

Mayor's survey irks fellow council members

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Farmington Hills Mayor Terry Sever thought his random survey of 1,000-1,200 residents was innocent enough. But his city council colleagues had no idea what he was doing.

Sever's announcement of the survey was met with some indignation. The mayor mailed his survey Friday, March 17, but didn't tell his colleagues until Monday evening. Some council members found out before his announcement after residents called asking what the survey was all about.

"I was embarrassed by this going on under the purview of the city," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said. "I felt the council should have known about it."

Other council members agreed. "My concern was that, I guess out of

courtesy and a matter of information and communication with the council, I would have preferred he would have let us know," councilwoman Jody Soronen said. "Without any knowledge of it, you do feel un-informed."

Soronen told Sever Monday that if the tables were turned and he was the one unaware of what other members were doing, "he would have felt the same way."

COUNCIL MEMBERS Jean Fox and Ben Marks felt Sever had good intentions but would have liked to have been informed. "The mayor is supposed to be the leader of the city," Fox said. "I'm sure the council would have supported him." Fox said. "It was not the advantageous thing to do at this time."

Sever apologized Monday evening to the city council for failing to inform them prior to mailing the sur-

vey. The mayor paid for the survey and for postage.

"I thought it was a harmless thing. And I thought it was a good idea for me and for the council to hear from the residents," Sever said Tuesday morning. "I failed to realize that people in the community and some people in politics sometimes speculate about motives."

He acknowledged Monday morning — before his announcement to the council — that he didn't inform residents. "I'm going to share it (residents' responses) with other council members. I didn't ask for council approval. But I didn't feel it's an obligation because it was a random survey," he said.

A citywide survey by members of the Year 2000 task forces are expected to be presented to the city council Monday, March 27. White Fox suggested that Sever's survey be included in the city newsletter, Vagnozzi suggested that Sever could have waited for the all-inclusive city survey.

Sever divided the city into six areas and mailed surveys to about 200 residents in each area. The one-page survey asks residents to rate city services, such as police and fire, public services and the city council.

"I've been really interested in trying to find out what people feel about the services we perform, the priorities," Sever said. "It's not real clear what residents want."

TWO SURVEY questions caused some concern. One asks whether the city council or voters should elect the mayor. Residents also are asked whether they would be willing to spend an additional \$1-\$2 monthly to improve services.

Sever said he is curious how residents feel about an elected mayor. "I'm convinced the one-year (mayoral) term is not beneficial," he said.

"Few cities have that procedure." Sever said that he would like a residents committee established to study the issue. "They could look at the pros and cons from a citizens standpoint, not a political standpoint. The issue comes down to how much power you give to the mayor."

With all the work involved and the need for political leadership in the city, Sever said he "kind of resents the ceremonial image."

But Vagnozzi said the mayor's election question gives the impression a change in the city's form of government is being considered. The city follows a city manager, weak-mayor form of government.

The additional money to improve services question "is kind of deceptive," Vagnozzi added. VAGNOZZI SAID he also is concerned that residents will believe the city council sent the survey because it needs information to prepare the

budget. "The role of the mayor is the city charter is described as passive. It is not a power base. Whatever the mayor does is to be done in conjunction with the council," Vagnozzi said. Fox called the additional money to improve services question as one "arousing an antagonism." The question can be interpreted, she said, as "an oncoming thing."

Soronen said she didn't feel any of the questions were alarming and there was "nothing necessarily inappropriate" about them. Councilman Philip Arnold was unavailable for comment Tuesday morning.

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City considers a traffic safety board

By Susan Buck staff writer

The Farmington City Council Monday took a step closer to tackling the city's growing traffic problems by considering formation of a traffic safety advisory board.

Councilman Arnold Campbell made a motion, supported by William Hartsock, to authorize the city manager to propose within 30 days a mission statement, objectives, guidelines, composition and meeting frequency in the form of a resolution to establish such a board. The board would serve in an advisory capacity to the city council.

The board was requested by residents in the historic Old Village, north of Grand River, last November. Since last summer, they have complained about downtown traffic cutting through their neighborhoods, particularly during rush hour. It has not been determined whether the board would be a commission or a committee.

"We recommended a commission," said Kenneth Chiara, who headed up a recent Old Village Association traffic study. "We're hoping

to see something with teeth in it. I want something more than a sounding board. In the past 10 years, traffic has been getting worse and worse."

