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Hills forbids Lutheran High building use

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Lutheran High School Northwest has turned into a \$332,000 white elephant.

The Farmington Hills Zoning Board of Appeals last week ruled that the building can no longer be used as a high school because it's on property zoned for elementary school use.

The Lutheran High School Association of Greater Detroit purchased the building for \$332,000 last August from the Farmington Public Schools. Both

sides say they were unaware of the zoning regulation.

The school is in a residential neighborhood bounded by 12 Mile and 13 Mile, Middlebelt and Orchard Lake roads. It was formerly Highmeadow Elementary School.

With an enrollment of just more than 100 students, Lutheran High Northwest operated during the 1969-81 school year. Presently closed for summer break, a gymnasium was being constructed adjacent to the school until the city of Farmington Hills issued a work stop order.

The problem is that the school isn't located on a major or secondary thoroughfare, according to Hal Rowe, zoning supervisor.

Rowe says there were some problems with traffic which would've been compounded by more students and an athletic program.

Residents of the Holly Hills Farms subdivision complained to zoning officials about the construction of the gym last month.

"WE'RE VERY concerned about the traffic in our neighborhood," said Nan-

cy Reilly. "Especially with the addition of the gym. There's only a dirt road going into the school."

The Lutheran association asked for a variance but the zoning board denied the request 4-2.

"We're exploring alternatives," said Harry Lapham, attorney for the Lutheran association. "One alternative is to stay there, but we can't use the building as a high school."

Lutheran High Northwest has had a nomadic existence, drifting from one temporary location to another. It was

first established in 1978 at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills.

It quickly outgrew that facility and moved to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Birmingham.

In 1979, the association discussed buying the former Bond elementary school from the Farmington Public Schools. That building, on 13 Mile west of Orchard Lake, was sold to an office developer.

"We're interested because we sold (Highmeadow) knowing they would use it as a high school," said William Prisk,

superintendent of finance for Farmington schools.

"We have concern. But right now, we're an outsider looking in. We have sold the property."

"This is a disagreement between the Lutheran association and the zoning board."

The Farmington Board of Education building and site committee, which studies offers and recommends sales of school property to the school board, will discuss the situation in a meeting tomorrow at 7 p.m.

State Dems seek economy linkage with business

By Steve Barnaby
editor

In hopes of forging a stronger bond between Michigan's business community and the Democratic Party, two state senators have teamed up to press for passage of a 10-point economic program.

Bannered as a plan to "recharge" Michigan's lagging economy, many of its points are aimed at the complaints of the small-business sector, traditionally a GOP-oriented voting bloc.

"The time has come to put aside the study commissions and endless wish lists in favor of some practical changes," said state Sen. Doug Ross, D-Southfield, who has teamed up with Senate Majority Leader William Faust, D-Westland.

The plan would reform the single-business tax, eliminate tax on workers' compensation and unemployment compensation costs, cut workers' compensation costs and establish a "one-stop" permit process for business permits and business licenses.

The program comes at a time when many feel Gov. William Milliken will step aside and either retire or run for the U.S. Senate, leaving the door possibly open for a Democratic gubernatorial hopeful.

A broader-based economic plan would go a long way toward giving a Democratic candidate a chance.

Other features of the program would be a sunset law on paperwork, elimination of "wasteful" rules and regulations, creation of a red-tape hotline, promotion of auto investment, targeting of state resources for capital investment and spurring of local development networks.

"UNTIL THE STATE is perceived as offering a positive business climate, we aren't going to attract the thousands of

new jobs that we must have to put our people back to work," Faust said.

The plan includes legislation currently before the Legislature such as the single-business-tax proposals and paperwork reduction as well as proposals that will be developed over the summer recess, the two senators said.

The single business tax has been especially irritating to small businesses which have low profits but high tax bills because of a business payroll tax.

Senate Bill 240, recently passed by the Senate, enables a business which produces no adjusted business income to pay no state business tax. This would provide \$25 million in tax relief for small business. Ross was the primary sponsor of this bill.

The bill also enables new research and manufacturing firms to qualify for exemption from the SBT if the businesses are unprofitable during their first three years. It allows small and new businesses to pay taxes based on profitability not their payroll.

Senate Bill 360 exempts workers' compensation and unemployment compensation costs from a business' taxable base. Because these costs are mandated by state law and included in the taxable base, the current system is a tax on a tax. SB 360 would save Michigan businesses \$40 million in the first year, its sponsors said.

MICHIGAN'S workers' compensation costs, the highest in the nation, would be brought down to compete with other states, according to the plan.

Although comprehensive, the plan isn't a cure-all, Faust said.

