

DEVELOPMENT

## Racine has a soil problem

City wrestles with land already built on, unsuitable ground

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Racine has a soil problem. And a land problem. Together, they make problems for development.

Most of the City of Racine's 15.5 square miles of land are already built upon: homes, buildings, current and former industrial sites, etc. There's no room to expand since there are no towns or vacant land to be annexed to the north, south or west; villages, such as Mount Pleasant and Caledonia, have secure borders and cannot be annexed. To the east, there's one of the largest lakes on the planet.



Powell

"We're landlocked," said Shannon Powell, chief of staff to Mayor Cory Mason.



Mason

As for the remaining few areas not already built upon, they're not shovel-ready. They often need months of geotechnical work before you can even think about pouring concrete for a foundation.

There are two main primary reasons for that: First, there's the former industrial sites known as brownfields. They often require thousands, or millions, of dollars in remediation before any new building can start.

"It is not the same as plotting out development in an old farm field that doesn't have legacy costs in the soil and water," Mason said earlier this month, when discussing how the city is pursuing federal funds to help pay for brownfield cleanup.

In other spots, such as where a convention center/hotel is proposed near Festival Hall, millions of dollars in groundwork needs to be done.

"Not all soil is created equal," said Department of City Development interim Director Matthew Rejc. The problems "are not insurmountable," he said, but they're not cheap to deal with.



Rejc

When the city talks about a project being "complicated," Powell said, "you're talking to the tune of millions and millions of dollars."

That's the reasoning city leaders cite as to why virtually no significant project gets off the ground without some public financing.

If there's weaker soil, you need to put in pilings. The denser the above-ground project is going to be, or the taller (and thus heavier) a building is going to be, the more engineering work you need done first, often in the form of sending pilings deeper into the ground.

"That adds to costs of projects," Rejc said.

"When you think of soil, you think of dirt," Rejc continued, almost with a laugh. But it isn't that simple, he said: "There's so many types of soil."

A 1970 soil survey of the Racine and Kenosha areas conducted by the University of Wisconsin listed more than 60 distinct types of soil, each with subtypes, taking the number of soils in the area well into the hundreds.

There are loams, which are generally the best to build on. "Many shopping centers, storage warehouses, and industrial sites, in or near the cities of Kenosha

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UNION GROVE

## Hitting the road and ballot box

Voters to share if they believe ATVs, golf carts should share village streets with cars

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UNION GROVE — Street traffic in Union Grove could look much different if voters in the April 5 election signal a willingness to share the road with ATVs and golf carts.

The village is holding an advisory referendum on whether



Union Grove residents want to make it legal for all-terrain vehicle or golf cart riders to travel on public streets alongside cars and trucks.

An advisory referendum, as opposed to a binding referendum, means that village officials are not required to follow the wishes of the majority of voters.

The seven-member Village Board may decide the matter after seeing the referendum results.

ATV owners and other supporters of the proposal say that owners of alternative vehicles should have a right to use public streets the same as other vehicle operators.

Opponents contend that ATVs, golf carts or other non-traditional vehicles would make street traffic more congested and would create new safety hazards on the roads.

Although there has been no sign of organized campaigning on the referendum from either side, both supporters and opponents have been outspoken about

the issue on social media.

Supporter Cody McDonald posted in a Facebook discussion that people in Union Grove should keep "open minds" about ATVs in traffic. "Just because you don't see a benefit," McDonald posted, "doesn't mean someone else wouldn't benefit from the use of alternative transportation."

Opponent David Kovach argued that allowing ATVs or golf carts into street traffic could have deadly consequences.

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RACHEL KUBIK PHOTOS, RACHEL.KUBIK@JOURNALTIMES.COM

Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps Supervisor and Crew Lead Keyonte Edwards, left, and GLCCC crew member Saeveon Mosby lead the unveiling of the solar charging station Friday morning at the GLCCC's headquarters, 1437 Marquette St. in Racine.

## An itchy bitsy solar-powered, phone-charging little library

Great Lakes CCC helps out when your battery is low

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RACINE — In this digital age, most have dealt with this problem: Your phone dies and you don't have a phone charger. You ask around and no one else nearby has a phone charger. You can't make that important phone call.

This happened recently to Saeveon Mosby, a crew member of the nonprofit Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps, when he needed a ride home and was hoping to call his mother. He ended up having to walk.

The Great Lakes CCC has created a way for anyone to just about always have a solution, even if there are storms, power outages or if homelessness is a factor. The group installed a solar-powered charging station for cellular devices atop a Little Free Library. The station is open



Great Lakes Community Conservation Corps Supervisor and Crew Lead Keyonte Edwards shows off that the newly unveiled charging station can indeed charge his phone Friday morning at the GLCCC's headquarters, 1437 Marquette St. in Racine.

to the community and free to use. More are coming.

