



Today:



### Sections

- ▶ HOME
- ▶ News
- ▶ AP Wire
- ▶ Community Forum
- ▶ BlogCentral
- ▶ Michigan News
- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Travel
- ▶ Auto/Business
- ▶ Business/Finance
- ▶ Opinions
- ▶ Legal Notices
- ▶ Announcements
- ▶ Obituaries
- ▶ Archives
- ▶ Special Sections

### Entertainment

- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Events Calendar
- ▶ Movie Reviews
- ▶ Music Reviews
- ▶ Recipes & Menus

### Sports

- ▶ Local Sports
- ▶ MICentralSports
- ▶ U-PICKEM NFL Contest
- NEW!**
- ▶ BlogCentral
- ▶ Lions/NFL
- ▶ Pistons/NBA
- ▶ Red Wings/NHL
- ▶ Tigers/MLB
- ▶ College Basketball
- ▶ College Football
- ▶ Golf
- ▶ NASCAR Racing
- ▶ Tennis

## News

**The Ypsilanti  
Courier**  
A Heritage Newspaper  
Weekly Publication



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### City Council rejects Starkweather bid

Staff recommends Rupert bid, voted down in split decision

*By Dan DuChene, Staff Writer*

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The future of the Starkweather House remains unclear as City Council voted to reject an offer on the gifted property last week.

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- ▶ Video & Photo Sharing
- ▶ Photos to Buy
- ▶ AP Video
- ▶ Podcasts

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## Classifieds

- ▶ Classifieds
- ▶ MICentralAutos
- ▶ MICentralHomes
- ▶ Jobs
- ▶ Place a Classified
- ▶ Specials


## Advertisements

- ▶ Newspaper Ads
- ▶ Advertising Info
- ▶ Place An Ad

## General Info

- ▶ About Us
- ▶ Contact Us
- ▶ Community Directories
- ▶ Jobs at Heritage
- ▶ Jobs in JRC
- ▶ Letter to the Editor
- ▶ Newsstand Locations
- ▶ Newspaper in Education
- ▶ Subscribe & Renew
- ▶ Carrier Info

## Quick Links

- ▶ Contests & Promotions
- ▶ Cool Links
- ▶ Crossword
- ▶ Cruisin' Downriver
- ▶ Lottery
- ▶ MICentral
- ▶ Personals
- ▶ Ryan's Friends
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One of two bids submitted to the city on the deadline earlier this month, City Council voted 4-3 to reject the offer made by Ronald Rupert, an Ypsilanti Historic District commissioner

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City staff had recommended Rupert's bid over the other, cast by local developer Stewart Beal.

John Gawlas, D-2nd Ward, Bill Nickels, D-3rd Ward, and Mayor Paul Schreiber were the dissenting votes on City Council.

Brian Robb, D-Ward 3, said government is "in the business of providing services and setting policy.

"We did our part in 2005, when the historic district was created," Robb said.

Currently owned by Arthur Campbell, the 166-year-old Starkweather House was gifted to the city earlier last month in an effort to claim a federal tax write-off, when he could not sell the house because of the district imposed by City Council. His plan to demolish the house and build several other new homes was stopped when the district was created.

In the agreement for the gift, City Council would attempt to sell the house to the best bidder. If an agreement could not be reached within six months of the city assuming ownership, than the house would revert back to Campbell.

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"We're not in the business of flipping houses," Robb said. "Time will pass and the house will revert back to Mr. Campbell."

Though Brian Filipiak, D-Ward-3, agreed with Robb, he said he was also concerned with how the bid process was conducted.

"I just didn't feel comfortable voting yes," he said.

 @ChrisRobb

Barr said the bid process was short because he hadn't wanted the dilapidated house in the city's ownership for long, for fear of liability and structural integrity. He said that might not be an option now.

However, because the deal with Campbell has not been completed yet, Barr said the city still has ample time to select a bid, even if the process is opened up again.

At the last council meeting, Beal said he was upset that his bid was not the bid selected by city staff.

"I am extremely disappointed in and in complete disagreement with the recommendation," Beal said in a prepared statement to City Council last week.

Beal said the lawyer who had recommended the bid, David Wagner, was inexperienced and unknowledgeable about historic renovation and the bid process.

Barr said the firm had chosen Wagner, who was fresh from law school and out of work, because he was indifferent about the two bidders on the house.

Beal said he planned to invest more money into the house than Rupert, and was better able to prove his financial ability.

Beal said his comments were not against Rupert as a person or a craftsman, but were strictly motivated by his review of the bids.

Beal's proposal laid out a plan to invest more than \$150,000 and have work complete within a year. Rupert's bid offered investing more than \$55,000 and to have the work complete within 18 months. Both offered a purchase price of \$1 more than any cost in selling the house occurred by the city.

"I don't think we would have any reason not to look favorable on Mr. Beal's bid," Filipiak said.

However, he said if the issue came up to council again, he would consider approving Rupert's bid, only if some of his questions were answered.

"Mr. Rupert did layout some more details□historic preservation language," Filipiak said.

"That was important to the city," he said. "I think it may have earned him a few more points."

Rupert's position on the HDC had raised eyebrows about a potential conflict of interest in his involvement with purchasing the house.

"It concerned me," Robb said, "the appearance of a conflict of interest.

"It's just an appearance," he said. "After speaking with Ron, I don't believe there is a conflict."

Rupert and Campbell could not be reached for comment for this story.

City Council members and city staff had all said they don't know what to expect in the future of the Starkweather deal. While all laid out potential options, no one was clear as to what an outcome might be.

Contact Staff Writer Dan DuChene at 697-8255 or at [dduchene@heritage.com](mailto:dduchene@heritage.com)

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