

# A Planned Community, a Civic Center, and the Fox Point (Stormonth) School



**A**fter the village incorporated in 1926, real estate activity took off. Lieberg & Safer developed the Fox Point Gardens subdivision on Whitney and Regent Roads between Bradley and Dean Roads. The firm sold 22 of its 126 lots in less than three weeks. The Birchfield subdivision (East Daphne, East Apple Tree and East Acacia Roads) sold out in one day. The village board and Plan Commission saw the need to stay on top of the growth. Through their efforts, Fox Point became one of the first planned villages in the state. In March 1927, the commission released a design for the development of a village beautiful with an English type of architecture -- resembling the aesthetic of the buildings still standing in the village of Kohler -- grouped around a civic center to be located where Stormonth School now stands. The plan proposed a commercial district along Community Place. The streets surrounding the civic center to the west were laid out in concentric arcs.

The village board passed a zoning ordinance that created "A", "B" and "C" districts. The "A" district was located east of Lake Drive. Each lot was a minimum of 40,000 square feet. The "B" district, between Lake Drive and the railroad tracks, required lots of at least 15,000 square feet. The "C" district, west of the tracks, required lots of at least 7,500 square feet.

The Great Depression slowed the expected growth. A number of developers and speculators suffered substantial losses due to rapidly falling property values. Most of the homes remained east of the railroad tracks. In light of these events, the village board had some difficult decisions to make. The school was at capacity. In the end, the village beautiful plans gave way to the more immediate practicalities and requirements of public education.

A Planned Community, a Civic Center, and the Fox Point (Stormonth) School Part 2 (Continued from Fox Point Files June)

At inception, the Fox Point village boundaries included parts of three separate common school districts. From parts of each, the village fashioned the Fox Point Common School District. The district took ownership of the brick Fox Point School at 8340 North Lake Drive. The school had been built in 1914 to replace, in turn, an old frame schoolhouse just to the south.

By 1930, the student population was exceeding the limits of the physical structure. The school board proposed a new school to be sited on the northwest corner of Lake Drive and Hyde Way. The village board, however, refused to rezone the property. In 1932, the village board engineered a trade. The village had outgrown the village hall -- located in the old Stabelfeldt farmhouse (now

the Wheel & Sprocket parking lot). The village board conveyed to the school board the use of twelve acres of land at 7241 North Longacre Road -- the parcel designated for the civic center. In return, the school district transferred its old school building to the village as the new village hall.

The village board moved to the new village hall in May of 1935. The public works, fire and police departments remained at the Green Tree Road location. When, in 1958, the village hall was built at its current location at 7200 North Santa Monica Blvd., the board ordered the brick building razed.

In the meantime, the school board hired Eschweiler & Eschweiler to design the school building. The new Fox Point School officially opened on February 26, 1935. The board hired Peter Stormonth away from the Country Day School as the principal. A tall, lanky gentleman, Stormonth came from Dunfermline, a large town in Fife, Scotland, located 3 miles from the northern shore of the Firth of Forth. He graduated from St. Andrew's University and did his postgraduate work at Edinburgh University. Stormonth was much admired. He was a great reader, a lover of Latin and an advocate of both progressive and conservative pedagogical principles -- depending on what he felt worked best.

In the early years, Stormonth knew every child and every parent by name. Special classes for children with learning issues did not exist. Instead Stormonth held classes in his office for those who needed individual help.

Stormonth retired in 1964. The school board honored him by renaming the building Peter Stormonth School. The board closed the school in 1976 due to declining enrollment. Thereafter, the building was used to house the district administration offices and several businesses. In 1991, district residents approved a plan to renovate, expand and reopen Stormonth School, and close Dunwood School. Stormonth reopened in 1992 for students in kindergarten through the fourth grade.

Even for a planned community, things do not always end as they begin. It has been Stormonth's school, rather than a village beautiful civic center, that has over the years endured to anchor this important village space.

*Mr. Frazer is a trustee on the Fox Point Village board. The views expressed are his own and not necessarily those of the village, the village board, other village board members, or Neighborhood Communications, LLC.*

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