

Farmington Observer

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Hills, school rift lingers over tax plan

By Jean Adamczak staff writer

The big guns from the Farmington school board will converge on Farmington Hills City Hall tonight at 7:30 to protest a city tax plan.

Led by School Trustee Richard Wallace, the board officials will speak against a city-planned financing scheme to make improvements along the 12 Mile corridor in Farmington Hills.

Farmington Hills officials would use the Tax Increment Finance Authority (TIFA) act, to set up a special taxing authority to provide funds for road repairs and drains along the 12 Mile stretch.

Normally, school districts receive the majority of tax revenue in a municipality. If TIFA goes into effect, the city will capture most, if not all, of the future tax revenue in the specified area.

A BIG BONE of contention between the school board and the city is whether the property value in the designated area is decreasing. Hills City Manager Bill Costick says it is.

"If we can't accommodate the growth along 12 Mile there will be a decline in property value," Costick said.

"We compete with many other communities who do have adequate road systems and it's a gamble. If we don't do it now, we may or may not be able to develop the roads in the future," he added.

Assessed valuation decline is crucial, Wallace agrees. "But I think it is improper to say there has been a property value decline in Farmington Hills."

"This law, if used properly, could be very beneficial for Michigan," he continued, "but where the property value

hasn't declined, that's improper use of the law."

According to Bill Prisk, assistant superintendent of finance and services for the school district, TIFA would divert funds from the day-to-day operation of the school district.

"There is no question about it," he said. "Just how much I can't tell until the city finishes its assessment of the area."

SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT Lew S. Schulman agrees.

"From the very first sentence, this act is a vehicle to take tax dollars from the school district," said Schulman who will also attend tonight's meeting. Costick disagrees.

"We (the city), are not taking anything from the schools," he said. "This is all new tax money. The new growth that comes in will eventually pay for itself."

"Promoting economic development — that's for the whole city, including the schools."

The designated area is a narrow, 3 1/2-mile-long strip of land bounded by Haggerty Road and Kendallwood on the west and east, and by 12 Mile Road and I-496 on the north and south.

Other objections to establishing TIFA are:

"It (TIFA), will negatively impact future finances of the school district," said school board Treasurer and Finance Committee Chairman Wallace.

The second is the "inappropriate utilization of Public Act 450 (TIFA), which was intended to be used for deteriorating urban areas," said Wallace, at a special meeting of the school board last Tuesday evening.

At that meeting, the board voted unanimously to oppose the city's position at tonight's public hearing on TIFA.



John Reich, spokesman of the SS Action Group, delivers his message in Farmington.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Nazi shouts fall on deaf ears

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

The swastikas, Nazi salutes and racial slurs were reminiscent of Nazi Germany.

But there was no round of applause or evident support for the 12 Nazi members gathered near Farmington City Hall Saturday afternoon.

Drawing little more than curiosity, the appearance of the Nazi group was more of a photography session for passersby and motorists than a political rally.

"Are they for real?" shouted a young

man standing across from city hall.

The members of the Security Services Action Group, the militant arm of the Dearborn Heights-based National Socialist Party, made their scheduled appearance at 2 p.m., complete with banners declaring "White Power" and "Smash Communism."

THE GATHERING, according to leader John Reich, was aimed at promoting capital punishment. But their hour-long stay was imbued with racist shouts and chants.

With Farmington Police posted near all corners of the Liberty and Grand

River intersection, the gathering was calm and peaceful, except for the obscene gestures and surprised laughter of passing motorists.

While an elderly man posted himself with camera across from city hall minutes before the van carrying the black uniformed men and women, more of the curious slowly gathered with their flashlights. Even the SS Action members pulled out their cameras.

"It's a big laugh for me," said Larry Bolella, a former Farmington resident, with camera in hand.

"I didn't find out about this. I was

driving by and I had a camera," Bolella said. "These guys are outlandish."

STANDING NEARBY, two black men on their way to work stopped to see what was happening.

"They're in the wrong country," one said, chuckling as he aimed his camera. "I think they're sick. I think they just want attention."

While only a few motorists stopped in the parking lot of city hall for a closer peek at the men and women in black uniforms and hob-nail boots, others shouted from their car windows.

Floyd recalls his era

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

He's the one most people go to when they want to know all there is to know about Farmington Hills.

It's not surprising though that Floyd Cairns, veteran city clerk of Farmington Hills, knows the answers to most of the questions put his way. A lifelong resident and clerk for 29 years, he has witnessed the human foibles and strengths that aided the growth of the community.

