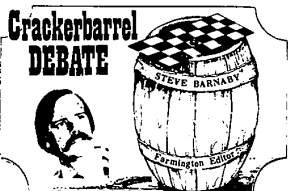


editorial opinion

SEMTA pull-out puerile ploy



Permission slips past Hills council

Willoughby Wink came staggering into the office Tuesday morning with eyes blurred and puffy. For sure, I thought, Willoughby had been hitting the bottle a little to hard.

"I know what you're thinking," he clamored. "But I never had time to get to the local pub Monday night. I went to see the Magnificent Seven."

As we know, Willoughby was referring to the gang up at the corner of Orchard Lake and Eleven Mile, otherwise known as the Farmington Hills City Council.

"I've got to give (hiccup) them credit. They actually decided against implementing an ordinance for a change," he said in a sober, yet very unsober manner.

The seven have been known for passing an ordinance to cover just about any circumstance these days. So my interest heightened when Willoughby related this news.

"Yep, they decided they were just too old to get a permission slip from the principal of a local school."

My mind was in a tizzy.

"What the devil are you talking about, Wink?" I retorted, in a fit of annoyance.

"Well, you see, there was this proposed ordinance that, if carried to its letter, would have required somebody to have a permission slip, signed by the principal, to walk across the playground," he said, flapping a copy of the proposed ordinance in my face.

Grabbing the ordinance, I flipped through it in disbelief, but sure enough, there it was.

Hugo Black would have rolled over in his grave. I thought, Who could have ever thought of such an ordinance? A legal gem it was not.

But there were even more gems. "No person shall hunt, set traps for, damage or worry any wildlife on any grounds of a public, private or parochial school," said the ordinance.

Now, I know that legal minds work a little differently, but "worry" wildlife?

Yes, Willoughby, I think you are right this time. The Magnificent Seven did their job this week, even if it did take them until 12:30 a.m.

'Fear of the unknown'

Housing vote no surprise

The turnaround of the senior citizens housing project and the ouster of three incumbent commissioners by the voters in Birmingham last week, in retrospect, shouldn't have surprised anyone.

Prime real estate in the downtown area became available when the school district tore down two older schools across from the city library.

The city fathers (and mothers) were convinced there was a need to create housing for older residents in town who no longer wanted nor could afford a large home but didn't want to leave the community.

Had the city resources to build the project itself, or had private developers been found to build the development, it would have been built and all involved would have been very pleased with themselves.

Unfortunately, the group selected by the city commission to go ahead with the project needed state and federal funds. Along with commitment of these funds come state and federal regulations.

While Birmingham looked at it as a community project to help its senior citizens, the government looked upon it as a low-income housing development which needed not only capital to build, but continuing support after completion in the form of rent subsidies.

When the federal and state governments provide financing, the project must be open to all who apply and qualify, regardless of who they are and where they come from. If tax money is used, it should be no other way.

So that the project could be used for senior citizens alone, the city commission was lured into agreeing that 50 homes in Birmingham, other than the senior citizen project, would be made available to low-income families.

For most middle class families in America, their home is their biggest single investment.

There is the belief by most people that renters do not maintain the property they rent as well as people who live in and own their own home.

From the observation of public housing in large

We were perturbed several weeks ago when Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young chose to play the child's game. "If I can't have my way, I'm gonna go home."

Young was threatening to pull out of the South-eastern Michigan Transportation Authority, a seven-county agency and the only organization large enough to piece together a unified public transportation service for our inter-dependent communities.

Well, two can play that child's game, as the Oakland County Board of Commissioners proved last week when it voted 18-8 to pull out of SEMTA.

There is more truth than home-town boasting to the notion that Oakland County is a pretty sophisticated place. Thus, it is doubly disappointing to observe our own county commissioners playing a child's game.

THE OAKLAND board's move is almost certainly a ploy. County Executive Daniel T. Murphy has 10 days to decide whether he will veto the board's withdrawal resolution. Without doubt, he will wait until the last minute before vetoing it.

The board then has two meetings to decide whether it will attempt to override the veto. An override takes a two-thirds vote, or 18 of the 27 commissioners. Since last Thursday's motion passed 18-8, the two-thirds majority is there—at least on paper.

It means more than a month to maneuver.

It gives Young a chance to modify his adamant stand about building as much of a rapid rail transit system underground as possible.

It gives the Michigan Legislature a chance to modify the law setting up the SEMTA board appointment system. Under that law, the Wayne and Macomb boards get to appoint their SEMTA members, but the Oakland board has only one appointment, with the other two Oakland SEMTA seats coming through the appointment process of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments—clearly an inconsistent process.

It gives The Establishment in Lansing a chance to satisfy suburban and road interests.

THE MOVE to withdraw from SEMTA is a culmination of the mind of Commissioner James Lanni (R-Royal Oak).

Lanni is no mere extreme conservative. He is at war with any regional agency. His constant attacks, poorly researched and never yet justified, on persons in SEMTA and SEMCOG are an embarrassment to Oakland County.

So Lanni and a handful of others are probably serious about pulling out of, and wrecking, the regional public transportation agency. Other commissioners, as we said, are playing the same game of bluff as Young. When the chips are down, they

will vote to sustain Murphy's veto of the SEMTA withdrawal resolution.

