

Schaap foes lay an egg

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GROSSE POINTE PARK — A lawsuit that was more of a speed-bump than roadblock to completion of the A. Paul and Carol C. Schaap Center for Performing Arts has been kicked to the curb.

Court-ordered dismissal of the suit in Wayne County Circuit Court Sept. 10 means construction of the 424-seat facility continues at the Park-Detroit border on Jefferson Avenue. Wrap-up is expected July 2025.

“The lawsuit with Wayne County (the plaintiff) has been amicably settled,” said Paul Schaap, the project’s main benefactor and a resident of the Park. “During the course of the lawsuit, we worked with the other side in a way that did not stop our project.”

“As with all discussions between adversarial parties, nothing’s ever 100 percent best-friend smooth, but we did work together with the common goal of trying to ensure the interests of both parties were met,” said Arthur Siegal, an attorney for the defendants: the Urban Renewal Initiative Foundation, or URIF, a charity formed in 2012 to raise funds for construction of the arts center; PCI/Dailey Industries, construction manager; and CBRE Global Commercial Real Estate Services, listed in foundation documents as the owner’s representative.

An after-hours voicemail message seeking comment from the plaintiff’s attorneys wasn’t returned.

Work never really stopped on the arts center during five months of wrangling between the foundation and county over how to manage the site’s rainwater runoff. The goal was to mitigate the odds of flooding during big storms.

“Early in the dialogue there was discussion about allowing work to continue outside of a certain contested area, an area where there was disagreement about whether or not there was a setback or easement requirement,” Siegal said. “The remainder of the dialogue was directed to resolving that disagreement.”

“The development team is currently proposing a system of onsite detention chambers and bioswales to ensure the planned development minimizes environmental impact while maximizing community benefit,” according to a foundation statement. “Based on these stormwater best management practices, URIF has recently received a stormwater permit from Wayne County to conditionally proceed with the planned improvements, including connection to the separated storm water system of Grosse Pointe Park.”

“These are great big tanks under the parking lot on our site,” Schaap said. “When a deluge comes, it can fill these tanks and, as time progresses, it puts that water into the Grosse Pointe Park stormwater system. This stormwater will not end up in the Detroit sewer system. Grosse Pointe Park is on the verge of approving it.”

Park City Manager Nick Sizeland said, “As part of the Park’s effort to separate storm and sanitary sewers in the community, including where some areas are still combined on lower Jefferson, we are looking to partner with the Schaap Center to separate a portion of Jefferson that is a benefit to the Park and the center. We’re working through the details, but we’ll have an agreement between both parties that will come to the city council at a future date.”

The city already budgeted around \$400,000 for the Jefferson separation.

“This isn’t a Grosse Pointe Park project funded entirely by the city,” Sizeland said. “The URIF and Paul are helping, of which we will be very appreciative. It’s a win for the community, a win for the Schaap Center. Separating sewers is going to help all entities.”

“I am grateful to the parties for implementing workable solutions that protect all interests, especially those of the public, to move the project forward,” Park Mayor Michele Hodges said.

The key to the center moving forward was Judge Sheila Ann Gibson dismissing the suit with prejudice.



Photo by Renee Landuyt

Construction on the Schaap Center continues to move forward, now without the hinderance of a lawsuit to contend with.

A court ruling of that type is the only time someone wants to be pegged with prejudice.

“With prejudice” sounds damning. Yet, in legal terms, it’s liberating to defendants. A case dismissed with prejudice is dismissed forever. It can’t be brought back to court.

A case dismissed with prejudice is the legal fat lady singing. It’s over. No encore. No revival. For the Schaap Center, then, it’s on to Cincinnati unless something else comes up.

“I’d like to get on with finishing our project and get things in there, like the Grosse Pointe Theatre and all that good stuff,” Schaap said.

The Grosse Pointe Theatre opens its 2025-26 season at the center.

“Grosse Pointe Theatre is excited and so grateful that we will have a permanent performing home at the Schaap Center,” said Theresa Selvaggio, the theater’s director of development. “Paul’s excited for us because the arts are so important in the community and we need a home. He is solving a major problem for us.”

GPT’s performances in recent years have been at various Grosse Pointe Public School System auditoriums.

“We’re grateful to the schools, but it’s not sustainable to be in the schools,” Selvaggio said.

The inaugural show at the Schaap hasn’t been chosen, except that it will be a musical.

“It will be a family musical because we want to welcome all the families in the region,” Selvaggio said. “It’s really important that it’s a broad-appeal musical so everyone can come into Schaap Center and see the spectacular facilities.”

She often drives out of her way to monitor the construction site and lick her chops.

“What makes it exciting for us are all the bells and whistles Paul Schaap is putting in there for us to use, whether its tunable acoustics, the fly space or wing space,” Selvaggio said. “He attended our performance of ‘Crazy for You’ yesterday (Sunday, Sept. 15, at Grosse Pointe North High School). He came backstage to share a few words with our actors and musicians. It was just as exciting for him to see all our volunteers at work right before curtain on a sold-out matinee.”

“I absolutely loved the show,” Schaap said. “The talent of the cast is just amazing.”

Schaap is a retired chemistry professor at Wayne State University, where he met his wife, Carol, recently deceased.

“She was secretary to the president,” Schaap said. “We always used to go to the Hilberry and Bonstelle theaters. We had a passion for the performing arts. It came naturally to support them here in our community.”

Schaap grew up in Indiana. He turned a boyhood fascination with fireflies into careers in academia and business.

“My area of research was chemiluminescence,” he said.

It’s an easy bet that few people know what Schaap is talking about when he talks about chemiluminescence and the clinical immunodiagnostics market. But generations of patrons attending performances and exhibitions at the forthcoming Schaap Center will be grateful he does.