

# Farmington Observer

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## Program consultant quits

# Council unaware of conspiracy connection

By STEVE BARNABY  
Farmington editor

The Farmington Hills city administration neglected to inform a majority of city council members that a woman hired in April for the city's loans and grants program had been a subject in an investigation by the Oakland County prosecutor's office.

A survey of council members taken by the Observer shows that only three out of seven knew that Maureen Lowe, the Neighborhood Improvement Program consultant, was involved in the county case.

And while Mrs. Lowe terminated her employment with the city on Tuesday, council members remain mystified that city administrators had not fully informed them of her background.

ACCORDING to the prosecutor's office, when Mrs. Lowe had applied for a job in the city's community development department, her application was backdated by county officials, false information was added to the form and she was shown an employment test beforehand.

As far back as 1976, both City Mgr. George Majors and his assistant, Mike Dorman, were aware that Mrs. Lowe was involved in alleged irregular practices by the county housing division and informed County Executive Daniel Murphy.

The irregularities were first noted by Dorman when George Roberts, a loan applicant from Farmington Hills, complained about the quality of work being done on his house in 1976. It was discovered then that a painting contractor, Steven Lowe, was Mrs. Lowe's husband.

It also was discovered that Tim Ashley—who inspected the work for the county and established the cost to have to work done—was an employee of Aztec Construction Co., the firm which did the work on Roberts' home.

Ashley was on leave from Aztec to work for the county.

While some council members knew of the alleged application fraud, none knew that Dorman and Majors were aware of Mrs. Lowe's involvement in the rehabilitation of Roberts' house.

MRS. LOWE WAS fired by Oakland

*'I think we should have been informed about this for our opinion. We could have done this in an executive meeting dealing with personnel at least to get the benefit of other persons' thoughts.'*

—Earl Oppertbauer

County earlier this year but won back her job after going to circuit court. She quit soon afterwards and was hired by Farmington Hills.

She is an undicted co-conspirator, according to county prosecutors, because she will be a witness in the county's case against Donald Mackenzie, former deputy director of community development.

Both Majors and Dorman this week stood by their hiring of Mrs. Lowe, saying the work she did for the city kept her away from involvement with contractors. She processed claims for persons making application to rehabilitate their homes, according to Majors.

Majors and Dorman said they were

unaware of the county charges until they appeared in newspapers last month.

"We were careful to insulate her from the problems in Oakland County," said Majors. "She had nothing to do with contractors." Majors admits he "agonized" for a long time before hiring her, but said she knew the program well and was qualified to do the work.

Dorman said he looked for other persons to fill the slot but found none more qualified than Mrs. Lowe.

"We knew what we were getting into," said Majors. "We didn't hide her. Her name was on fliers and in the paper."

Majors said he found nothing

unusual about not informing all council members about Mrs. Lowe's background, saying that numerous persons were hired throughout the year for various jobs and that council members were probably only familiar with 15 or so city employees.

Majors added that a person shouldn't have to suffer for past deeds forever and that not everyone hired by city hall has to have a perfect record.

BUT COUNCIL members expressed concern that they hadn't been informed of Mrs. Lowe's past before she was hired by the city.

"I think we should have been informed about this for our opinion," said Councilman Earl Oppertbauer. "We could have done this in an executive meeting dealing with personnel at least to get the benefit of other persons' thoughts."

Oppertbauer claimed this was the first time he had heard about any of the charges against Mrs. Lowe.

Other members unaware of Mrs. Lowe's background were Keith Deacon, Joe Alkatech and Jody Soronen. "I'd certainly be shying away from

a person like that," said Deacon when informed of Mrs. Lowe's independent contractor status with the city.

Mayor Jan Dolan said she spoke with Majors about Mrs. Lowe's background but that she was unaware Majors and Dorman knew of Mrs. Lowe's involvement with the work at Roberts' home.

"I don't think anyone on the council knew about that," said Mrs. Dolan.

"George (Majors) did inform me of her problems with the county before hiring her and it didn't sound like the best thing to me. I'll admit that I don't feel comfortable with her in that position," said Mrs. Dolan.

Council member Joanne Smith said that although she didn't know of Mrs. Lowe's background until after the hiring, she felt that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

"I think she should be given a fair chance. From all accounts she is doing the job for which she was hired," she said.

