



crackerbarrel debate Steve Barnaby



If you're anywhere close to being a concerned Farmington Hills resident, you've got to be a little more than irritated over recent actions of the gang up at Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

Seems that preserving the status quo has become something of a fetish in some circles. Being conservative is one thing, but when it reaches the point of a) wasting tax dollars, b) hindering progress, c) denying the realities of today's economy, and d) shutting out potentially good neighbors, that's when the preservation program has to be called to a halt.

And this is an especially important season to pay attention to the actions of local officials. Election time is just around the corner — thank the Almighty.

So here are a few issues on which you might want to question your council candidates.

• Why does city council continue to waste money on legal fees in an attempt to force Lutheran High School Northwest out of the Holly Hills Farms subdivision?

Having recently lost its case in circuit court, the city has decided to forge ahead in an appeal. It will take a year for that appeal to come to a conclusion. Meanwhile taxpayers fork over extra bucks to a city attorney for a case which shouldn't have been taken to court in the first place.

You see when the Farmington School District sold the property to the Lutheran High School Association, everybody knew how the former elementary school would be used. Some city officials even attended a dedication ceremony for the school.

IT WASN'T until Lutheran High Northwest decided to build a gymnasium that anyone objected. Mayor Fred Hughes has nobly vowed "not to compromise our position," in explaining why the city is appealing.

What a bunch of baloney. We know it's good politics to side with subdivision residents on an issue against the outsiders — especially around election time. But no good reason exists to pick on the Lutheran folks.

A parochial high school isn't exactly a den of iniquity, you know. The city should be welcoming this group with open arms for occupying a building which would otherwise stand empty in the middle of a subdivision and become nothing but an eyesore and safety hazard.

• The second rejection comes in the downsizing issue. Again this is an example of shutting the door to newcomers.

Seems developers are coping with the realities of a new downsized economy and are trying to build smaller houses in subdivisions where larger homes already exist.

Big deal. The idea makes a lot of sense. Frankly many homes in Farmington Hills are too big, anyway. Few of us really need 4,000 square feet of space. If nothing else it's too expensive to heat.

Besides developers have a right to make a few bucks on their investment.

But most importantly, by downsizing the size of houses new folks will have a chance to move into Farmington Hills and enjoy many of the amenities that other residents have taken advantage of over the years.

But instead of having the courage to tell hysterical residents to take a walk, the council came up

with a "compromise" ordinance which allows a builder to construct a home that has at least 75 percent of the floor area of homes within 750 feet of the new house.

Again, a waste of time and a move toward making the community just that much more stagnant. What this community needs more than anything

else is new neighbors, young enough to put children in our schools and to build for the future of Farmington Hills.

But instead, the council has chosen the expedient way out. Hogwash. Bring on the election.



King plus 20: Integration is only a dream

More than 250,000 people marched in Washington, D.C. last weekend to honor the famous "I Have a Dream" speech given by Martin Luther King 20 years ago.

This weekend hundreds of people with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.) will arrive in Detroit after walking from southern Ohio in a voters' registration drive.

All of this activity makes one wonder: What is the status of blacks in the suburbs in 1983?

Stan Connelly, a white civil rights activist who lives in Birmingham, is taking part in the N.A.A.C.P. march.

"It's all right for football players to live in the suburbs, but that's about it," Connelly said earlier this week. "Integration of the suburbs is something you just don't hear much about anymore."

Integration has been quietly going on in several suburbs north of Detroit, such as Southfield and Oak Park. In the 1980 census Southfield reported a 9 percent black population. It is believed that population has continued to grow since the census.

Redford, a community immediately west of Detroit, still has few black families.

Connelly said the slow rate of suburban integration is due to several factors.

"With the poor economy, few blacks can afford to buy suburban houses," he said. "At the same time, Detroit is improving. Fewer blacks want to get out to move to the suburbs."

THE EXCEPTION to the quiet on the integration front is Birmingham. On May 2, 1982 federal Judge Robert DeLoach dropped a bombshell on that city. He found Birmingham guilty of racism "in part because of its desire to exclude black people from the city."

The ruling came after a trial over a 1978 election in which voters turned down proposed low-income senior citizen and family housing. The City of Bir-



Nick Sharkey

irmingham's appeal is pending before the U.S. Sixth District Court in Cincinnati.

