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FROM THE PRINT



Village Council and school board members, as well as other local stakeholder groups, spent much of the last year discussing a proposal that could one day lead to a large, approximately 50-unit low-income housing development. (Photo by Reilly Dixon)

2024 In Review | Top Stories

By Reilly Dixon

Published: January 6, 2025

Focus on low-income housing

A low-income housing proposal dominated discussions during many public meetings this year.

Since late last year, local stakeholders and public bodies have been in pursuit of \$10 million — \$15 million in available low-income housing tax credits — federal money that would allow a developer to build a 30–50-unit, multifamily apartment complex on the western edge of Yellow Springs.

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The proposal has been locally dubbed the low-income housing tax credit, or LIHTC, project.

Unable to site the proposed development on the Village-owned Center for Business and Education, local attention shifted to another location: 3.6-acres of the school-district-owned Morgan soccer fields north of McKinney Middle and Yellow Springs High schools.

Amid both public support and criticism, and following concerns over public transparency in the initial Morgan Fields discussions, Village Council and the school board spent the next several months taking the necessary steps to render the fields

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a competitive site for a developer's eventual tax credit application to Ohio Housing Finance Agency, or OHFA.

Those intergovernmental steps have included: working with bond attorneys to remove the land's financial and institutional encumbrances, rezoning it to high-density residential, appraising the land for \$339,000 — an amount the Village would pay the school district, should the tax credits be awarded — as well as identifying a developer. Earlier this month, the Village selected Columbus-based Woda Cooper Companies Inc. over three other applicants, including Dayton-based nonprofit St. Mary Corporation.

For the school district's part, the Morgan Fields can only be sold to the Village if a replacement athletic and recreation space is secured; to date, no such replacement fields have been publicly identified, despite ongoing discussions between area landowners and Village leaders and stakeholders.

Woda Cooper must submit a pre-application to OHFA for the tax credits by Jan. 3, 2025, followed by a final submission on Feb. 27. OHFA will announce the statewide recipients of the millions in tax credits in May.

March homicide roils village

A March 14 homicide claimed the life of 71-year-old Yellow Springs resident Connie Vang.

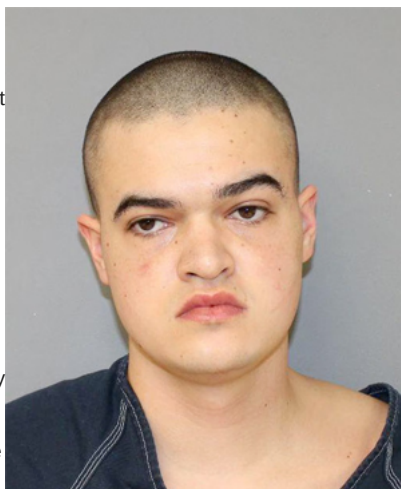
Following a weekend-long manhunt for a suspect in connection with the fatal shooting, 22-year-old Jackson Isaiah Bleything, a 2020 graduate of Yellow Springs High School, was arrested near his Clark County apartment.

In November, Bleything pleaded guilty to Vang's murder, as well as other charges, and was sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for 30 years.

In exchange for pleading guilty to charges of aggravated murder, improperly discharging a firearm at or into a habitation, felonious assault and five counts of tampering with evidence, Bleything's other charges of possession of criminal tools and inducing panic were dismissed — an exchange that allowed Bleything to skirt the maximum sentence of life in prison without parole.

Around the time of Bleything's arrest, a number of local residents criticized the response to the homicide from the YS Police Department — namely, a perceived lapse in public communications from the department between the murder and the arrest.

Vang's obituary, which appeared in the March 28 issue of the News, described her as having been "the embodiment of hearth and home for so many, and ... one of the kindest and most beautiful humans."