"Much of Michigan's fate will continue to be shaped in Washington and by international events," he said. "Our plan focuses on 10 'can do' proposals to snap Michigan's business and job climate back on the right track while upgrading the state's tarnished image."

Foster home limit sought by lawmaker

By Louise Okrusky
staff writer

Zoning laws which allow placement of foster care homes in residential areas in spite of deed restrictions could be repealed with the passage of four bills proposed by state Sen. Donald E. Bishop, R-Rochester.

Scheduled to come before the Senate Municipal Committee and the Health and Social Services Committee in the fall, the bills would effectively repeal the zoning enabling laws which allow the state to place foster care homes for the mentally retarded in subdivisions, according to Jim Clark, development specialist for the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center (MORC). The organization has about 3,100 foster care homes for the mentally retarded in Michigan.

Michigan allows the homes to be placed in subdivisions where deed restrictions prohibit commercial enterprises.

The bill's supporters argue that the homes are operated at a profit and should be regarded as commercial enterprises.

Compliance with deed restrictions would increase local control over the placement of homes, according to Rick Simonsen, Bishop's administrative assistant. The senator represents an area including Troy and West Bloomfield Township. Bishop was unavailable for comment.

INCLUDED IN the bill are provisions which would reduce the maximum number of residents in a foster

care home from six to four; require owners operating a home for profit to live on the premises; and establish a minimum distance of 2,500 feet between the homes.

Homes would be better managed and costs to the state cut by limiting the number of residents to four. License holders of homes realizing a profit would be required to live in the home, thereby limiting to one the number of facilities an individual could operate.

Instead of saving the Department of Social Services money, these moves would increase costs and decrease professionalism, Clark said.

"For the 12 years Michigan has been involved in community placement there has been a great deal of change and refinement of the system," Clark said.

Non-profit corporations owning two or three homes have been found to be the most efficient.

"You can have a more professional approach then," he said.

Limiting the number of a home's residents to four would normally affect its operating costs. Daily costs per resident averages at about \$60.

Charges that the state pays more money than necessary to the homes were refuted by Clark who said it would cost more to rent the homes than to buy them.

IN HOMES planned to accommodate physically handicapped residents, the cost of renovating a home to provide access to wheelchairs outweighs the cost. Please turn to Page 4A



Working together has become commonplace for the team at Firestone Tire in Farmington. Owner Bruce Habermehl found it advantageous to hire his employees from the Farmington School co-op program. These

employees are (from left) Pete Morelli, Gary Leemgraven and Tom Wilson.

Everyone profits

Hiring co-op students is tradition

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Bruce Habermehl is a local store owner who believes in hiring local talent.

The proof of the pudding is in his staff. All five general service mechanics at Habermehl's Firestone Tire Center are graduates of the Farmington Public Schools co-op program.

The foreman and most seniored co-op, Gary Leemgraven, has been a full-time employee since graduating from Harrison High School in 1974.

Two other employees are Harrison graduates: Pete Morelli, class of '80, a general service mechanic; and Robert Bryant, class of '81.

Terry Lotz, North Farmington High class of '72, is the electronic tune-up specialist. And Tom Wilson, Farmington High class of '79, specializes in alignments.

Habermehl has been hiring co-op students since he opened his downtown Farmington store in 1968. Most of the current staff started working there parttime when they were high school juniors majoring in career auto mechanics.

Everything except heavy engine repair is done at the Firestone store.

"THE CO-OP PROGRAM is excellent," Habermehl said. "It allows boys who show mechanical abilities to get involved at an early age through school."

"Also it allows double supervision by the school and the employer."

Adds Leemgraven: "You learn a lot more on the job than in school. Even the new co-ops we get, we start them out on big projects."

At various times throughout the school year, whole auto mechanics classes visit Habermehl's store.

Hiring co-ops was just an automatic thing, Habermehl says. "I was asked to try it out and it's been a super program. I've never had a bad co-op student."

Each one is screened by Richard Canton, trade and industrial co-op coordinator for the Farmington schools.

"Bruce (Habermehl) has been very supportive of our program, a very good employer," Canton said.

"It's unusual the number of students who stay there after graduation."

Habermehl's employees have all attended special classes after graduation. All are certified licensed mechanics.

In September, Habermehl plans to expand his staff by hiring another co-op student to carry on the tradition.



Teamwork has proven fruitful for these former Farmington School District co-op students who now work at the local Firestone store. These two are Bob Bryant (left) and Terry Lotz.

what's inside

Community Calendar . . . 7B

Editorials 9A

Inside Angles 2A

Obituaries 2A

Shipping Cart . . . Section B

Suburban Life . . . Section B

Sports Section C

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