An official unveiling ceremony for the station was held Friday morning at the GLCCC's headquarters, 1437 Marquette St., Racine.

"This really changes the situation you're in if you have a cell phone," Mosby said.

Mosby and GLCCC Supervisor and Crew Lead Keyonte Edwards

dug the hole the Little Free Library was placed into. Now, "it's cool to see it finally works."

"I look at this, kind of tiny, but mighty," GLCCC President Chris Litzau said. "It is the future ... Don't be fooled by its size."

The creation process

This project has lasted two years and began with focus groups. Litzau said the idea came

about as a way to get ahead of climate change and stay on top of unpredictable weather swings.

With input from formerly homeless military veterans and young adults in housing transition in Racine and Milwaukee, the prototype was designed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the UWM Design and Innovation Makerspace Lab with assistance from the Wisconsin Office of Energy Innovation, Wisconsin Electric Machines and Power Electronics Consortium, SMP and the Little Free Library organization.

Several of the units will be produced by the GLCCC and are to be planted in neighborhoods in Racine and Milwaukee where a natural disaster or community crisis may negatively impact the economically disadvantaged.

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■ Watch: For a video of the unveiling, find this story online at JournalTimes.com

DRUGS, GUNS

## Man arrested after chase through school zone

Nearly caused multiple crashes, police say

JOURNAL TIMES STAFF

RACINE — A Racine man allegedly had two guns, MDMA, fentanyl and marijuana in a bag that law enforcement searched after the man was accused of nearly causing multiple crashes during a police chase.

Kendrick D. Smith, 41, of the 2200 block of Center Street, was charged with two felony counts of possession of a firearm by a felon and felony counts of second-degree recklessly endangering safety, attempting to flee or elude

an officer, possession of narcotic drugs, possession of a controlled substance, possession with intent to deliver/distribute/manufacture marijuana less than or equal to 200 grams and sell/possess/use/transport machine gun.

According to a criminal complaint:

On Thursday, officers observed a newer model Toyota 4 Runner with an out-of-state license plate driving through the intersection of Washington Avenue and 12th



Smith

Street. The officers recognized the car from being involved a shots fired incident.

After officers turned onto 12th Street, and the car accelerated and turned north onto Harbridge Avenue. The car drove through the parking lot of Ruth's Beauty Salon, 1200 S. Memorial Drive, and then cut off several vehicles, nearly causing crashes. Officers terminated the pursuit as the car continued going around 70 mph through a school zone while school was in session.

Later, a sergeant located the suspect, identified as Smith, on 11th Street. According to police, Smith began to jog away before

eventually complying with orders to stop.

He had two MDMA (aka ecstasy, molly) pills in his right pocket. An officer found a black bag that was thrown away by Smith. It had two guns, one of which had a fully automatic switch, another two MDMA pills, 38.5 grams (just shy of one-tenth of a pound) of marijuana and 1.3 grams of fentanyl.

Smith was given a \$10,000 cash bond in Racine County Circuit Court on Friday. A preliminary hearing is set for March 23 at the Racine County Law Enforcement Center, 717 Wisconsin Ave., online court records show.

# Rapid RFD response minimizes damage in Harriet Street fire

**JOURNAL TIMES**

RACINE — A quick response early Saturday morning to a garage fire resulted in minimal damage to the structure and the items inside — including a Harley-Davidson motorcycle that did not sustain any damage, the

Racine Fire Department said in a news release. There were no injuries.

The Racine Fire Department was dispatched to the 2300 block of Harriet Street at 12:22 a.m. Saturday for a structure fire.

Upon arrival, firefighters

breached the overhead door to fight the fire while other crews attacked the fire from the opposite end of the exterior.

According to RFD Lt. Michael Moss, the blaze was brought under control swiftly by firefighters and there was minimal loss

for the occupant. A Harley-Davidson motorcycled parked in the garage sustained no damage, Moss said.

The damage estimate is \$4,000 to the structure and \$3,000 to the items inside. The incident included the response

of six RFD apparatuses, and the assistant fire chief served as the safety officer. Also on scene were a battalion chief and an investigator, according to the news release.

The fire remains under investigation.

## Soil

From B1

and Racine, are located on this land type," states the 1970 report.

But then there's also Ashkum soils, which can be found in different veins running from north to south throughout Racine County. Ashkum is considered highly corrosive to metal, meaning any piling you put in would likely be damaged. It's also too compressible to be good for building upon.

"It's real simple: When you have soils that are not stable enough for a traditional footing, it's like putting a knife in butter ... The more weight you press, the

more you're going to go into the ground," said Chris Wilson, who's spent his career spanning more than



Fischer

three decades dealing with dirt; he's owner of Waukesha-based The Mudjackers LLC and president of the Wisconsin Association of Foundation Repair Professionals.

