

# Farmington Observer

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## 'Boutique' law gets short end in bad economy

By Craig Piechura  
staff writer

Central business district homeowners have yet to take advantage of a year-old ordinance which allows them to convert their homes into "boutique businesses."

The bad economy and city parking codes are the culprits, according to homeowners and city officials.

Homes zoned for commercial and office use in the downtown area can be converted into businesses such as art studios, real estate offices and curio shops. Communities such as Plymouth, Northville and Romeo are well-known for such shops.

The central-business-district homes run east along both sides of Grand River, from city hall to Mayfield. The northern boundary is to the rear of commercial frontage on Thomas, behind the Civic Theater. It meanders south along Sycum incorporating homes on Orchard and the area around Ray's Interiors.

"Nobody has converted their home to a business or a shared business/residential use yet," admits Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman. "But how about the economy? Nobody's doing any developing at this time."

The ordinance was adopted last November.

Only Walter Sundquist, owner of a home on the south side of Grand River, east of the downtown Farmington Center, is considering converting a barn behind his home into an antique shop. Nothing is definite at present.

To satisfy the city's planning commission, businesses must meet certain criteria on design, building materials, additions and signs to qualify for use as a business.

Businesses must not clash with the historic character of the homes, according to the ordinance.

Some residents believe the ordinance parking requirements to be too strict.

The ordinance is a step in the right

direction, according to business district resident Laurie Newton. She owns a home east of Warner on Grand River. But she wonders how owners of homes like hers could meet parking requirements.

Deadman admits homes with 50-foot lots probably would have a difficult time qualifying unless a homeowner purchased an adjacent home to provide room for more parking.

Parking requirements vary depending on the amount of traffic a business generates. A restaurant, for example, needs more spaces than an insurance office. Generally, the ordinance requires one parking space for every 150 feet of building devoted to the business, says Deadman.

Homeowners living above the business would only have to provide parking for business underneath the living quarters.

If 600 square feet were devoted to a cookie shop on the main floor, the homeowner/businessman would have to provide six parking spaces — each nine feet by 20 feet. Variances could be sought to alleviate problems with narrow driveways, says Deadman.

Grand River homes west of Farmington Road don't qualify for business conversion under the ordinance. Homes around the Warner Mansion are in the historic district and are disallowed for commercial use.

This bothers Lawrence Mayer, owner of Mayer Florists Shop and three homes west of the business on Grand River. Originally, he bought the houses with the intention of developing them into small businesses, he says.

"So long as they don't physically strip the house to allow display windows or build a storefront in front of the houses, I think it would be fine," he says.

Mayer suggests allowing businesses such as interior decorator shops or insurance companies to operate out of homes in the historic district "but certainly not a Little Caesar's (pizzeria) or something like that."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

A familiar site soon may be gone from the Farmington area. The Cunningham Drugstore is being closed, although officials say it could open under new ownership.

## Employees await store's fate

By Craig Piechura  
staff writer

You can't see it hanging next to display racks for razor blades but there's a sword dangling over the heads of Cunningham Drugstore employees working in the Farmington store.

One of only two Cunningham stores remaining in the state, the store will remain open until a buyer is found to take it over as an independent drugstore.

When the Farmington Cunningham closes its doors nearly a dozen union employees with seniority dating back to the mid-1960s will find themselves moving from the check-out lane to the unemployment line.

Negotiations are taking place with two independent businessmen who operate other pharmacies, said Seymour Serling, partner in the M.E. Arden Co. of Birmingham, owner of the Farmington Plaza shopping center.

Serling refused to say with whom his corporation is negotiating.

"It's someone well-experienced in the drug line," Serling said. "One of

them is involved in three or four professional pharmacies offering just prescriptions. The other one runs a pharmacy that has been connected with a big chain for some time."

The sale could be completed as soon as two weeks, said Serling.

"I KNOW people are concerned about keeping the store open," Serling said. "We will continue with a good, full-service drugstore of high caliber serving the people of Farmington the way they've been served in the past."

Ray Shapero, a Cunningham executive who lives in Northville, refused to confirm or deny reports of an impending sale. He did say the company doesn't "need" the Farmington store anymore.

Asked if the store might become a non-union Apex Drugs, as many former Cunningham stores have, Shapero stressed that the two companies are separate. Union members claim the companies share many of the same corporate officers. And ex-Cunningham employees are picketing a number of

Apex stores in protest.

A year ago, Shapero says, Cunningham owned 185 stores and now owns only 68 throughout the country under the names Cunningham, Schettler, Shapero and Crossroads. The remaining Cunningham stores are the one in Farmington and another at Eight Mile Road and Dequindre in Detroit.

Clerks and other union employees of Cunningham have spent much of the year engaged in a seniority bumping game as the number of stores declines. Employees at the Farmington store carry seniority ranging from 11 to more than 17 years with the company. Clerks said they've been left in the dark by the company and their union about future plans. Most expect the worst.

"IT'S TERRIBLE if you want to know the truth," said one clerk. "It's easier to work eight hours than not knowing whether you'll be here or not from one day to the next."

Another clerk, with 17-years seniority, said she should be able to find work at another store when Cunningham closes. But it won't be at an Apex store.

"If I have to work for minimum wage, it'll be for somebody else," she said.

The public blames union wages for the demise of Cunningham, said Sue Stewart, a clerk from Northville. After 17 1/2 years with the company, she said her take-home pay is less than \$200 a week and her hourly wage is "six-

Despite the pickets, Stewart said she visited an Apex store that once was a Cunningham.