Jackson Isaiah Bleything, 22, was arrested on Sunday, March 17 in connection with a homicide that occurred on Thursday, March 14. The 2020 Yellow Springs High School graduate pleaded guilty to murder on Nov. 18 and faces life in prison. (Submitted photo)

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Antioch College President Jane Fernandes met and spoke briefly with those gathered, but declined to comment further on the January termination of Banks. (Photo by Truth Garrett)

Locals protest Wellness Center firing

The January firing of local resident Guy “Tron” Banks from the Wellness Center at Antioch College spurred significant ire against the college and support for Banks among village residents.

Banks was fired from his position as a personal trainer at the Wellness Center — a position he’d held since 2022 — following allegations of “threatening behavior” from Wellness Center Director Kathy Kern Ross, who was hired days before the firing took place.

According to Banks earlier this year, the termination was unexpected, unwarranted and administered without due process. Dozens of letters to the editor in the News’ “Community Forum” section outlined positive experiences with Banks and, noting that he is a Black man accused of misconduct by a white woman, questioned the firing, as well as called for mediation between Banks and the college.

A protest was staged on Antioch grounds in early April, when Antioch President Jane Fernandes met and spoke briefly with the several dozen protestors, but declined to comment further at the time.

Banks and Antioch reached an agreement to “resolve [their] differences relating to Tron’s employment at the Wellness Center,” as a joint letter to the editor from Banks and Fernandes stated.

“Both of us are pleased to have reached an amicable conclusion to this situation, and we appreciate the community’s support for Tron as well as Yellow Springs residents’ longstanding commitment to the Wellness Center,” the letter read.



At a public work session on Wednesday, Sept. 25, Columbus-based Windsor Companies provided some Planning Commission members with an early concept plan of a proposed 128-unit apartment complex the development company seeks to build where the Antioch College Student

Union presently sits. Upon the impending demolition of the union, Windsor plans to erect two buildings populated with 32 two-bedroom and 96 one-bedroom units. (Rendering by Windsor Companies)

Apartments coming to Antioch

In July, Columbus-based real estate developer Windsor Companies purchased the vacant Antioch Student Union for \$500,000.

Across campus, two other prominent buildings — the Sontag-Fels Building, located at 800 Livermore St., and Charles F. Kettering Building, at 150 E. South College St. — are under contract with Windsor.

Upon the eventual demolition of the student union, Windsor plans to build two 64-unit apartment buildings — tentatively dubbed “Unity Village” — composed of 32 two-bedroom and 96 one-bedroom units.

As Windsor representatives told Village officials at a September work session, these 128 units will range from 650 to 1,100 square feet; the twin structures will be four stories high, with one floor underground, and will adjoin a new parking lot as well as a small public park.

Windsor's head designer, Jason Dorsey, told attendees of the work session that the student union building — which was built in 1957 and closed completely in 2007 — is beyond repair or renovation. In addition to tearing the building down, upcoming steps to one day build “Unity Village” includes rezoning the Windsor owned land from educational to a planned unit development, addressing some parking and environmental concerns raised at the work session, as well as holding a number of public meetings.



In July, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost renewed its \$150,000 contract with the Butler County Sheriff's Office for "helicopter services for the Bureau of Criminal Investigation's marijuana eradication initiative." (Photo courtesy of Butler County Sheriff's Office)

Village home raided for marijuana

On Aug. 13, a Wright Street home was the target of an apparent marijuana raid.

The Lewis family's Yellow Springs residence was surrounded by more than 20 law enforcement officials from several counties, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigations as well as a helicopter overhead from the Butler County Sheriff's Office.

In speaking with the News, Mijanou Lewis said that an officer from the Greene County Sheriff's Office told her that law enforcement had observed “over 40” marijuana plants growing in her backyard — 28 more than are permitted under Ohio state law — which she said was untrue. The Lewises had 12 plants.

The hour-long encounter between Lewis and area police ended as abruptly as it began. Neither Lewis nor her husband — a professional horticulturist who also grows large exotic and rare plants in their backyard — were charged or detained by the officers.

According to Lewis, she was told by county officials that the police presence was there to “educate” her on how to grow marijuana within the limits of the law.

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