Council member Cathy Jones said she was aware of Mrs. Lowe's background and refused to comment further about the case.

## Officials' attendance rates 'A'

Most Farmington area officials earned an "A" or at least an "A-" for attendance at public meetings during the first half of 1978.

But some appointed officials of boards and commissions may need a truant officer.

According to public minutes of meetings, most elected officials attended the majority of meetings held between January and June of this year, although they may not be aware that truancy carries a stiff penalty—removal from office.

Under the charters of both the City of Farmington and Farmington Hills, elected officials may be dismissed from office for absenteeism. The Farmington School Board has a better reason to keep attendance in top form—board members are paid \$20 per meeting with a provision that restricts payments on a per-day basis. Two meetings scheduled during one day are considered for one payment only.

Under the Farmington City Charter adopted in 1951, an elected official may be removed from office for missing four consecutive meetings of the council or 25 per cent of the total meetings held during one fiscal year (which runs July 1 through June 30 of the following year).

The Farmington Hills City Charter, adopted in 1973, provides for removal of an elected official if the council member fails to attend six consecutive regular meetings of the council without being excused by the council.

While the Hills charter fails to specify grounds for removal of an appointed official, the Farmington charter provides for removal of appointed officers of boards or commissions miss four consecutive meetings or commissions under the same considerations applied to elected officials, unless excused by the council.

CHARLOTTE BRUCE, a member of the Farmington Planning Commission, outranked the city competition by missing five of 13 meetings conducted thus far this year. Two of her counterparts in Farmington Hills also have truancy records, according to public minutes.

Hills Planning Commissioners Edward Andries missed seven of 15 meetings between Jan. 5 and June 8, while Charles Teichner missed six meetings.

Attendance of elected officials, however, reveals better attendance.

Councilmen William Hartsock and Warren Buckler have unblemished records for regular meeting attendance thus far in '78. Ralph Yoder missed three of 14 regular meetings, one absence on account of illness. He and Mayor Richard Tupper each missed two meetings which occurred during their vacations.

Councilman Allen Bennett also missed one meeting due to vacation. Farmington school board members Erna Makinen and Michael Spiece recorded perfect attendance thus far this year, while Shiple was the only member who attended all regular

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The radio tower that Larry Gordon planned to erect stands at half mast awaiting the fate of a zoning amendment in Farmington Hills. (Staff photo by Allen Schlossberg)

## Radio tower bid raises static with residents

A Farmington Hills ham radio operator's unsuccessful bid for permission to erect a 72-foot tower and antenna in his backyard has signalled a drive to amend the city's zoning ordinance.

Under the proposed amendment, ham operators would be allowed to erect towers up to 75 feet high before being forced to go before the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) for a variance.

That amendment is causing static among homeowners worried about decreasing property values, interference with their television reception, safety and the aesthetics of living near a 72-foot radio tower.

The plan is the subject of a Farmington Hills Planning Commission public hearing at 8 p.m., July 20, in Farmington Hills City Council chambers.

Under the proposal, which first must be passed by the Planning Commission before going forward to the city council for ultimate approval, the radio towers height would be restricted by the size of the owner's lot.

TOWERS must be built so that if they fell, the structure would land only on the owner's property, according to Farmington Hills City Attorney John Donahue.

While ham operators are applauding the move for higher towers, some residents are rallying against the action.

They would prefer the city maintain its present height limit of 25 feet for the towers. The same height restriction applies to church spires and chimneys in the city.

The move toward raising the height limit began quietly last summer when Larry Gordon, 46, decided to experiment with a larger radio tower for his ham equipment. A ham operator for about 2 1/2 years, Gordon was using a 23-foot high antenna when he decided to switch.

He began by circulating a petition around his Old Farms subdivision neighborhood, asking for approval of the move toward a 72-foot tower in his backyard. Eleven of his neighbors signed the petition between June and August, 1977.

By the time his hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals came up in November, Gordon discovered that several of his neighbors had second thoughts about the project.

AMONG THEM is Iris Jones, whose husband Michael signed the petition. Both of them are opposing the amendment.

"Aesthetically, my objection to having a tower in my direct line of vision that looks like a scaled down TV-2 tower and is twice as thick as a telephone pole is that it's not my idea of beauty," said Mrs. Jones.

