

Class size figures misleading, says union chief

The Farmington Board of Education may be misled on class size, said Farmington Education Association (FEA) President Jerry Kaplan. He intentionally mind you, but the rest is the same.

A recent report to the board on class size may make Farmington schools look good, but it fails to tell the whole story, he said. Many classes are much bigger than average, and the FEA is conducting its own study to see just how many.

"It's not an overt attempt to mislead the public or the board. We did negotiate an average class size," but

there are a few classes which are overloaded," Kaplan said.

Kaplan said the board members may not know how the class size figures are reached and thereby be misled by low sizes.

"For example, if Mr. Jones teaches six English classes a day with 30 students in each, they will add up all the students and divide by seven instead of six, because that's the number of class periods in a junior high school day."

Such figuring may lead others to believe that the actual class size is 25 or 26 when it is really higher, he said.

Neither the board nor administrators are doing anything illegal, he said.

"THEY'RE NOT VIOLATING our contract, or I'd be filing a grievance instead of writing nasty letters," said Kaplan, who is a counselor at Warner Junior High School.

"In fact, they're probably below contract. It's just that morally, I think they have a responsibility to the community to lower class size where they can."

A school budget allotment of \$16,000 for grass seed could be better used as

salary for two teachers to reduce the class sizes, he said.

His interest in class size is not going to be an entirely altruistic, he said.

"There are people who are going to say, 'The FEA is not really interested in class size; they're interested in hiring teachers back,'" he said. While that may be true, he said, they should remember that Farmington's only teacher strike two years ago was over class size.

As a result of the strike, definite class sizes were written into the contracts for elementary teachers. How-

ever, class sizes at the secondary level were determined by a formula more complicated.

"Staffing at the secondary level is determined by taking the fourth Friday (student population) count and dividing it by 25." The result is the number of teachers the district will need for that year.

BUT STAFFING as though there were only 25 students in a classroom doesn't mean there aren't any classes of 33. In many of the advanced classes, such is the case, he said. "You just can't do the kinds of things you

should be doing in a class like that when you have so many students," he said.

The board's delight over the recent class size report, not made public, was unfeigned.

"I believe the board in good faith believes there is no class size problem in Farmington. The information they've been given is not allowing them to see the total picture," Kaplan said.

The FEA study on class size should be available in about three weeks, he said.

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Advisory referendum battle erupts

By STEVE BARNABY

The need for city parks and road construction are the two advisory questions that Farmington Hills voters will be asked to answer during this November's election.

After a marathon 4 1/2 hour debate at this week's council meeting, city leaders parred down the list of advisory referendums submitted by Mayor Earl Oppertbauer.

Originally the council was asked to consider advisory votes on a fulltime fire department and storm sewer construction, in addition to the other two questions.

Debate revolved around the practicality of even having advisory referendums on the ballot.

"We haven't given the public enough information to tell us what to do," said Councilman Fred Lichtenman when council considered the road construction question.

"I WAS HOPING we were going to talk about an advisory vote in general rather than getting down to specifics

When residents elect us, they should have faith in our judgment. These kind of decisions are what we were elected to make," he said.

Oppertbauer, who has been the prime booster in the advisory referendum issue, said informing the electorate about the ramifications of the issue was part of waging an advisory question campaign.

"From now until the election, we must go out and give the people the information. The referendum questions are aimed towards the principle, not the specifics," he said.

Councilmember Joan Dudley agreed with Lichtenman, saying that only two of the four questions were specific enough to be placed on the ballot.

"The worst thing that can happen is to get advice from voters when it is not their intention to advise us," she said, while commenting on the danger of voters' misunderstanding the questions.

"I think it is condescending to put a question on the ballot when it is not their intention to advise us," she said, while commenting on the danger of voters' misunderstanding the questions.

In the first question voters will be

asked if they favor the council's accelerating the paving of major and primary city roads through the sale of city road construction bonds to be sold off or retired with a portion of future federal gasoline or weight taxes.

The other question will ask if voters prefer no additional park and recreational development, small neighborhood parks, large municipal parks, or a combination of the two.

Mrs. Dudley queried Oppertbauer on why these questions weren't considered in a year other than when an election was being conducted. Oppertbauer is up for reelection in this November's election.

Councilman Robert McConnell defended the placing of advisory questions on the ballot.

"These are questions that came up among the candidates. I don't see any harm in asking the voters what they think," he said.

The council knocked down an advisory question on storm sewer construction because of the possibility of having to raise the millage anywhere from 2.5 mills to nine mills, depend-

ing on the amount of bonds sold. The council was considering changing the sewer question from an advisory referendum to a proposal, but that was turned down when legal problems threatened to confuse the question.

THE QUESTION ON WHETHER a fulltime fire department should be implemented was turned down because cost figures were too nebulous. While the estimated cost was put at \$1.5 million Lichtenman thought otherwise.

