

# Hills eyes wider input over group homes

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

If Farmington Hills officials want some say on location of group homes for mentally retarded persons, they have to develop open communications with mental health agency officials,

said Rep. Wilbur "Sandy" Brotherton, R-Farmington.

"Because the law is being so rigidly interpreted and backed up by the courts, the only way (to have input) is to get close to people who are running the program and attempt to work with them," Brotherton said.

Talk of improved relations with

mental health agencies that sponsor and monitor group homes in local communities surfaced during the latest controversy over the placement of a proposed group home in Briar Hill subdivision — off 13 Mile west of Farmington Road — in Farmington Hills in early September.

The purchase of an existing home in Briar Hills by the Clinton Township-based Macomb Oakland Regional Center (MORC) fell through.

But the issue left some residents and city officials feeling that mental health agencies, such as MORC, do not fully cooperate with local officials or understand residents' feelings about group home placement.



W.V. Brotherton  
State rep.

THE FARMINGTON HILLS City Council decided to meet with Brotherton in October to discuss mental health agencies' efforts, residents' concerns and just what a city has in the placement of group homes. Farmington Hills has eight group homes.

"The council knows they are going to be faced with this (more group homes) that will cause concern to residents," said Karen Rirkholz, Farmington Hills assistant to the city manager. "So the council just wanted the facts."

Brotherton told the city council it has two areas of involvement when it comes to group home placement. The first is to make sure that proposed group homes will not be within a 500-foot radius of other similar facilities.

"The council can also show that the physical plan or the immediate area around the home could be detrimental to the health of the residents (in the group home)," said Brotherton, in offering a second method.

STILL, AS far as Brotherton is concerned, opening the line of communication between city and mental health officials will produce the best results.

And that's a notion city officials are encouraging, said Farmington Hills City Manager William Costick. "We are encouraging a different attitude. So communication is proposed, they (mental health officials) go out and talk with the residents. But we don't think they have done as good a job as they could on that."

Mental health agency officials agree communication is important. But they also feel they do a pretty good job of it.

"I think we have had good communications with the city," said Sharon LaNoue, MORC community liaison coordinator. "Relatively few local officials (throughout Macomb and Oakland

counties) have become actively involved with site selection. It is a political no-win situation."

Making an active move to communicate with MORC representatives, Farmington Hills city officials proposed to the agency that group homes be restricted to sites along the city's major roads. "They rejected that," Costick said.

RECALLING THE meeting with Mayor Jan Dolan, Costick and Rirkholz, LaNoue said MORC officials did not automatically reject the city proposal.

"Although we said we would encourage that, we made no commitment. There isn't a whole lot available on mile roads. My understanding was that by doing this (major road placement), there would be a lot less resistance by neighbors," LaNoue said.

Sensitivity to neighbors — or the lack of it — has also become a growing issue for communities.

Residents and city officials sometimes feel MORC officials are insensitive to feelings of neighbors near proposed and existing group homes, said Farmington Hills Mayor Jan Dolan. "They (MORC) come in and some people feel they have already made up their minds that people are against them," she said.

LANOUE DISAGREES. "I don't think we are insensitive. But our goal is to get the home open. A lot of times, I believe people don't trust us because we are the state. But this is also the fear of the unknown. We feel our program is great. We feel it has a great deal of integrity," LaNoue said.

Brotherton said he also believes mental health officials have lost — to some degree — their sensitivity to local officials and residents.

"I have a feeling that over a period of time the bureaucrat may be a little too cocky and too impatient," Brotherton said.

"We intended this (group home placement) to be as smooth and painless as possible. You have to recognize people's fears. MORC needs to cooperate and also be sensitive."

To encourage cooperation, Brotherton said he intends to meet with Patrick Babcock, state Department of Mental Health director, to discuss concerns about mental health agencies' apparent insensitivity to municipalities and neighbors.

RESIDENTS MUST also keep an open mind about the placement of mentally retarded adults in group homes, LaNoue said. When mental health agency representatives are on hand to answer questions, questions are not asked. "I think the frustration neighbors have is that they are looking for ways to prevent the home from coming

in," she said.

If neighbors wait three-six months after a home has opened, they usually find that "none of the horrible things they imagined are happening." Usually, it is two-three families that are immediately opposed to a group home, LaNoue said. Opposition fades as the two-three families pass along their feelings.

Most of the arguments against group homes include the possibility of declining property values, safety concerns and, occasionally, charges that the mental health agency didn't properly inform anyone about a proposed home.

