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Council split on block grant

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

In a 5-2 split decision, the Farmington Hills City Council voted to submit to HUD a housing assistance plan — the first step in applying for Community Development Block Grant funds.

Farmington Hills is eligible for \$417,000 in federal funds provided it agrees to utilize the money to rehabilitate low- and middle-income housing units, assist renters and make public improvements.

Voting to submit the housing assistance plan were Mayor Jack Burwell and council members Jody Soronen, Charles Williams, Fred Hughes and Jan Dolan.

Dissenting were Mayor Pro Tem William Lange and Councilman Donn Wolf.

Projected by city officials in the three-year housing assistance plan is \$230,000 worth of public works improvements in the southeast portion of the city. Bounded by Middlebelt, Shiloh and Grand River, the area contains the city's oldest housing stock and the greatest concentration of low- and moderate-income families.

Also allocated is \$24,000 for sidewalk construction along 13 Mile Road

from the Detroit Baptist Manor senior citizen housing project to Orchard Lake Road and \$125,000 to "make existing low- and middle-income housing suitable for safe, healthy habitation."

Administrative costs will total \$38,000 according to the plan.

After a stormy debate, the council voted 5-2 to hold a public hearing on the issue at 7:30 p.m. April 19. Lange and Wolf abstained.

By a slim 4-3 margin, council members then voted to include in the public hearing advertisement the two-page list of federal regulations the city must comply with upon acceptance of federal assistance. Williams, Burwell and Hughes opposed the motion while Soronen, Wolf, Dolan and Lange supported it.

Prior to the voting a heated discussion was sparked when Dolan differed with a March 11 Observer article which quoted Lange as saying the city will lose control by accepting federal funds.

Because developers may apply for HUD funding under Section Eight, the city doesn't have the control to lose, Dolan said.

Lange contended the city does have control because it can ensure property is properly zoned.

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ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Circus time

Farmington youngsters Stephanie Schwalb, 4, and Jennifer Schmidt, 5, get a surprise visit and a swan made of balloons at Children's Hospital in Detroit. Tinker the Clown from the Shrine Circus came to cheer the children during a time out from the Shrine Circus now playing at the State Fairgrounds in Detroit.

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Wagner fights red tape, stereotypes

Mentally retarded getting raw deal from state

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

As a pioneer in placing retarded persons in residential homes, Mary Wagner of Farmington Hills is bound to be a booster of the idea.

And she is. However, her support for the plan to take retarded persons out of institutions and place them in residential homes is tempered by a realization that some group homes are substandard and some are staffed by persons who have no business supervising the retarded.

Incidents such as last month's arson conviction of William Ricks Jr., who received state funds to prepare a group home but burned the unoccupied house in an unsuccessful attempt to collect insurance money — hurt legitimate efforts, Mrs. Wagner says.

"We're always fighting that bad image," Mrs. Wagner says. "We're always meeting with people who'd like to



Mary Wagner

change things designed to make it difficult to operate our homes."

Stiff opposition to the idea of placing retarded in residential settings makes it even more important to screen applicants for jobs as house manager or social worker, she explains.

"I've had to let three staff members go (in 13 years) because we found drugs in their possession," Mrs. Wagner said. "And that's cause for immediate dismissal."

While two of the 10 Community Living Center (CLC) homes operated by Mrs. Wagner are run in conjunction with the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center (MORC) for the retarded, an arm of the Michigan Department of Mental Health, she is critical of the state agency for some of its policies but not its intentions.

MORE THOROUGH and more selective screening must be done of prospective employees or persons applying to

be directors of MORC group homes, Mrs. Wagner maintains.

The amount of paperwork required by the state is staggering, she adds. "There's so much red tape that makes the homes almost institutional," she explains. "You have to account for every single dollar. Our (private) group homes are homes. We don't make our people write down every single thing they do during the day."

Despite some problems in state-financed group homes, Mrs. Wagner says they are infinitely more humane than the alternative — an institution.

"I haven't met one resident yet who preferred the state institution," Mrs. Wagner says. "They fixed up the Plymouth State Home recently and we visited it. It's cleaned up but still so cold, so un-homelike."

"The most important thing for the retarded, in talking to them, is that they have some things of their own, a place of their own."

THE ASSOCIATION for Retarded Citizens of Oakland County honored Mrs. Wagner earlier this month with an award for her success with group homes in the Detroit area.

The award cites her, as executive director of CLC, for "providing an exceptionally warm, comfortable, and stimulating living environment for persons with mental retardation."

The award is another plaque she can add to the growing collection hanging on the wall of her downtown Farmington office. Other awards she has received include the 1958 Detroit News Teacher of the Year award for her work in special education at North Farmington High School and a 1970 Special Educator of the Year award bestowed on her by the Oakland County Association of Retarded Citizens.

The awards are nice but unnecessary, she says.

"What's most reassuring is that all the hard work our staff has done is recognized," Mrs. Wagner says. "Look at this stack of letters of recommendation."

The real payoff, she says, comes about when retarded residents show progress far beyond anyone's expectation.

ONE SUCH EXAMPLE is her son, Tony, 32, who was a resident of the first CLC home that opened in 1959 in the former Malcolm Palmer Nursing Home on 13 Mile in Farmington Hills.

