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Court battle looms

Compromise on housing strikes out

By LYNN ORR

An impasse in negotiations concerning senior citizen housing may force a court battle over the controversial zoning ordinances.

Farmington Hills councilmember Joe Alkateeb admits that his efforts to settle the question out of court have proved fruitless. Meanwhile the Farmington Hills Council of Homeowners are beginning fundraising efforts for a legal campaign.

Alkateeb, a Homeowners member, was elected to city council last fall, after waging a campaign opposed to the senior citizen zoning ordinances which allow mid-rise (up to 60 ft.) buildings. RCE allows zoning for 30 foot structures specifically for senior citizen housing, while RCE-1 allows 60 ft. high structures for the same use.

Alkateeb says he is attempting to settle the issue to heal the divisions within the council.

"We have to turn our attention to other pursuits that are important to the city," he says.

Alkateeb polled five other members of the council in an attempt to avoid court action, he says. But the majority of the councilmembers are opposed to the settlement proposed by the Homeowners.

The Homeowners have initiated two petition demands to place the zoning ordinances on the ballot for voter consideration. The group is willing to "not press" the case, he says, if the council will accept an alternative.

That alternative is a ballot question asking voters if they favor repeal of the two zoning ordinances.

THE HOMEOWNERS want the council to consider a 60 per cent majority decision by the voters, a mandate. If 60 per cent of the voters favor repeal, the council would take action to remove the ordinances, Alkateeb explains.

The impasse in negotiations concerns percentages. Councilmembers have indicated they would be unwilling

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**— Joe Alkateeb
Farmington Councilman**

to accept anything less than 67 per cent or a two-thirds majority as a binding decision, he explains.

The Homeowners most likely will wait until after the June 12 meeting before escalating legal action, says Robert Anzovar, Homeowners' chairperson. The council has a city charter obligation to rule on whether they will put the group's most recent initiative referendum on the ballot at the time, Anzovar explains.

The referendum would ask voters to reject the council's decision to allow a mid-rise senior citizen housing complex to be built on Orchard Lake Road between Thirteen and Fourteen Mile. The council granted the zoning change to Multi-Rise Associates, which plans a 60-foot-high senior citizen complex on about 10 acres of property.

The initiative petitions were the Homeowners' second attack on the zoning ordinances.

The first petition drive demands a voter referendum on a charter amendment. The amendment, if approved, would mandate future voter approval of any zoning changes not outlined in the city's master plan.

The amendment would be retroactive to Jan. 1, 1977, thus nullifying the council's approval of the senior citizen ordinances adopted last fall.

City Clerk Floyd Cairns is awaiting a legal opinion from the state attorney general's office on the legality of the proposed charter amendment. He has until mid-September to decide whether the amendment will be placed on the November ballot.

Student absenteeism is teachers' headache

Absenteeism may be a growing problem in the Farmington School District, but school administrators lack statistics to substantiate that claim.

High school assistant principals who cope with absenteeism daily, confirm that truancy percentages are unavailable; but they're convinced that schools parallel spiraling industrial absenteeism.

Partial or single-period absenteeism particularly is on the increase, says Norm Dickson of North Farmington High. He believes the absences, both excused and unexcused, reflect on parental guidance.

"When you miss work because you don't want to go in, how do you tell your kids to go to school?" he asks. He believes parents accept student excuses, such as fatigue or boredom,

that parents wouldn't have accepted 10 years ago.

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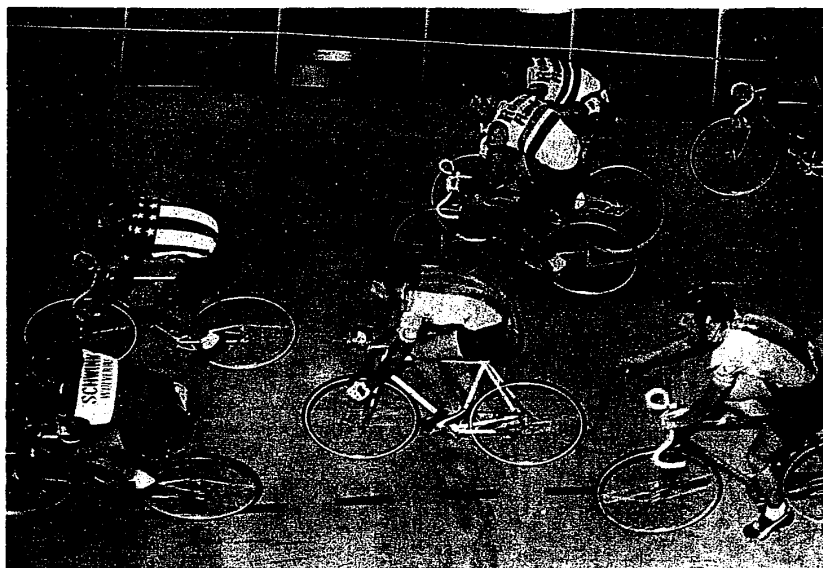
Harrison High doesn't keep tabulated figures, says Jack Buller, but absenteeism is his most serious problem. He sends letters to students with two or more unexcused absences in one week.

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WALT SCOBIE at Farmington High, agrees with Dickson about the increase in period skipping and its relation to societal irresponsibility.



Bikes on boards

In the 1920s, thousands of Detroiters crammed Olympia stadium to watch a sport that was then more popular than baseball. Today, 50 years later, board track bicycle racing is coming back—and its renaissance is taking place in Southfield. Set up in the Southfield Civic Center sports arena is the country's only board track, 122 meters of wood banked 50 degrees in the turns and demanding excellent bike

handling skills and speeds of up to 35 miles an hour. This Friday, racers from across the country will take to the boards to test their stamina and pedal toward a victory. The racing begins at 8 p.m. The main event, a two-man, 40-minute team race, starts at 9:30 p.m. The program is held in cooperation with the Southfield Parks and Recreation Department. (Photo by Ed Zbikowski)

Trustees eye penalty for skippers

By LYNN ORR

Students may find their grades lowered for skipping school if the Farmington school board acts on a committee recommendation.