"The soils are a significant issue in the City of Racine," said Mason.

Racine's most desirable properties are likely along Lake Michigan. You get beautiful lake views, but also the problems that come along with the accompanying moisture, not to mention erosion.

"That's the complexity of what the City of Racine brings," said city Finance Director Kathleen Fischer. "Of course I want to build a high-rise on Lake Michigan," she said, while also well aware that putting pilings in could cost \$5 million.

### Status quo doesn't mean status quo

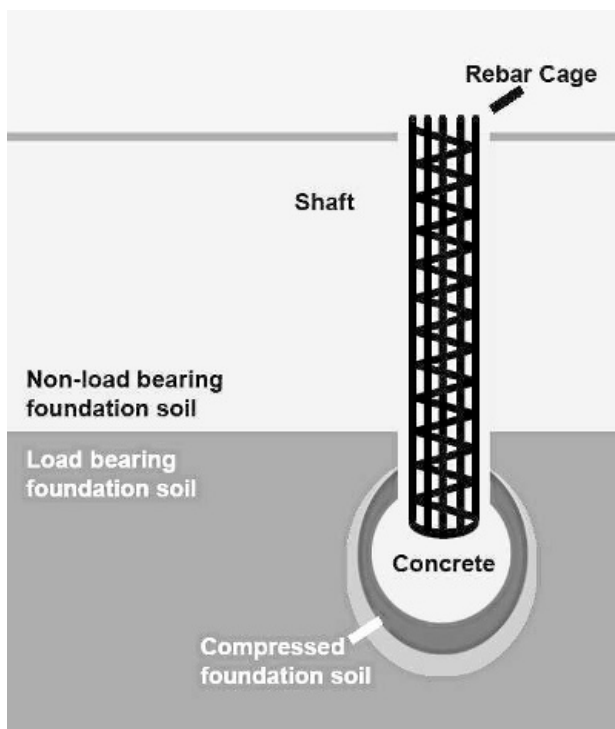
But doing nothing and keeping the status quo also pose problems. Since 2013, under a law that imposed what are known as levy limits, the state's municipalities were effectively banned from raising taxes if they didn't have new construction. If nothing is built, the tax rate can't go up.

The imposition of levy limits was championed by then-Gov. Scott Walker and approved by the Legislature's Republican majority.



MARK HERTZBERG, JOURNAL TIMES FILE PHOTO

James Kruser signals a crane operator as they position pilings on the east bank of the Root River near Cedar Bend Park on June 19, 2002, as construction of a bridge for the Root River Pathway was underway.



Franki Piles, depicted here, also known as "cast-in-situ piles," are cast-in-place elements constructed using a drop weight (hammer) and temporary casing.

Its intent was to limit unnecessary local taxation. The nonpartisan League of Wisconsin Municipalities argues that while it was effective at that, many municipalities are reaching

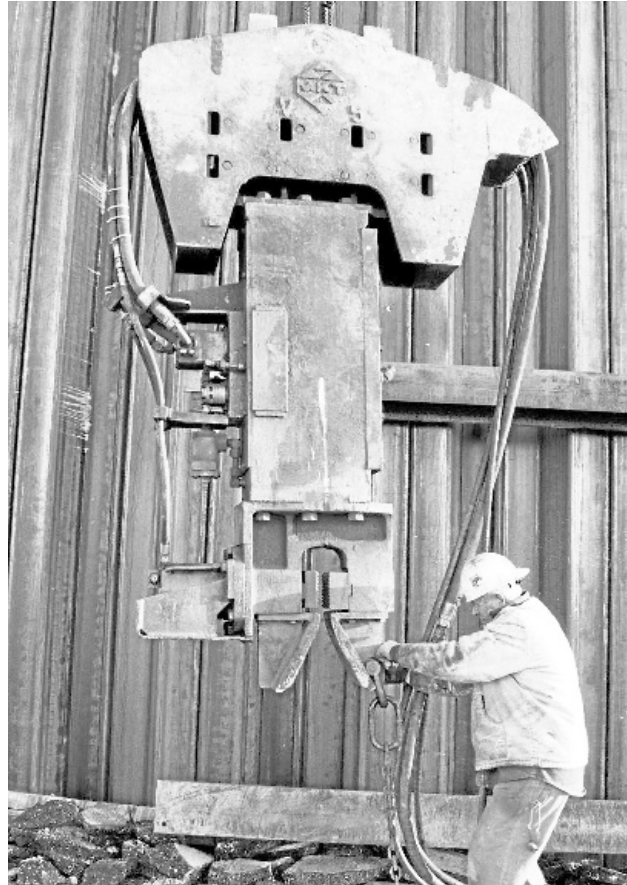
breaking points. The costs of necessities like public safety and road maintenance are increasing faster than property values are appreciating. That's squeezing communities

from Waupaca and Oostburg to Racine and Caledonia, since they are being forced to reduce services or make other cuts unless their municipality sees new development.

