

Farmington Observer

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Middle school sports spawn controversy

By MARY GNIEWEK

There's a controversy brewing over the type of sports program that will be offered to students in the Farmington middle schools in September.

Teachers and administrators are divided over two conflicting proposals known as the Cotton report and the Whalen report.

Named for Farmington Public Schools Athletic Director Jack Cotton, the Cotton report favors a combination of interscholastic and intramural sports for seventh and eighth grade and intramurals only for sixth grade.

Interscholastics involve competition between schools within the district; intramurals involve competition between squads within the same school.

The Cotton report was approved by

the Middle School Cabinet for Implementation last month. It will be recommended to the Farmington Board of Education for adoption, possibly in March.

But the Farmington Education Association, the union which represents district teachers, is backing a proposal drafted by Warner Junior High physical education instructor Sean Whalen, also a former coach.

The Whalen report proposes elimination of all interscholastics and a greatly expanded intramural program.

FEA Vice President Richard Curp, a special teacher at Warner, opposes the Middle School Cabinet's acceptance of the Cotton report as "hasty and didn't consider all the factors."

Whalen, who worked on the proposal as a member of a four-person commit-

tee that Cotton chaired, believes his contribution is over.

"AS FAR AS I'm concerned, the administration has made its decision, and that's the way it stands," Whalen said. "The FEA is pursuing this further."

The committee also included physical education teachers Don Dettler from Power Junior High and Eleanor Snyder from Eagle Elementary School. The committee presented both proposals to the cabinet.

The vote of the Middle School Cabinet for Cotton's proposal was five to one, with administrators Don Howell, Bob Brown, Jerry Potter, Don Cowan and chairman Lynn Nutter, an assistant superintendent, supporting it. The only teacher on the cabinet, Marion Spencer, voted against it.

"With the makeup of that cabinet five to one, the implications are obvious as far as teacher input is concerned," Curp said.

The Cotton report proposes interscholastics in co-ed cross country, boys' football, basketball, wrestling and track; girls' basketball, volleyball and track. The proposal recommends modifying rules of the games to get greater student participation.

Intramurals would be boys' basketball and soccer; girls' soccer, basketball, volleyball and possibly softball and badminton.

The FEA's objection is that the present sports program is dual, but intramurals receive a small amount of attention while emphasis is placed on interscholastics.

"WE FIND that the most support for

the Whalen report comes from junior high teachers and upper elementary who have the most experience with this age group," said Curp.

"Personally, I've been working with junior high kids over 10 years, and I think a good intramural program with participation by 75 or 80 percent of the kids is what's really desirable," he said.

"We believe that the Farmington community is not controlled by a vocal minority that receives vicarious satisfaction in seeing a few 12-year-old children emulate professional athletes."

The FEA believes that a minimum of 12 new coaches and at least \$50,000 would be needed if the Cotton report is adopted by the board of education.

The Whalen report could operate with present money and staffing, the

FEA argues. "Let's say we go with this (intramural-interscholastic combination) two years and it's not acceptable," Cotton said. "It'd be easier to go to intramurals. It wouldn't be such a dramatic switch."

"If we go intramural and try to come back with interscholastics, the transition would be more difficult," he said. "Several committees of teachers and administrators have been studying curriculum for the past two years for the transition from junior high to middle school."

The new format will take sixth graders from elementary schools and put them with seventh and eighth graders in middle schools. Ninth graders will move to high schools in September.

Environmental effort harmed by bureaucracy

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Convoluting bureaucracies and unenforced laws have contributed to environmental problems almost as much as belching smokestacks and poorly constructed landfills.

That's the message John Sobetzer, executive director of the East Michigan Environmental Action Council (EMAC), brought to the West Bloomfield-Farmington Area League of Women Voters last week.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR), its overseer — the Natural Resources Commission — attendants' citizen's commissions and bureaucracy came in for their share of verbal knocks during his presentation.

While the DNR has improved in its approach to environmental problems, its past performance is faulty, Sobetzer said.

"It's easy to make fun of them (DNR). It's easy to point out the problems in the past," he said.

He criticized the DNR for taking too weak a stand on such issues as exploratory oil drilling in the state and water and air pollution. Programs to cure these problems disappointed environmentalists for many years, according to Sobetzer.

He lays part of the blame at the feet of "wacko citizen commissions."

THE CITIZENS commissions work within the DNR and in many instances send down approval or disapproval for industrial site permits.

In the case of locating a site for a landfill, both the DNR and the citizens

group look at the proposal. The citizens group isn't a permanent body. It's comprised of three persons from state environmental agencies, two from a university setting and four local members.

Sometimes, the decision of the citizens board and the DNR doesn't reflect local opinion, Sobetzer said, and sometimes the board diffuses dissent.

When considering the case of putting a landfill in Groveland, Mich. the local board members didn't want to live near the site which would handle hazardous material even though the process seemed to be safe.

The vote reflected their concern. Four local members voted against the site and the five members from outside the area voted in favor of the plant, Sobetzer said.

The composition of the citizens commission often includes representatives from industries who are polluting, he added. "It's like having embezzlers on the banking commission."

CURRENTLY the governor is considering dismantling the smaller commissions, according to Sobetzer. The responsibility for watching the environmental standards would transfer to the DNR and the Natural Resources Commission.