Hartsock called such a board "a reasonable idea" and "a helpful tool" but wants to assure a good balance among members. Councilman Ralph Yoder wants the membership to include a school safety official in addition to residents and a public safety officer.

CITY STAFF has reviewed the use of traffic safety committees and commissions in other cities. Information and advice was obtained from the Michigan Municipal League, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Northwestern University Traffic Institute and Traffic Improvement Association of Oakland County, and from people in towns with traffic safety boards.

In Michigan, Troy, Livonia, Birmingham, Rochester Hills and East Grand Rapids — all much larger cities — have a traffic safety board. "Although traffic volumes have grown in Farmington, the volumes don't begin to approach the situa-

tions which exist in the above named communities," said Robert Deadman, Farmington city manager.

According to Deadman, the duties of traffic boards include review of issues such as restricting or prohibiting parking on residential streets; need for public and curb parking; speed limits, one-way streets; one-way streets and yield sign vs. stop signs; and the need for school crossing guards. The boards typically accept requests for traffic-related advice from city councils, citizens or public safety officials.

The Troy board operates as a traffic safety committee. Livonia, Birmingham, Rochester Hills and East Grand Rapids have enacted local ordinances that delineate duties and objectives of traffic safety commissions.

The boards have seven to 11 members — citizens, public safety/fire personnel, city council members and staff traffic engineers.

"IT IS interesting to note that in an article which describes the Troy system, the committee has been effective in educating the public (about why traffic control devices are nec-

essary or what the impact of their proposed use is) and in resolving minor matters," Deadman said.

"However in controversial issues presented to council, the committee's recommendation to city council is less likely to be adopted."

Because traffic boards usually meet monthly, services of a traffic engineer would most likely be needed on a regular basis in Farmington. A consulting engineer charges \$60 to \$75 an hour, Deadman said.

"Depending on the activity the engineer is providing advice on, we would estimate an annual cost of

traffic engineering services to be between \$3,000-\$10,000 a year," he said.

The range would cover both attending meetings and doing field work.

"That's not unreasonable money," Deadman said. "If there's a problem that needs to be addressed, and it's not recognized by us, but by others, we'll spend the money anyway (and hire a consulting engineer)."

"The city staff would also have to devote time to providing support services to the committee," Deadman said.

Schools uphold sibling policy

Continued from Page 1
tors sent letters Feb. 21 to parents announcing an open lottery system for the first-grade slots.

"It leaves some speculation in the back of everyone's mind whether future decisions will be made like this one," said parent Lonnie Joe Jr.

Angry parents charged that tax dollars are supporting Highmeadow and therefore children from across the district should be given a chance to attend the two-year pilot program for grades 1-5. They opposed the appearance of "a private school atmosphere."

Highmeadow provides an alternative, choice-oriented curriculum. Programs also are offered for gifted students.

"If we do allow sibling priority to exist, then we no longer have a choice in Farmington," parent Carol Norton said.

Without the sibling priority policy, Highmeadow would have been the only elementary in the district where children of the same family could not attend together, trustee Janice Roineck said.

Some trustees openly disagreed with parents who charged that the school board was establishing a privileged class. "I don't buy the argument that this is a privileged class of students. I buy the argument that students have the right to go to school with their siblings," Roineck said.

Superintendent Graham Lewis told parents he was happy so many are interested in Highmeadow but cautioned that "it (Highmeadow) is not all a wonderful situation." The school is one of three that had the capacity to absorb more children to reduce overcrowding at other elementary, he said.

Lewis urged the parents to give school officials a chance to continue working with Highmeadow pilot runs twice into its 80-week only 20. "It's an ongoing assessment and test."

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BUT SCHOOL trustees told parents they are concerned with the four overcrowded schools. "I'm very sorry for the confusion. I regret it," trustee Susan Rennels said. "We will try to be consistent but we don't always get everything right."

She reminded parents how much they opposed redrawing elementary school attendance boundaries to reduce overcrowding.

clarification

The missing caption of a picture appearing on the front page of the Observer Monday should have read: Defendant Jon Vermeulen (left) listens to his defense attorney, Lawrence Kaluzny, in Circuit Judge Fred Meier's courtroom Thursday, March 16.

Staff photographer Randy Borst took the picture.

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