Most suburbanites are sophisticated in dealing with blacks. Loud threats are not uttered. No houses are firebombed. Obscenities are seldom used.

Only the most uneducated suburbanite would use the term "nigger." They are now "undesirables."

Thus it is almost impossible to pin down racism. Take, for example, the attempt of the Word of Faith to find a school in Southfield. Word of Faith is a fundamentalist black church.

For three years the church has been frustrated by the Southfield Board of Education and neighborhood associations in attempts to buy two closed schools.

The Rev. Keith Butler of Word of Faith has given up. "We've had racial slurs thrown at us by people in the community," he said. "It isn't worth all the anguish."

Neighbors counter that they were worried about non-educational uses of the building. The head of the neighborhood association which opposed the church school, Cliff Worthing, is black.

Word of Faith has now leased classroom space in the vacant Franklin Elementary School in Franklin. Was racism a factor in denying Word of Faith the Southfield school building? It's impossible for an outsider to know.

SUBURBANITES CAN BE such slick racists that they are difficult to pin down.

Stan Connelly remains optimistic. He is volunteer director of development for Focus: Hope, a Detroit-based civil rights group which promotes better relations between blacks and whites.

Connelly reports that Focus: Hope recently received an unsolicited gift of \$250 per month from a Grosse Pointe woman. In addition, 107 employees of the Wayne County Road Commission began taking payroll deductions to raise money for the civil rights group.

"One day we will disagree with each other based on issues and not on whether someone is a woman, Jew, black or Arab," he said.

Keep on marching, Stan.

2 politicians: a difference in problems

The two most interesting politicians in the state at this point are Gov. James Blanchard and Wayne County Executive William Lucas.

Each started the year in a new job with a new staff and facing a host of inherited problems. Each has used his strengths to attempt to deal with harsh economic realities.

Before the election, most experts thought Blanchard the better politician and more forceful leader. But since then Blanchard has lost some of his luster and Lucas has tended to look better and better.

BACKED BY union strength and traditional Democratic backing, Blanchard rode into office on a tide of economic discontent and mistrust of his opponent, shoot-from-the-hip Richard Headlee. The most remembered part of his campaign was the oft-repeated suggestion that he could do something about providing jobs for the state's unemployed.

Lucas avoided campaign confrontations, espoused no particular programs, promised better government and took advantage of his name recognition (the only thing that matters in county elections, some politicians contend) to walk past his challenges.

What about their impact on government? Aided by the same forces which helped elect him, Blanchard was able to eke out of the Legislature a temporary tax increase. This averted the substantial problems that would have ensued had he not been able to secure the increase.

Blanchard's other major accomplishments — if you consider raising the tax rate an accomplishment — was the institution of the Youth Job Corps and his pairing of the state payroll by instituting a hiring freeze and not replacing employees as they leave.

LUCAS, FACED with similar budgetary problems, had no real possibility of tapping the public



Bob Wisler

for a tax increase. Although he did mention the possibility of a 1 percent county tax increase, he quickly conceded that public approval of a tax increase was almost impossible and dropped discussion of the subject.

Instead, he has embarked on a program designed to force Wayne County employees and unions to abandon the idea that public employment is an expected and quite appropriate guarantee of high wages.

AT THIS point, Blanchard has been able to at least temporarily resolve some of the major problems of state government, while Lucas has had only symbolic victories.

Yet, Blanchard is no doubt less popular with the general public than he was at the start of the year, and Lucas may be even more so.

The reason well may be that whereas the governor resorted to a tax increase to get past the immediate economic problems, the executive has steadfastly pushed for wage concessions and a paring down of county government.

But even beyond this, Blanchard is becoming a victim of the public's perception of him (perhaps the media's perception would be more accurate) as a man unable to get a grasp on the handles of government. The continuing speculation over his staff appointments, his use of helicopters and Mackinac Island amenities, his seeming inability to use words to convey the image of a strong leader all contribute to the perception that the governor somehow can't take charge.

Lucas' actions have included such unwise things as appointing his undersecretary as director of emergency preparedness (cancelled by a subsequent resignation) and a penchant for enjoying chauffeur-driven luxury cars.

Yet his unrelenting efforts to bring stability to county government and his ability to speak convincingly contribute to the perception that he is, indeed, a strong leader who is in charge.

It will be interesting to see if the trend continues.