"It would cost us \$4.5 million to have a fulltime department with 300 men. We would have to go back to the people and ask for a charter amendment anyway," he said.

"If we feel we need a fulltime department, let's go back and ask for one."

Lichtenman feared that if these advisory referendums were turned down, future councils would be disenchanted from considering them again.

Oppertbauer disagreed.

"We have had several votes on consolidation and incorporation. Just because something is turned down doesn't mean you can't raise again," he said.

McConnell said all the questions were a matter of priorities.

"The idea was to look at the question of priorities. There just aren't sufficient finances to do all of these things," he said.

Farmington Hills charter sets a millage schedule, with a maximum of 10 mills. A charter amendment would be put on the ballot to raise additional millage funds.

"We're not going to have a utopia in this community with six mills. Maybe we should let why we need 20 mills and mill backing around the ball," said Lichtenman.

"The real question is, do the people want to pay taxes. These questions before us are meaningless," he said.



Taking aim is Farmington Hills Police Sgt. Richard Niemisto, a member of that force's pistol team. To learn more about what it's like to be on that team turn to page 3A. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Business leaders cautious over downtown planning

By MARTHA MAHAN

If only one building is spruced up or erected along the northeast section of Grand River at Farmington Road, the \$3.30 which the city is paying for a plan of planning consultants will be "money well spent."

That is the opinion of City Manager Robert Deadman who encouraged the City Council to approve a study by Howard Green and Associates.

The report, financed from a federal community development grant, is due around the first of the year.

Business leaders expressed approv-

al of the study but were cautious.

Bill Flattery, former Chamber of Commerce president, agreed that "something has to be done eventually and probably the sooner the better" but he saw "multiple problems."

"The north side of Grand River is really not being used to the best advantage," Flattery said, "but we can't tear down everything."

Jim Woodby, now president of the chamber, called the property value in the area "too expensive to tear down and put up new."

should wait until the report is in before commenting with any finality.

"We don't know what they will determine," Deadman said. "The firm has an expertise in marketing and that's really crucial. They can tell us what kind of rents can be generated."

(Continued on Page 1A)

Why writer backpacks with 'Y' youth

By SUSAN AVERILL

Unlike previous years, this year the Farmington YMCA supplied each backpacker equipment to suit the student and his parents from confusion and misery.

"We supply all equipment, the tent, fork, spoon, canteen, cap, sleeping bag, tent, and everything."

"Junior high-aged students and parents usually don't know what to buy. It's difficult to find good equipment scaled down to their size."

After the first summer's use, the equipment is in good shape, he said.

"WE HAD A LITTLE trouble getting the kids to remember not to wear their boots in the tents, but hopefully, they took their boots off when they got into the sleeping bags," he said.

McKenzie said that each trip consisted of 16 backpacking students and two adults. Carrying 15 or 20 lbs. on his back, each person hiked for six days on the island.

McKenzie carried the bulk of the group's equipment, sometimes up to 60 lbs., he said.

The first night of the trip is spent at Van Riper State Park in the UP.

"This is the first night with the tent. It's a non-dressing atmosphere, and the kids can take showers. We don't rough it yet."

The second night stay is in Fort Williams State Park in Copper Harbor. McKenzie said he talks to the students about the old copper mines and shows them one of two stands of virgin pines left in the state.

Day three is the first day on the island. The backpackers leave their 13-passenger bus behind and board the late Royale Queen for a four-hour haul.

"It was a very unusual summer. I don't think one kid got sick either going over or going back," McKenzie said.

The following six days are spent on the island. Awakening at 9 a.m., everyone will finish breakfast by 10 a.m. and be on his way. Each carries

his own lunch so that they can eat on the trail whenever and with whom-ever they please.

HIKING TIME IS only four hours with a backpack, with some evening hours spent foraging close to camp for berries for the morning's pancakes.

"The object isn't to exhaust the kid. It's to give him good experience. It's usually about 2 p.m. by the time we reach the next campground. Most of the places have docks for the kids to jump into the lake, and there's a short hike after dinner without the packs," McKenzie said.

Evenings are spent around a campfire.

There are 800 mosquitos and three wolf packs on Isle Royale, but McKenzie said his under them most other areas.

"It's safer to backpack on Isle Royale than anywhere else because there are no bears."

ALL THREE MEN AGREED they



Tom Kinsey (left front) Terry Tolwin and Lisa Johnson show some of the backpacking equipment they used this summer on Isle Royale.



DAVID MCKENZIE

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PROBLEM SOLVERS

Undoubtedly, household appliances are very handy items, until you no longer need them. Then they become big and awkward and difficult to store. J. Kaminski, of Howl, solved the storage problem by advertising on extra area and air conditioners in The Observer's Classified Section. Both were sold right away leaving behind only one thing: plenty of space on table. Which means no storage problem at all. Call us today to make some extra room at your house.

644-1070