She explains that her husband misunderstood the petition when Gordon presented it to him. The Joneses, like some of their neighbors, are concerned about the effect of the tower on television reception and property values.

A house which has a view of a large

radio tower is bound to lose some of its value, according to Mrs. Jones.

After the Joneses and other neighbors spoke against the tower at the November meeting, the Zoning Board of Appeals turned down Gordon's request. He then decided to move on to the Planning Commission and work for an amendment.

During the first appearance of the proposal at the Planning Commission, the Farmington Hills Homeowners Association came out against the move.

Homeowners representative Robert Anzovar said that the existing zoning codes require all new subdivisions be built with underground utilities. Homeowners are buying property in subdivisions without high obstructions. Some pay an extra price to move into a subdivision with underground utilities.

Increasing the height limit of radio towers would be contrary to the existing city code, he said.

Objections to his plan took Gordon by surprise.

By the time the zoning board had rejected his request, he had spent about \$2,000 in installing the cement base of the tower. He was confident that the board would look at his petition favorably and grant his request so he decided to install the cement base before winter frost hardened the ground.

ALTHOUGH HE believes that some ham operators in the area constructed their towers without consulting the city, he wants to follow the authorized route to gaining some sort of legal approval.

"I didn't want to do it that way (without approval). I wanted to build a free standing tower without guy wires because it's safer," Gordon said.

"The checker ones require wires but the wires are a safety hazard for kids," he said.

In addition to his rejection by the zoning board, Gordon was told to readjust the height of his original 33-foot high tower, which was against city height limits.

"It was there for four years and nobody cared," he said. The antenna was originally used for his Citizen's Band radio.

One advantage of his proposal would be a decrease in the number of variance request ham operators put before the zoning board, he says.

Area ham operators agree that the 75-foot limit would be adequate for their needs. The towers would be safe, argues Richard Painter, of Farmington Hills.

"The towers are structures and should be as strong as a house. If an apartment can be five feet from the lot line and not fall so will a tower. Its design and safety can be predicted," said Painter, 61.

HE SAYS he has been involved in ham radio since 1936. A Hills resident for four years, he refused to move to

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## Peace Corp recruit gains dream

When Julia Tully was a little girl, she had a dream not usually shared by children.

She wanted to join the Peace Corps. For years she sent for every brochure the organization offered and waited until she was old enough to join. Through her years at Harrison High School, she wanted to sign up.

Last year, at the age of 20, she signed up for the group at a time when its popularity seemed to be in decline. But she discovered her waiting wasn't over. Her original assignment to join a malaria eradication team in Columbia was canceled when that country withdrew from the program.

So she determined Ms. Tully waited another year for the Peace Corps. In the meantime, the Marygrove College graduate enrolled in Wayne State University Law School and completed her first year of study before being reassigned by the Peace Corps.

Her idealism remained undampened.

"I'm idealistic. I want to make a change," she said.

After being reassigned by the organization, she recently left her Farmington Hills home to organize a food cooperative in the Dominican Republic.

AFTER organizing the cooperative she will act as its resident nutritionist. As the nutritionist of a small town, she will be in contact with between 200-400 families. The town will have about 800 infants, according to Peace Corp statistics given to her.

In addition to performing the regular duties of a nutritionist, she will be faced with the task of teaching the villagers to perform such precautionary steps as boiling water before drinking it, Ms. Tully said.

Her new assignment has left her with mixed feelings.

"I'm really nervous. It took a year to get this assignment. But I also like the responsibility."

Embracing responsibility is something that she believes was little practiced by the generation that grew up in the '60s.

But she also recognizes that the Peace Corp lost some of its potential members from that generation because many of the young saw the organization as an arm of American imperialism.

Before she her recent departure to her new assignment, she was looking forward to the training session in Miami.

"I'll have to do a lot of homework. And I'll meet a lot of the people who will be involved in similar programs for the next two years," she said.

After her stopover in Miami, she will be flown to her assignment and further training.

VISITS to a nutritionist working in the field, and to the surrounding villages will familiarize the new recruits with their duties. Ten weeks of intensive training will include courses in nutrition and health.

On the eve of her departure, Ms. Tully was enthused about the Peace Corps.

"We're lucky we have such an organization," she said.

### inside

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