We note, in passing, that Lanni has a forum at SEMCOG for his destructive tactics only because he is an alternate delegate. The main delegate is Commissioner Robert Page (R-Birmingham), a conservative but level-headed, thoughtful and responsible person. Page, unfortunately, has been missing many SEMCOG meetings, allowing Lanni to charge around unfettered. We hope Page will get back to SEMCOG business.

A DECISION on how many miles of a rapid rail system should be underground is not one for Cole-



man Young to make. It's not a decision the Oakland Board of Commissioners and Road Commission can make. It's not a decision for Rep. Bill Ryan and Gov. Bill Milliken to make. It's not a decision for the Michigan Legislature, or the federal Urban Mass Transit Agency to make. It's the SEMTA board's decision. The SEMTA board has the data, the expertise, the legal duty—and the cool heads. It's a tougher decision to make than the lay person can possibly realize. It's no help when the SEMTA board gets whipsawed by Young and 18 Oakland commissioners.

A child's smile puts life in perspective

Some day, when the dice are running against you and everything is going to seed in your private little realm, take time to make your own tour of the Plymouth Center for Human Development.

Get someone to show you where they house the little tots, the boys and girls of nursery school age. Some can't talk, some can't walk.

Then go home and complain because the chaps are overdone.

Watch a teenaged boy, whose lack of leg mobility dooms him to a lifetime in a wheelchair, toss a soccer-size rubber ball through a basketball hoop which stands at about your eye level.

Then scream at a cop because a railroad train, or a hunger-bender on your freeway up ahead, has delayed you 15 minutes in getting to the pub on time.

Blink back the tears when a 6-year-old's records show no known relatives sing his guttural version

of the line. "He has the whole wide world in his hands."

When you get home, beat the kids for leaving their skateboards where you could stumble over them.

NO MATTER WHERE in Michigan you live, revelations of abuse by some rotten apples on the Plymouth Center staff have shocked us all. The echoes have been heard significantly in Lansing and the courts. Rightfully so.

But gnawing at me is the recent statement of one holdover executive whom I have known for years as he spoke of what he called the "good" staff members:

"Their morale is down, but they know there still are people they must take care of. In spite of everything, they come to work and they do a damn good job."

Let us recognize that mental retardation knows no definable social or economic strata. The next child born with such an affliction could as well be in your family as the one next door, or in the next block.

Those dedicated to serving this portion of mankind keep trying. To them we, who don't know how lucky we are, should give special thanks.

THE STATE-OPERATED facility at Sheldon and Five Mile actually lies in Northville Township. It bears the Plymouth tag for reasons of proximity and because there already was a Northville State Hospital when the original State Home and Training School received its first residents in March 1950.

What they call the place is unimportant. It's

Thwart bureaucratic secrecy

Michigan's Freedom of Information Act recognizes people have the right to request copies of government records, the right to go to a governmental office and inspect and make notes from these documents, and the right to subscribe to future issuance of public documents.

All files, records, reports and information of any agency are open to the public unless they are specifically exempted. The exemptions protect documents which would invade an individual's personal privacy or frustrate the agency's ability to do its job.

When you make a request for information, the agency must respond within a specified time limit.

through bifocals



what is being done with and for those human beings inside that counts.

Right now, the resident count exceeds 800 mentally retarded, from toddlers on up. Since court intervention, the staff has been increased to more than 500. It will reach at least 600. There also are 285 volunteers putting in varied amounts of time—some of them your own Oakland and Wayne county friends and neighbors. High school and college students are included.

A particular program which catches the eye is one called the Foster Grandparent project, which is what got me out there for the first time a decade ago.

Senior Citizens spend each visit with at least one child, reading, walking, coloring or rocking—and maybe even whispering, "I love you."

Young cries of "Grandpa" and "Grandma" tell one that those are words the children believe. It isn't bad therapy by itself, and sometimes it works in both directions. The center will welcome others who are willing to give it a try.

The agency cannot simply deny or ignore your request. If it denies a request, it must give you its reasons in writing.

The agency may make a reasonable charge for copies of the records you request.

The ideal of government "of the people, by the people and for the people" is often thwarted by bureaucratic secrecy. Citizens deserve to be able to find out what government is doing, and why.

The whole was not invented out of thin air. Nor is it part of the "Watergate fallout." Many persons in Michigan had long, dreary wars to fight about how they were denied information.

The Freedom of Information Act is the result. It's a law citizens can and should use.



cities since the second world war, there is a perception that government subsidized renters have even less interest in maintaining the property they rent when compared to ordinary renters.

While the community seemed very supportive of senior citizen housing, apparently there was a great underlying fear that the 50 homes selected for low-income families would end up decreasing the value of the homes nearby, and no one seemed to know for sure where the 50 homes would be located.

Many residents were afraid that they would end up being next door to them.

You can condemn these people for being narrow minded, but they suffered from the fear of the unknown about the effect on their largest single investment.

Had the commission been more sensitive to this and done a better job of informing the residents of what they could expect, I think the results would have been different. That, of course, is water over the dam.

When you deal with the federal government, there is no such thing as a free lunch. Federal funds are only available and should be only available to help the disadvantaged.

The world probably will construe the vote as another white suburban residents attempt to thwart integration in the suburbs, but government should share equally in the criticism because people only were faced with a decision to say aye or nay without having all the alternatives before them and without fully understanding how it would affect them individually.

Advertisement for Farmington Observer newspaper, including contact information for Steve Barnaby, Editor, and John Reddy, General Mgr.