These larger bodies are the ones which make the hard-hitting decisions when the smaller ones fail, he said.

For example, he related, the ban on phosphates was enacted by the smaller Water Resource Commission. Instead the governor transferred the authority to the Natural Resource

Commission and they banned the material.

Even if hard regulations are passed they are only as good as the enforcing enforcement, Sobetzer said.

Inadequacies of dealing with hazardous waste are one example, he said. State and federal laws differentiate between hazardous waste and toxic substances.

While toxic substances are materials being used, hazardous substances are materials which are discarded, excluding material usually found in domestic sewers or irrigation ditches. Authorized industrial discharge to a municipal treatment system and special nuclear material don't come under this definition.

Nuclear material is handled under the Federal Atomic Energy Act of 1954.

INADEQUATE AUTHORITY and inadequate funding to cope with regulating hazardous wastes make enforcement of existing laws difficult, said Sobetzer.

"The enforcement process is an unduly cumbersome time-consuming process," he said.

The offender can be brought to court after disobeying orders not to continue polluting.

Sobetzer frowns on the "long standing tradition" to enforce pollution laws through cooperation instead of pressure.

"The DNR would sit down with polluters and set time tables that they never met. They were almost pleading with them (offenders) to meet the laws."

Finally, the bureaucracy makes it difficult to press issues, Sobetzer said. Groups have to work hard to turn the bureaucracy's attention to a problem.

Hills assessments increase 25 percent

By MARY GNIEWEK

Farmington Hills homeowners can expect average increases of up to 25 percent in their yearly assessment notices which they'll be receiving in the mail this week.

Assessment notices were mailed the first week of February in the city of Farmington and represented overall increases of 16 percent. Only those

with adjusted assessments received a notice.

Farmington Hills City Assessor Robert Roemer said 90 percent of the 15,000 notices were mailed Friday. Following corrections of computer-made errors, the remaining 10 percent will be mailed early this week.

Rising property values account for the assessment hikes, but Roemer couldn't pinpoint the subdivisions which will experience the sharpest increases.

According to state guidelines, assessments equal 50 percent of the current market value of the property.

"It's hard to say where it will be greatest. It varies from neighborhood to neighborhood, but on the average, 20 to 25 percent," he said.

Once they receive their notice, homeowners can question assessment changes by making an appointment through the assessor's office with the Board of Review.

THE THREE-MEMBER board, appointed by the Farmington Hills City Council, will hear cases March 17, 18 and 19. Additional dates will be added if those three days aren't adequate to fill the demand.

Meetings with the Farmington Board of Review are planned March 10 from 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and on March 11 from 2 to 5 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m.

Call the Farmington city assessor's office at 474-5500 for an appointment. In Farmington Hills, call 474-6115.

Homeowners must appear before the review board in their city before an appeal can be made to the state tax tribunal.

Turkey caper thaws

A stolen frozen turkey leg apparently was used for unauthorized target practice last week.

Farmington Hills Police suspect a connection between the theft of \$25 worth of frozen meat from James Conrad's Ravenwood street garage and the frozen turkey leg thrown at a girl waiting for a school bus on Farmington Road and Ridgewood. Both incidents happened the same day.

List Ludington, 13, was waiting for the school bus when a red car with three or four male passengers drove past her. As the car passed, a frozen turkey leg, still in its store package, was thrown, hitting Ms. Ludington on the wrist, arm and stomach. She suffered bruises and was X-rayed for possible broken bones.

The frozen turkey leg wasn't recovered.

Frozen meat, including turkey, ham and steak, was taken from a freezer in Conrad's garage earlier that day. The thieves opened the unlocked east side garage to take the meat. A north side garage door was open by the thieves and a 2-by-3-foot plastic window was broken.



Kids create 'tomorrow'

Ya gotta have art. That's what Farmington Parent Teachers Association believes. So they're encouraging Farmington schoolchildren to participate in a contest called Reflections, sponsored by the National PTA Council.

With a theme dealing with Tomorrow, kids are encouraged to express themselves in any creative medium: poetry, literature, painting or music.

At right, Danny Hull, 11, of Longacre Elementary School, adds a few notes to a competition he's authoring for the contest.

Above, 7-year-old Jody Harrison of Highmeadow Elementary School, puts the final touch on her canvas.

There will be 30-40 district winners who will receive awards at a Farmington Board of Education meeting before the end of the school year.

Then the entries will be sent to the state and national levels for further competition, with national winners announced in late August or September.



Thieves hit Dodge dealer

Two car radios and a battery were taken from vehicles parked in the fenced lot of Town and Country Dodge, 31015 Grand River, Farmington Hills, last Thursday.

A radio valued at \$10 was pulled from a '71 Plymouth in the lot. Another dash-mounted radio was taken from a black '69 two-door Dodge which belonged to one of the dealership's servicemen, Steve McNeil of Detroit. The radio was valued at \$80.

A battery worth \$10 was taken from a white '73 Dodge Sportsman van the same night. The van was brought in for body work after being declared a total wreck by the owner's insurance company, according to Farmington Hills police.

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SISTER CITY SHOWDOWN

Editor Steve Barnaby is wondering just what will happen when Farmington Hills council meets with its counterparts in Farmington. To see why he thinks there might be trouble, turn to his Crackerbarrel Debate on 4B.