

GOOD MORNING

# Sandusky Register

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### SENIORS



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villagers found  
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# NASA property eyed

## Township ponders best use of Plum Brook area

By MICHAEL TURNBELL  
Staff Writer

**PERKINS TWP.** — The westernmost portion of NASA's 6,400-acre Plum Brook Research Station, declared as excess by the federal government more than a dozen years ago, may be sold and developed someday if remnants of a former World War II-era munitions

plant are removed.

If and when that happens, the Perkins Township trustees say they want to be prepared to make the best use of government-owned land restricted from private development since the 1940s, starting with the reopening of several roads.

Ransom Road and Campbell

Street, two north-south roads between Bogart Road and Mason Road, Fox Road, an east-west road between Ohio 4 and Ohio 13, and Buoy Road, a short east-west road off Patten Tract Road, are all barricaded at property lines in NASA's westernmost portion.

The subject of eliminating the barricades and reopening the

roads came up during a discussion of future township land uses at the trustees' work session earlier this week.

Trustees have complained in recent years that the township is plagued by a shortage of east-west roads, forcing an increasing number of motorists onto north-south roads such as Hayes Avenue,

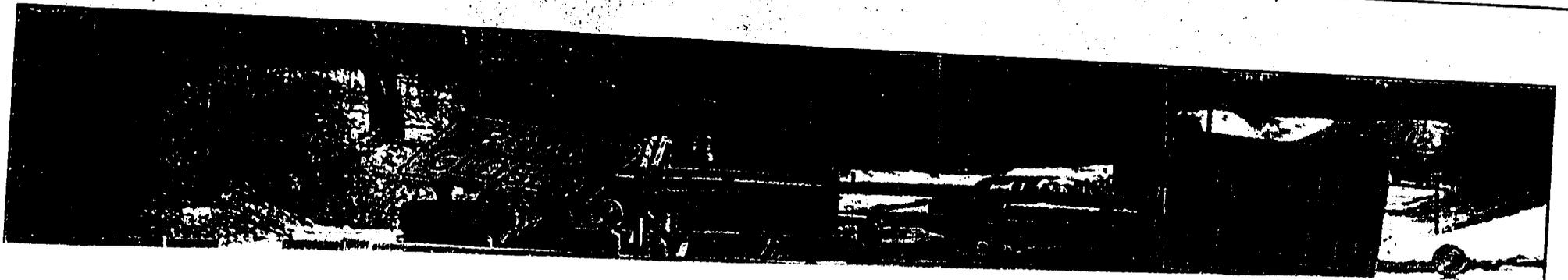
Columbus Avenue and Milan Road.

Trustees have talked about extending both Marshall Avenue and Bell Avenues from Campbell Street to Hayes Avenue but no formal proposals have been made.

Trustee Jim Dee said Wednesday

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## High water



# NASA

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any he'd like to see Fox Road opened. "even if it has to be surrounded with a fence on both sides."

Marie Hildebrandt, chairwoman of the Perkins Township trustees, said Friday a north-south road, either Ransom Road or Campbell Street, should be extended to Mason Road to open up land development in the southwestern part of the township.

NASA has maintained that 6,400 acres are a necessary safety buffer around Plum Brook's test facilities. The buffer overlaps Perkins and Oxford townships and all portions of Milan and Huron townships and cuts off eight roads including Columbus Avenue, Tay-

lor Road, Fox Road, Scheid Road, Buoy Road, Ransom Road, Taft Road and Campbell Street.

About 60 years ago, the federal government purchased more than 9,000 acres to establish the Plum Brook Ordnance Works during World War II, according to stories culled from *Register* files.

When the war was over and the gunpowder manufacturing facility was no longer needed, farmers were given the first opportunity to buy back the land in the late 1940s and 1950s.

NASA later took over most of the Plum Brook property and established Plum Brook Research Station, a satellite facility of NASA's Lewis Research Center in Cleveland. In the late 1960s, the space agency planned a noise test tunnel and bought about 1,500 acres of

farmers' land back for a buffer zone.

When the space budget was cut in the early 1970s, NASA's plans for new facilities were scrapped and most of Plum Brook's operations were phased out. NASA then leased the land back to farmers.

In 1978, the federal government declared the land to be excess and in 1983, auctioned it to more than a dozen buyers for \$2.3 million.

The government decided Plum Brook's Space Power Facility, Spacecraft Propulsion Research Facility, Cryogenic Propellant Tank Lab and Hypersonic Tunnel Facility might be needed in the future so land in Plum Brook's eastern portion was kept.

NASA Plum Brook General Manager Bob Kozar said an additional 600 acres in Perkins Township roughly west of Ransom Road was also declared as excess but could not be sold because of remnants from the former munitions plant.

NASA turned the 600 acres over to the federal government's General Services Administration. But the site must be cleaned up before the property can be sold.

The U.S. Army of Corp of Engineers is in charge of cleaning up former defense sites around the country like Plum Brook under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program for Formerly Used Defense Sites.

Rick Meadows, project manager from the corp's Huntington, W. Va. office, said the corps will look for areas and the extent of contamination at Plum Brook first, then recommend an appropriate clean-up.

Meadows said explosives were removed from the site when the plant closed, but chemicals or by-

products used in the making of gunpowder may have been left behind and contaminated the soil.

Meadows said the corps' investigation of Plum Brook started last fall and expects it to continue through this year.

Meadows offered no timetable for how long the clean-up could take or how much it could cost.

If the contamination is removed, General Services Administration realty specialist Joseph O'Bradovick said the property will be made available to federal agencies first.

O'Bradovick said if there are no takers, GSA will then simultaneously screen proposals from state and local governments to use the land for public purposes along with proposals to use the land to assist the homeless.

O'Bradovick said if there still are no takers, the property will be sold through competitive bids or auctioned at fair market value.

O'Bradovick said the land may be restricted to agricultural use if it contains archeological or historical sites. Because Indian artifacts have been found in the area, anyone wanting the land for reasons other than agriculture must get approval from the Ohio Historical Society.

Kozar said the Ohio Army National Guard has used the 600 acres as a training site for about 20 years and it's possible that the guard may want to hold on to the property for future reserve units.

Hildebrandt said the township, county and regional planning should work together with prospective developers to provide a viable development plan if the land becomes available to the township.

Hildebrandt said the Perkins school district also should be involved because any development that takes place will have an impact on the school district.

"The first step is to see if the contamination is as bad as people in town think it is. If in fact the land can be reclaimed, step two is a north-south road which would eventually open a thoroughfare system or better, access to the land. From that point on I don't anyone locally has the expertise to say what the best use of the land would be," Hildebrandt said.

"Step three would be taking a careful look at land-uses and what would be the use in terms of a planned community."