The committee assigned to review the student conduct code has asked the board to repeal a portion of the district's attendance policy which prohibits academic penalties for unexcused absences.

The current board policy, amended last fall, is tying the hands of administrators and teachers who are trying to curtail truancy, argue committee members. In addition, the policy has been interpreted to mean that teachers must give makeup work and/or tests

to students with unexcused absences, they say.

"In the high schools, one of our critical problems is absenteeism," explained Walter Scobie, assistant principal at Farmington High who sits on the committee. "Teachers are saying it's a critical issue, because we can't account for children."

Sharon Kerr, a committee member and substitute teacher in the district, maintained that procedures for dealing with unexcused absences vary among teachers and schools.

"Every teacher seems to have his own method," she explained to board members in an informal session concerning the matter Tuesday.

An unexcused absence may call for a drop in percentage points for one teacher, while another teacher interprets the policy as a mandate to offer make-up tests and work, Ms. Kerr said in an interview.

"It seems that there's no set code, teachers are doing what they please," she added.

The committee recommends that a procedure for truancy penalties, including suspension, be established, said Buhl Burton, chairperson of the committee.

ALTHOUGH board members will tackle the truancy issue at their next meeting, discussion during last week indicated divided support for a change in policy.

Trustees Michael Spiece and Arne Struble argued against lowering grades strictly for absenteeism.

"Being dropped from a class for not attending is not being punished on the academic level," Ms. Struble said. "But to say you have been tardy 10 times, therefore instead of getting a 'C' you're going to get a 'D' is."

"We may want some sort of procedure where we drop a kid if he's been absent unexcused 10 times,"

Absentee ballots ready at C'ville

Clarencville School District voters who want absentee ballots for the June 12 annual school election may get them by writing the Board of Education Office, 28830 Eight Mile, Farmington Hills 48024, or by calling 474-8503. Those telephoning should ask for Mrs. Geraldine Kelly.

The board office will remain open Saturday, June 10, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. to receive absentee ballots.

Two members of the Clarencville Board of Education will be elected at the June 12 election.

Spiece said. "I also agree with Mrs. Struble and think it's unfair if we say that for every time you're absent unexcused your grade goes down."

Trustees Helen Prutow and Richard Wallace supported the committee's recommendation.

"Are we talking about putting armour around student rights or trying to clarify existing wording to eliminate existing abuses?" Wallace asked.

"We're running a day school here, not a correspondence school," he added. "And it's our duty to encourage attendance in class."

Unfair treatment concerned Mrs. Prutow.

"If some kids are getting the grades while skipping, it's not fair to the other kids who show up every day," she said.

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Supt. Lewis Schulman, and Lynn Nutter and Larry Freedman, assistant superintendents of secondary and elementary education, agreed with the committee's recommendations.

Most of the student conduct code, published in handbook form, should remain as is, the committee said. The handbook was first published in 1971 and revised in 1972.

Committee members included Burton, Scobie, Boys' Republic instructor Charlotte Merritt; East Junior High counselor Jim Harden; elementary principals Walter Prince and Frank Delewsky; Ms. Kerr; two high school students; and parent Ann Sommerville.

Both Prince and Delewsky agreed that elementary school absenteeism is a minor problem.

Home fixup plans to be discussed

Farmington Hills residents can find out how they can fix up their homes through a federal grant or loan this week.

The Farmington Hills committee of the Coalition for Block Grant Compliance is sponsoring a two-hour meeting from 1-3 p.m. June 1, at St. Alexander Roman Catholic Church, 27825 Shawwassee, west of Inkster Road.

An evening session will be from 7:30-9:30 p.m.

"The city is dedicated to preserving our existing housing stock by making low interest home repair loans available to homeowners," says program director Mike Dorman.

"These loans, granted at three per cent interest, are a valuable opportunity in these inflationary times. Low

income homeowners may qualify for grants."

Some of the questions which will be dealt with are eligibility and how to apply. Also to be discussed is what kind of improvements can be made under the program.

Speakers at the sessions will include Dorman; Maureen Lowe, intake specialist; Rick Lamp, zoning inspector; and Dick Young, Housing Inspector.

Free babysitting will be available for those who contact Sr. Colette at 474-8128.

"We are talking about funds that are already available, not something pending on future legislation," says Paula Tolocman, staff monitor for the coalition in this area.

Hills council, school board to meet in special sessions

FARMINGTON HILLS
Council meeting
7:30 p.m., May 30
11555 Eleven Mile

The council will meet for a public hearing to discuss the city's 1978-79 budget.

FARMINGTON SCHOOL BOARD
Meeting & Home Committee
7 p.m., May 30
22550 Shawwassee

The committee will meet to consider an offer to purchase property at the Farmington Junior High site. Also

under consideration will be the listing of Bond School with a realtor and architectural consultant guidelines.

School board
7 p.m., May 31
22550 Shawwassee

The full board will meet in a special session to consider the revised 1977-78 school budget. At 8 p.m., a meeting will be convened to set the tax levies for the 1978-79 school year. The board also will consider personnel items and action on the second reading of board policies. All meetings are open to the public.

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INDECISION

That's what's plaguing the editorial opinion page—good old summertime indecision. Take a peek and find out why Lynn Orr has spring fever. Figure out why Louise Orskov is resigned to watching her plants die. For the philosophic, there's Craig Piechura's thoughts on the afterlife and how to obtain an easy one. For these meanderings and letters to the editor, turn to page 4A.