"I guess I educated myself," said Cairns, 70. "I grew up with the community, is what happened."

When he leaves the city's employment Dec. 31, his departure will be more than a retirement. For all practical purposes, it will herald the end of an era for the city.

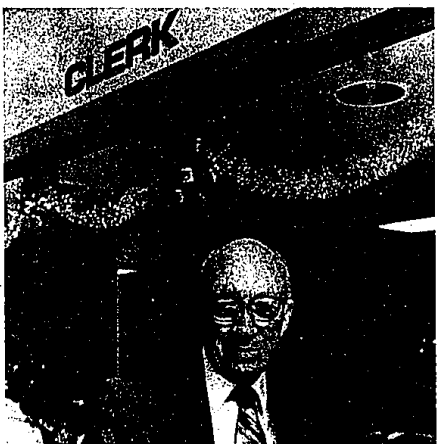
With him, he'll be taking a stronghold of knowledge, facts and the nuances that turn geographical boundaries into an honest-to-goodness community. But he knows that.

HE'S SEEN farms give way to suburban neighborhoods; the Detroit Urban Railway pulled up for concrete roads; and farmers edged out by professionals.

But with each story about the community's growth and development, Cairns throws in a couple of short tales about the way things used to be — and always with a chuckle.

In the early township days, well, let's face it — there was more a cow population that there were people. The farmers, the farms — a whole different ball game.

The farmers looked out for themselves and didn't need a lot of services.



Floyd Cairns stands in front of the department which has become synonymous with his name. He soon will retire.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Although Oakland County shoveled and scraped the snowy main roads, kids did the other roads and "got so much for doing it."

Times have changed as much as the people have. But Cairns isn't surprised.

"Someone once said they were amazed how I accepted the growth. But it had to come. You can see the handwriting on the wall. So you might as well get the best of it."

ALTHOUGH CAIRNS seemingly handles his job with ease, it wasn't always that way.

When he first donned his hat as township clerk in January 1955, the community was divided into, as he recalls, either three or four precincts.

The 4,000-5,000 voters cast their ballots with the help of eight voting machines.

It sounds simple enough.

But within a month of his appointment as clerk, the township held an election. He had absolutely no idea what he was supposed to do.

Up until he became clerk he operated a trucking company, handed down to him from his father.

"I had milk routes. I hauled milk from the farms to the creamery."

It was through his milk routes that he eventually turned to a career in government.

"One of my customers was the (township) supervisor. He was the one who convinced me to run for township office."

Despite encouragement from the supervisor, Cairns first try for political office was bitter-sweet.

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Hills city employees urged to report sex harassment

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Under a new city policy, the burden is on Farmington Hills employees to report incidents of sexual harassment and civil rights discrimination.

With little discussion, council adopted, in a 7-0 vote last week, a policy that supports Equal Employment Opportunity and prohibits sexual harassment.

"The city has an affirmative duty to investigate complaints of sexual harassment, and deal appropriately with offending personnel," said Helen Scott, personnel director, in a report to council.

The sexual harassment and equal opportunity policies make it clear what the city's position is and what the rights and responsibilities of employees are, said City Manager William Costick.

Although employees are automatically protected under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Costick said the city's labor attorney indicated the city would be in a stronger legal position if it adopted formal policies.

What the new policies do is force employer and employee to share the responsibilities, Costick said.

In recommending that council adopt the policies, Scott indicated in her report that the city "go on record as supporting equal employment opportunity, and prohibiting conduct which results in the sexual harassment of its female employees."

In August, a federal jury found in favor of a former Farmington Hills employee who brought suit against the city for sex discrimination in job promotion.

The former employee expected to receive at least \$140,000 in damages for lost wages, emotional distress and for "reckless disregard" in which the city handled the last lawsuit.

Under the city's new policy, sexual harassment is defined as "unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal and/or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

'The city has an affirmative duty to investigate complaints of sexual harassment, and deal appropriately with offending personnel.'

— Helen Scott personnel director

- Submission to this type of conduct or communication is a term or condition, whether implicit or explicit, to obtain employment;
- When submission or rejection of this type of conduct or communication is a factor in any employment decision.
- This type of conduct or communication has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with a person's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

As with the Equal Employment Opportunity policy, employees are asked to immediately report an incident of harassment. Once reported, an investigation will be conducted "immediately and confidentially."

Under the policies, any employee found to have engaged in sexual harassment or who has discriminated against an employee according to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 will be "disciplined up to and including termination."

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