Tony Wagner is now married, owns a home in Farmington and works as a mail handler in the Troy post office. He has a difficult time reading, says his mother, but learned the mail sorting system perfectly.

Another success story is John Mintline, of Farmington, who works full-time at Knart white living in a group home at Farmington Road and Freedom. Mintline is planning to move to a supervised apartment for high functioning retarded residents.

Daniel Trompeter is another high achiever. After living 22 years in the Lapeer State Home, he is working as a

janitor in a local bowling alley, and is married. His wife works as a domestic in one of the group homes but they own their own house.

After receiving help, Trompeter is now helping others. He located his mother, after a long absence, in a nursing home in Ohio where she was reportedly housed for mental problems. According to Mrs. Wagner, Trompeter found better accommodations for his mother in a home operated by the Department of Social Services in Southfield.

The Trompeters live on the wages they make and no longer receive any money from Social Security.

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Thieves hit Hills homes

A \$1,200 pair of diamond earrings were reported missing by Margaret Williams of Mairwood Apartments in Farmington Hills Monday.

Police said the thief entered through the front door leaving no evidence of forced entry.

A note found lying on the floor advised Williams the maintenance personnel had entered the apartment to repair a leaky ceiling but were unable to find the leak.

Williams told police she never reported a leak.

The case is being investigated.

In an unrelated incident, William Reid of 29023 Arnel returned home from a weekend vacation Sunday to a ransacked home.

Jewelry and cash were taken. Reid told police the burglars apparently found a hidden key, which they left in the lock.

TV a near vacuum for children

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Here's a scary statistic brought to you by the Committee for Children's Television of Metro Detroit:

"The average American child spends 15,000 hours in a classroom and 18,000 hours watching TV, by age 18," said Elaine Saum of Farmington Hills, new director of the CCT.

In her 20-hour-a-week job funded by the Junior League of Birmingham, Saum will research children's programming and advertising aimed at youngsters, keep abreast of studies of TV's effect on children and speak in schools to students about becoming "smart watchers."

She's already sent out a couple letters to persons in the TV industry, and she just started work last week.

One letter was sent to Channel 2 executives complaining about the station's decision to run "Charlie's Angels" reruns at 4 p.m. Monday-Friday.

The other letter was congratulatory, and it went to Detroit Free Press TV critic Mike Duffy, thanking him for warning parents about the excessive violence in "T.J. Hooker," a new cop show starring William Shatner.

"Charlie's Angels" is one of the examples we already point to as being the worst example in sex-role stereotyping," Saum said. "We also object to the excessive violence of the show. We see our job as trying to make sure what's on TV is appropriate for children."

EXCEPT FOR the "Smurfs" and other Saturday morning cartoon shows, Saum said there's very little programming especially geared for children in the Detroit market. On the network level things aren't much better, she added, noting that CBS shows "Captain Kangaroo" for a half-hour beginning at

6:30 a.m., and Detroit doesn't pick up the program.

Which leaves children watching soap operas about premarital and extramarital sex and themes of drugs, divorce and abortion during the daytime.

Even so-called quality programming such as "Sesame Street" and "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood" shouldn't take the place of learning by experience.

There are probably kids who spend hours listening to "Sesame Street" who can recite the alphabet by rote and not think about what they're saying," said Saum. "They absorb it painlessly and think that's the way learning happens — effortlessly. It can give them a false impression about how the world and the mind works. It's a bad habit — TV watching — no matter what's on."

Saum and the organization are concerned that children who watch TV excessively will become passive observers of life instead of involved participants.

THE MOTHER of two children — Jeremy, 9, and Johanna, 6, Ms. Saum said she and her husband, the Rev. William Saum, a minister at Church of Our Savior United Presbyterian in West Bloomfield, learned to say no to their children.

"We tell them their brains are going to turn to oatmeal if they watch too much television," Saum said. "They'll end up making forts out of blankets and cardboard boxes or ask me to read them a book."

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CRAG PIECHURA/staff photographer

CCT director Elaine Saum says kids spend more time in front of TV sets than they do in the classroom.

Tire-slashing spree

The occupants of two four-wheel drive trucks apparently did more than \$1,000 in damage during a tire-slashing spree on Haynes and Lamar streets in Farmington Hills early Monday.

Robert Kraatz, 23014 Haynes, told police he saw someone crouched near

his parked 1974 Chevy pickup at 1 a.m. who "took off in a truck followed by a second truck." He later found his rear tire slashed.

Police received reports of slashed tires from Douglas Riddell of 30598 Lamar and from Lawrence Burnes, 23155 Haynes. Police discovered slashed tires on vehicles belonging to Thomas Taube, 23157 Haynes, and Ken Kedzierski, 23176 Haynes, while inspecting the area.

Nila Card, 24151 S. Duncan, told police she found the rear window of her 1974 Ford smashed and a pair of \$100 stereo speakers missing Monday. Duncan is a few blocks northeast of Haynes.

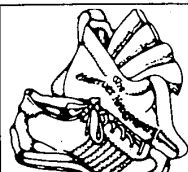
Police have no leads or suspects.

Clarification

A story in Monday's paper on a lawsuit involving the Farmington Hills Police Department and former police department dispatcher Gayns Willing should have said attorney Richard Beemer testified in Willing's behalf. Beemer successfully defended Willing in Oakland County Circuit Court in 1980.

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