"The picketers were just standing there and chit-chatting, so I went in just to see how the stores are set up," Stewart said. "I looked all around. I looked at everything and saw the price stickers still said Cunningham. They didn't even buy new pricing guns."

The majority of employees were willing to talk as long as their names weren't used in a news story. With many ex-employees waiting a picket line at Apex stores, most clerks are afraid they'll be fired before their time is up if the company learns they're disgruntled.

## Candidates debate worth of experience

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Detroit, and Republican attorney John Anderson disagree on what the issues are in the 15th District state Senate campaign that pitted them in a debate Wednesday before the Southfield-Lathrup Republican Club.

The 15th District includes Farmington, Farmington Hills, Southfield, Lathrup Village, Novi, Northville, Wixom, Oak Park, Huntington Woods, Hazel Park and Ferndale.

The debate also dredged up disagreement on the origin of, and remedies for, Michigan's economic problems.

"The issue as I see it, if there are any in this election, is the considerable turnover to be expected in both the House and Senate," said Faxon, president pro tem of the Senate.

"It's important that experienced legislators return to provide guidance, and I feel my experience in the areas of appropriations, mental health, education, arts and retirement will be very helpful."

During his 18-year tenure in the Legislature, Faxon has become known for his support of education and the arts. He is owner and headmaster of Lycee, a French-American school in Southfield.

Formerly a business executive with

a large manufacturing firm, Anderson is former vice president of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, director of the southeastern Oakland County Boy Scout district and an executive board member of the Detroit Area Council, Boy Scouts of America.

"As I see it," said Anderson, "this is anything but a long-term race. We're faced with issues in this state that are critical to our survival. Michigan is at the crossroads."

"The state Legislature has refused to face up to the difficult challenges of this state, which is the very reason we need a turnover."

If things are going to turn around for

Michigan, "we can't send people back to Lansing who have cut their teeth on the tax-pend-and-morale. If we do, it Anderson, whose press releases refer to his opponent as "taxin' Faxon."

Faxon favored the 22 percent state income tax hike and the Detroit commuter tax increase.

Anderson discounted Faxon's "experience argument," saying, "We don't need people who are concerned about hanging onto a job. We need people who are ready to meet issues head-on."

"It's true a legislator has to be able to negotiate and work with others in order to forge a meeting of the minds. I'm ready, able and willing to do that."

THE LEGISLATURE is not to blame for Michigan's economic woes, Faxon said.

"Michigan — more so than any other state — has been devastated by a three-year recession. The Legislature has responded to everything the governor has requested."

"The state may not be able to lift itself out of what has been an economic downturn on a national and international scale."

"That's nonsense," countered Anderson.

"To say all of our problems are created by Washington or because of international economics is ridiculous. We can't wait for things to turn around in Washington or Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. We have to act now."

What's necessary, Anderson says, is creating jobs, reviving the single-bus-

ness tax on small and medium-sized businesses, and reforming workers and unemployment compensation laws.

"We must make Michigan competitive. Over the last 20 years, Michigan has piled burden after burden on businesses, and without businesses there are no jobs. Without jobs, nothing else matters," he said.

IN FAXON'S view, education holds the key to curbing Michigan's 15-percent unemployment rate.

"I think our investment in education is very important in terms of jobs available in Michigan. I've encouraged community colleges to diversify and to retain people to take the jobs that are unfilled due to lack of competency."

Please turn to Page 2

## Borrows inmate's ID

## Robbery suspect escapes from jail

By Craig Piechura  
staff writer

Charges keep mounting against armed robbery suspect Derrick K. Walker, 25, who escaped from Oakland County Jail just hours after causing a major disturbance in the halls of Farmington's 47th District Court.

Walker, who vowed he would not spend another day in jail, didn't.

He escaped by borrowing the wristband identification issued to another prisoner, Rochell Thomas, who was to be released Tuesday evening.

Sheriff's officials say Walker resembled Thomas enough to go undetected by the sergeant on duty and was able to correctly recite Thomas' Social Security number before signing papers for his release.

In district court, just hours before, Walker began shouting, biting and kicking police officers as he was taken to a place bin in a squad car following an order by 47th District Court Judge Margaret Schaeffer binding him over for trial in circuit court.

Walker originally was charged with four felonies: armed robbery of a Clark gas-station attendant on April 7 in Farmington; felonious assault, a charge that accuses him of pointing a gun at Farmington Hills Officer Bert Cook in a gateway and two felony counts for using a firearm in commission of a felony.

AFTER THE RUCKUS in district court, Farmington Police obtained two more warrants against Walker: a felony warrant for malicious destruction of police property, charged him with

denting a squad-car door with a kick and a high misdemeanor warrant for allegedly biting Public Safety Officer Michael Welchert.

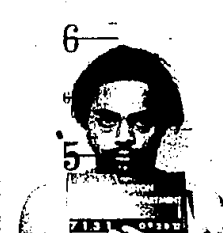
He is expected to be charged with a sixth felony count for escaping, said Lt. Frank Luhnoff of the Farmington Police.

Reports that Walker phoned Judge Schaeffer after his escape, threatening her life, are unconfirmed. Court officials said the judge was in Lansing Friday and unavailable for comment.

Court Administrator Howard Aldrich said precautions were being taken in court.

Farmington Police said three police agencies are involved in the search for Walker.

Attempts to reach Walker's attorney, Milton Henry, were unsuccessful.



Derrick K. Walker

## what's inside

Community calendar . . .	8B
Editorials . . . . .	6A
Letters . . . . .	6A
Obituaries . . . . .	3A
Oral Quorum . . . . .	8A
Shopping Cart . . . . .	Section B
Sports . . . . .	Section C
Suburban Life . . . . .	6-8B

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