensure every resident and visitor has access to them throughout those years,” stated Board Chair Mike Quinn. “We also understand the importance of family, so the decision doesn’t come without strain. This was a no-win situation, but we had to err on the side of the larger community that will benefit from the purchase and the Park’s natural visitors and residents.”

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## **Kalamazoo County Board Chair Mike Quinn**

### **Official Quote**

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