

Farmington Observer

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Voters will decide fate of mid-rise

By LYNN ORR

Because of a successful petition drive by a Farmington Hills homeowners' group, voters will decide the fate of mid-rise zoning in next fall's general election.

City Clerk Floyd Cairns recently certified the necessary 1,715 signatures needed to get a charter amendment on the ballot that, if approved, would mandate voter approval for changes in single family zoning as well as changes in building height limitations.

Since the charter amendment proposal is retroactive to Jan. 1, 1977, voter passage of the proposal would invalidate zoning amendments RCE and RCE-1, which allow special low and mid-rise housing for senior citizens.

THE BALLOT proposal caps a 2½ year battle against special zoning for elderly housing waged by the homeowners' group. After the city council passed the two controversial zoning amendments, the battle was carried into November's council election, where the special zoning opposition propelled zoning foes Jody Soronen and Joe Alkateeb into office.

While some zoning foes admit passage of the charter amendment may prove unwieldy, the "drastic action" was needed to halt mid-rise (up to 50 feet) buildings in the city, one opponent explains.

The homeowners' group also is waging a legal battle against the RCE and RCE-1 zoning amendments. Last week a court suit was filed challenging the constitutionality of the amendments.

The homeowners' success at securing a ballot question will very likely halt most zoning changes concerning mid-rise and land currently zoned for single family developments. It's

unlikely, one source indicates, that a developer will take a chance on going ahead with housing based on RCE and RCE-1 zoning, if council-approved zoning changes will be dependent on the outcome of next fall's election.

The Zoning Board of Appeals currently is faced with one request for RCE-1 zoning, although the land under consideration is zoned commercial, rather than single family.

WHILE the charter amendment proposal will be submitted to the governor's office for approval under state law, regardless of the opinion, the amendment will be on the ballot next fall, according to City Attorney John Donahue and the homeowners' attorney Harold Wolkind.

While the city attorneys' office will be investigating the effects of the amendment's passage, Donahue agrees that the enabling legislation could have wide-scale effects on zoning within the city.

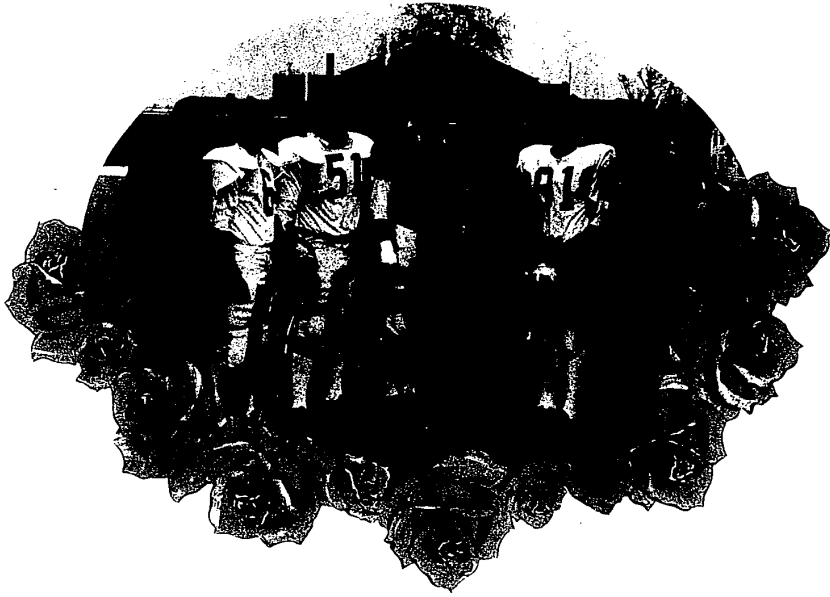
Wolkind maintains that the homeowners' intention is to force council members to stick to the city's master plan.

"Basically, the charter amendment is saying that before you're going to pass an ordinance that changes the master plan, you have to submit it to the general public," he explains.

Questions about what the amendment's language implies exist, says Donahue.

"It says that, in effect, any multiple use or special purpose use proposed for single family zoning approved by the council, also would require the approval of 51 percent of the voters in the next general election," he says.

The governor's office, as well as the attorney general's office will review the proposed amendment for clarity of language and constitutionality, Donahue says.



Bo's bowl-bound boys

The New Year is near and for the U of M football squad, students, fans and alumni, it's time to hope everything comes up roses. Local Wolverine talent making the Pasadena trip include: (from left) assistant coach Bob Thornbladh, former Plymouth Salem standout; James Kozlowski of Bishop Borgess; Dave Kadela, graduate of Cran-

brook; Jerry Meter of Bloomfield Hills Andover; Coach Bo Schembechler; Ed Kasperek of Livonia; and Bill McCartney, offensive coordinator and recruiter for Wayne and Oakland counties. (Staff photo by Gary Caskey)

Ms. Claus assumes a new stance

She doesn't look quite like one would expect.

Gone is the plump, white-haired woman with wireframed spectacles. Clara Claus is thinner now, with short dark hair waving gently around her face, and the glasses are gone entirely.

"What happened?" "Liquid protein, Clairol and contact lenses," says Ms. Claus with a smile. "I had a certain image for centuries now, and I was beginning to feel typecast. I thought it was time for a change."

"After all the bad publicity about liquid protein and hair dye, I probably wouldn't go the same route again."

Ms. Claus was in town recently to promote her new book, "Life with Santa."

She calls the book a "labor of love." "I had another reason for writing the book, I must admit. It isn't easy to live in the shadow of the most famous man in the world."

Ms. Claus presents a picture of life at the North Pole from an insider's viewpoint.