According to state rules, though, agencies such as MORC have notification procedures to follow, LaNoue and Brotherton said.

The latest proposed group home in Briar Hill raised the question of whether city officials had been properly notified. City attorney Paul Bibbey, the state mental health department had followed proper notification procedures.

There's never been a case where one notice is given and then 2-3 years later, a home pops up," Brotherton said.

## Placement rules spark challenge

Continued from Page 1

"Why do some communities have none (group homes) and others have many? There doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason."

Dunaskis knows it's an uphill battle for his bill, which has been given to the state House of Representatives' Mental Health Committee. "I think there is quite a bit of opposition to it," he said.

ONE SUCH steadfast opponent is state Rep. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, who chairs the House Mental Health Committee.

"We have no intention of making it law. There is not the support for it in the House Mental Health Committee," Stabenow said. "There are some real constitutional concerns about it."

One such concern is that the Legislature cannot limit or restrict who is to live in a particular community. Restricting the number of group homes is discriminatory, Stabenow said.

Because the state's courts have repeatedly upheld the state Mental Health Department's placement of

mentally retarded in group homes, such restrictions will never be condoned, Stabenow said.

"The courts have seen this as a discrimination issue, not a mental health issue. The next step is to say we have too many black people, too many Hispanics, too many Jews and too many Catholics," she said.

BUT DUNASKIS disagreed. "I don't think you can consider it discrimination at all. This is just to put some rhyme and reason into the concept (of group home placement)," he said.

Dunaskis maintains that distribution of group homes in Oakland County is inconsistent. Although the state mental health department said it doesn't want to create "mental health ghettos" in communities, Dunaskis said, that's just what's happening to some communities that have more than their share of group homes, while others have few, if any.

But Stabenow said standards, rules and procedures established by the state mental health department "makes sure we don't have mental health ghettos."

## correction

A picture of state Rep. W.V. Brotherton, R-Farmington, inadvertently ran in Monday's paper with a story about group homes for the mentally ill possibly coming to Farmington Hills.

The photo is re-run today with the above story on Farmington Hills wanting increased say over group home placement. We regret any confusion.

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#### Statement of Resources and Liabilities

	Thousands of dollars
<b>Cash and balances due from depository institutions:</b>	
Noninterest-bearing balances and currency and coin	135
Interest-bearing balances	16,079
Securities	1,742
Federal funds sold and securities purchased under agreements to resell in domestic offices of the bank and of its Edge and Agreement subsidiaries, and in IFBs	1,350
Loans and lease financing receivables	
Loans and leases, net of unearned income	15,513
LESS: Allowance for loan and lease losses	148
LESS: Allocated transfer risk reserve	0
Loans and leases, net of unearned income, allowance, and reserve	15,365
Assets held in trading accounts	0
Premises and fixed assets (including capitalized leases)	674
Other real estate owned	39
Investments in unconsolidated subsidiaries and associated companies	0
Customers' liability to this bank on acceptances outstanding	0
Intangible assets	27
Other assets	17,153
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>34,217</b>
<b>Deposits:</b>	
In domestic offices	
Noninterest-bearing	9,957
Interest-bearing	24,260
In foreign offices, Edge and Agreement subsidiaries, and IFBs	0
Noninterest-bearing	0
Interest-bearing	0
Federal funds purchased and securities sold under agreements to repurchase in domestic offices of the bank and of its Edge and Agreement subsidiaries, and in IFBs	0
Demand notes issued to the U.S. Treasury	0
Other borrowed money	0
Mortgage indebtedness and obligations under capitalized leases	0
Bank's liability on acceptances executed and outstanding	0
Notes and debentures subordinated to deposits	230
Other liabilities	27
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>34,974</b>
Unlimited preferred stock	0
Perpetual preferred stock	0
Common stock	522
Surplus	522
Unallocated profits and capital reserves	1,341
Cumulative foreign currency translation adjustment	0
<b>Total equity capital</b>	<b>2,385</b>
<b>Total liabilities, unlimited preferred stock, and equity capital</b>	<b>37,359</b>

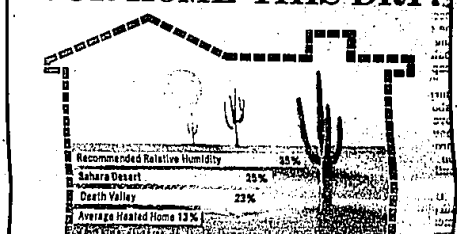
We, the undersigned directors, attest to the correctness of the above statement of condition and certify that the same has been prepared by us, and to the best of our knowledge and belief, is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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