

# Liba watches city leaders

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Bill Liba has always been interested in government. But he didn't start his official council watching career until he offered to drive to city hall a friend who always attended council meetings.

It started to go in May (1982) the first time they had the big budget session," said Liba, a 30-year Farmington resident.

"I saw how interesting it would be. I started to sort out the council people that were doing a good job, in my impression."

Watching each council member's work is one of the major draws for Liba, who spends a lot of his retirement time supporting and campaigning for candidates. Before he lends his support, though, it's imperative to Liba that he sees the council member of his choice in action.

"I try to pick a candidate that will get to the issue and make a motion. I try to sort out which candidate I would support."

LIBA DOES not limit himself to the Farmington Hills council when watching potential candidates. Every now and then he goes to his hometown council of Farmington. But he admits Farmington Hills is where the action is.

Because he's a Farmington resident Liba just sits back in the Farmington Hills council chamber, never publicly uttering a word. But every now and then a sigh of relief or indignation can be heard from the last row of chairs. It's Liba, losing patience with long discussions.

"Instead of getting to the issues they spend too much time philosophizing."

Liba said. "They are not issue minded. You can't be going from 7:30 p.m. until 11 and midnight every council meeting. If they were organized properly, they would have no need to go to 11 and midnight."

That's the difference, as far as Liba is concerned, between how the Farmington and Farmington Hills councils operate. In Farmington, he said, the city manager runs the city. In Farmington Hills, the city manager "is trying to run the city but the city council wants to manage it."

"Let the city manager run the city. You hired him," Liba said, as an afterthought of advice for Farmington Hills leaders.

WHILE acknowledging issues facing Farmington are not as involved as those facing Farmington Hills because the latter is still developing, Liba says he'd like to see Hills' leaders cut out unnecessary discussion.

"They take an issue and beat it down. They work it over and over. I would recommend that they don't beat issues to death. They should do their homework before coming to the council meetings."

"What they are doing is philosophizing before they make a motion."

Liba also believes council members should be more careful about the things they say. One recommendation is "to get to the point." Another recommendation is "to start listening to the community."

But like all council watchers, Liba believes more of the public must attend the meetings, participate and know what's happening in their city instead of waiting for a special topic like taxes to draw out interest groups.

"I would like to get the average person out (to council). On the issues, it's usually the power groups which come," Liba said.

WHAT RESIDENTS should be doing, Liba said, is helping the leaders run the city. For example, if there is a bad pothole, the resident should call the city and let the officials know exactly where it is instead of waiting for a city worker to notice it, Liba suggested.

"The taxpayers leave the upkeep of the city to the city workers without helping them out," he said. "People should be more interested and call the city on problems."

"People ought to be more interested in their city — roads, signs — anything they see that should be reported in. You can't expect city workers to be riding around looking for potholes."

Liba says he'd also like to see residents going to city hall, looking through the budget and other public reports so they know exactly what's happening with the city they pay taxes to.

"You find very few people look at the budget," he said. "We've got to get people to look at this so they'll know what is going on."

Liba acknowledges that most people simply pull a lever when electing a council member and never pay another bit of attention to the elected officials' work until the next election. He doesn't think that's wise.

"To the voter I would say just don't elect somebody to office without seeing how they are doing. That's why I go to council meetings. I go there to see what's happening."



Bill Liba (left) discusses the latest agenda topics with Aldo Vagnozzi.

RANDY BOST/Staff photographer

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