ALTHOUGH HER HUSBAND is the one in the limelight, Ms. Claus tends to all the details behind the scene.

"I'm in charge of production, and serve as a kind of liaison between our staff of elves (several thousand during our peak period in November) and Santa."

Santa gets a little neurotic at this



Clara Claus has found a new lifestyle and launched a career after living for years in the shadow of her famous husband. (Photo by Cynthia Abbott)

time of year. He worries that all the toys won't be ready on time and tends to get a little short with the staff."

Ms. Claus also has the job of inventory control. "I'm the one who reads

all the letters that flood in, and from them I determine what supplies to order and how many of each item to produce.

"It takes a lot of organization."

LIFE AT THE NORTH POLE has its disadvantages.

"I'm allergic to reindeer, for one thing," Ms. Claus says. "But the big problem is loneliness. We're fine during the busy months, but after the big day, things just die down."

"We sit there, Santa and I, with no one to talk to but each other and a bunch of elves. I'm not saying anything against elves, but they're terrible little chauvinists and don't have

Working from a preliminary sketch, administrators will consider installing the new garage will have four bays area which will allow for easier access. There will be two bays with hoists and two without.

In addition to the repair area, administrators will consider installing a drive through wash rack for the buses.

DRIVE through racks would be an improvement over the present system of portable washing devices that the garage uses, according to Trustee Dr. Mervyn Ross. Keeping the buses free of road dirt and salt would help prolong the life of the vehicles, he said.

If the drive through wash is found to be feasible, it will be installed in one of the four bays of the proposed garage.

Small business gains tax break

By ELIZABETH EHRLICH

Small businesses in Michigan will be able to reduce their 1977 tax bills by about \$50 million, under a last-minute fiscal measure passed in Lansing last week.

The new legislation, which also gives the State's farmers a tax credit of \$4 million, amends Michigan's controversial Single Business Tax (SBT) Act of 1975.

The amendment, a Congressional compromise several months in the making, was hailed by small business partisans as providing meaningful tax relief.

"It's a significant step in the right direction," said Doug Ross, coordinator of the Southfield-based Michigan Citizens' Lobby, a member group of a statewide lobbying coalition that takes credit for effecting the changes. The coalition, Citizens to Save Small Business, was formed last May by 100,000 Michiganders to enact SBT reforms.

The SBT came under fire from small businesses around the state because it replaced the old system of profits taxation with a "value-added" tax that determines a business' tax base by the incremental operating expenses figured into retail pricing. Critics claim that earnings are a more equitable point of tax reference for low-profit businesses with comparatively high operating expenses.

"The Single Business Tax may be a very reasonable way of taxing such large businesses as utilities and auto companies," Ross said. "But comparing GM to the corner grocery is like using the same standard to measure apples and oranges."

Replacing a system of seven different business taxes some called confusing and inequitable, the SBT was introduced in 1975 to broaden the state's tax base and remove a burden on heavy industry often blamed for driving large industrial plants out of Michigan.

"The old tax system had certain evils," according to State Representative Wilbur Brotherton, a member of the House Taxation Committee. "Certain businesses with large inventories were taxed more than others," under the profits system, he said. "Some said that partnerships were playing games by charging off

personal types of expenses so little profit would be shown."

Because Michigan's economy is "either boom or bust," he continued, the corporate profits tax resulted in a strain on business income as the state sought to maintain revenues in bad times. "Since the value-added tax relies on more stable factors than profits, business income remains more stable," he said.

In spite of favoring retention of some SBT features, however, Brotherton said that he and others on the House Tax Committee "accepted that something would have to be done," for small businesses in the state.

The new amendment has three important provisions for small businesses. Entirely exempted from the SBT are those with a tax base less than \$40,000 for sole proprietors. Partnerships are allowed an additional \$12,000 per partner to remain eligible for the exemption. The exemption is reduced at the rate of \$2 for each dollar of business income over these amounts.

Businesses with gross receipts for the year under \$3 million are favored by the small business tax credit provision to reduce their tax payments as much as 50 percent under a sliding formula dependent on size.

A third provision, the so-called "labor-intensity circuit breaker," allows the small business to reduce by 60 percent that portion of the value-added tax base made up of labor compensation costs.

The compromise amendment in its final form dates from September, when the Senate passed a measure introduced by Senator Patrick McCullough allowing small businesses to opt for a conventional profits tax in lieu of the SBT. Opposition in the House resulted in the tax committee passing a less sweeping bill, similar in most respects to the new amendment.

"We're not as happy with the final version as we were with McCullough's bill," said Chuck Shipley, spokesman for the Service Station Dealers Association, an organization of Michigan service station operators active in Citizens to Save Small Business. "But it certainly goes a long way in correcting some of the abuses that the SBT imposed on small businesses."

Board eyes Ten Mile funds for bus garage

If there's a court facility in the city's future, then there's a bus garage slated for the Farmington School system.

Money raised by the sale of Ten Mile School for a court facility is earmarked for the construction of a bus garage on the hill near the School Administration Building.

Farmington school trustees have voted \$4,000 of Ten Mile's \$150,000 price tag toward completing plans and specifications for the new garage which will hold the more than 60 buses used by the district.

Presently, the system is using the garage under the School Administration Building. The garage can hold two buses undergoing repair. It has one hoist for repair work. The other buses are kept in a fenced yard behind the building where they are open to the effects of bad weather, salt and vandalism.

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VIETNAM PERSPECTIVE

Farmington Editor Steve Barnaby takes a look back on the war-torn year of 1968 as his 10th anniversary as an infantryman dawns in 1978. To see what he has to say, turn to Page 10A.