Mason cited levy limits as one of the causes of health care costs for current and retired city employees being raised in 2019, a decision that wounded the mayor's relationship with the city's unions.

The LWM, which counts Mount Pleasant Village Administrator Maureen Murphy among its leaders, says municipalities are being "strangled by levy limits."

According to a 2019 bulletin from LWN: "Years of levy limits that don't come close to even the rate of inflation have left the majority of Wisconsin cities and villages with two poor choices: Cut services or push today's problems into the future by borrowing money or deferring maintenance. The League believes it time for a new way of looking at municipal finance; a way that is balanced and sustainable."



CHARLES VALLONE, JOURNAL TIMES FILE PHOTO

In this December 1993 photo, Don Lovrine guides hoses and a huge, 7,000-pound hydraulic hammer as it is lifted to pound 45-foot pilings that were being used to construct a retaining wall below Water Street.

## Charge

From B1

During times of electrical outage and limited access to recharge cell phones or other mobile devices, the community charging station provides free power using clean energy generated by a solar photovoltaic module.

The engineering team partnered with the Little Free Library organization to leverage the design of the book-sharing box and retrofit it with the solar PV module that powers a battery pack.

Users may connect their device to one of several power cords hanging outside the box. The cords are outfitted with Android- and iPhone-friendly connectors.

This setup allows community members to charge their phone, read and hang out, Litzau said. The station can charge up to 60 phones in a 24-hour period.

There are more than 125,000 Little Free Library units located throughout the country, and stewards may opt to add a solar PV to the existing structure.

The GLCCC and the engineering team plan to monitor the performance of the prototype unit and make adjustments to the design prior to fabricating the next 20 units for installation



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The Little Free Library hosts a solar photovoltaic module that powers a battery pack, pictured inside the box secured on the back of the structure. Users may connect their device to one of several power cords hanging outside the box. The cords are outfitted with Android- and iPhone-friendly connectors.

in Milwaukee and Racine by this summer.

Savannah Ahnen, a 2020 Case High School graduate, is a UWM sophomore studying electrical engineering and computer science. She said there's a need for homeless people to be able to connect and recharge at the unit, and it could be located in places where many homeless gather.

"Racine has high populations of people experiencing homelessness or power outages," Ahnen said. "This allows people to make calls or check on their family. The best part is that it's a continually

important design."

Ahnen said the two-year project has been an amazing process to be a part of: "I helped create something that people can benefit from and apply my education in a way that is important to me."

Edwards said it was very satisfying seeing the progress from tossing around ideas in the beginning stages to seeing the charging station become something "living and breathing."

"It's refreshing to see," Edwards said. "I'm thankful to the college to allow us to be a part of the process of building."

## Election

From B1

"Anything hit by a car that weighs significantly less than the car is going to lose, badly," Kovach posted. "Cars are built to protect their occupants at great speed. ATVs have no protection at any speed."

The referendum April 5 will allow voters throughout Union Grove to check "yes" or "no" on three separate questions about changing traffic laws to allow all-terrain vehicles, utility terrain vehicles or golf carts to enter and travel in public roads. Such alternative modes of transportation currently are prohibited on public streets and are generally limited to off-road trails or private property, or to golf courses in the case of golf carts.

The issue developed last summer when a Facebook discussion grew into a lobbying effort by ATV and golf cart owners for "road riding," as some ATV operators call it.

If the Village Board approves, the alternative vehicles will be allowed in traffic on streets with the exception of Highway 11 and Highway 45, where such devices are prohibited by state law.

One of the issue's early pro-

ponents, Sandy Born, has since become a candidate for Village Board in the April 5 election. With no opponent on the ballot, Born is virtually assured of succeeding Trustee Gordon Svendsen, who is stepping down after nine terms in office. Born could not be reached for comment.

Svendsen has publicly opposed allowing ATVs or golf carts to travel on public streets. "I think there's some huge safety issues," he said.

At least one other Village Board member is on record as opposing the idea, too.

Trustee Janice Winget said she is unsure how others on the board will vote, but she remains concerned about ATVs and golf carts creating safety hazards on the streets.

"That's my feeling," she said, "and I guess that's what I'll stick with."

Village President Steve Wicklund said he is awaiting the outcome of the referendum before he chooses one side of the other. Wicklund said he senses that the community is divided on the issue.

"I'm really curious as to how this is going to fall," he said. "Which ever direction the community wants to go, I'm probably just going to roll with that."