

# Opinion

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18A(F)

O&E Thursday, April 10, 1986



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

A view of 12 Mile Road, between Farmington and Haggerty roads.

## Council action — right course

A monthly peek into Bob Sklar's notebook —

**B**ACKING OFF sometimes is a far wiser course than pursuing a cause at any cost.

In that light, the Farmington Hills City Council wisely rescinded its plan to use tax increment financing to pay for a \$16½-million road improvement project predominantly along 12 Mile Road, west of Farmington Road.

Farmington Public Schools trustees, citing an opinion by Attorney General Frank Kelley, branded such use illegal because property values in the area weren't declining.

The city council, however, contended that without road improvements to 12 Mile, it's only a matter of time before property values along the corridor plummet.

Make no mistake: A costly legal battle between the city and the schools to determine the validity of Kelley's Jan. 16 opinion would have drawn the spotlight away from the sorry state of many Farmington Hills roads.

In announcing the city council's decision to rescind establishing a Tax Increment Financing Authority (TIFA) district along a three-mile stretch of 12 Mile, Mayor Joe Alkatech hit at the folly of a protracted court fight.

"It is not in the best interest of our community to become divided through legal suits between one local agency and another, both of which represent the same taxpayers' interests."

THE SCHOOLS opposed the planned TIFA, not the need to improve 12 Mile. They concurred with the city that without improvement, tax-rich development will be jeopardized along the corridor — and the quality of life in the city could suffer as a result.

Tax increment financing was proposed to pay for the city's \$9.5-million share of a \$16½-million project to widen I-96, add two freeway interchanges and build a four-lane boulevard on 12 Mile, between Farmington and Haggerty roads.

Farmington Hills proposed capturing some of the dollars yielded by the TIFA district's increase in assessed value for up to 12 years.

Stepping back while the TIFA act is under siege gives Farmington Hills time to again mull over other funding options for the desired 12 Mile Road boulevard or an alternative five-lane roadway.

## We care what you think

READERS ULTIMATELY determine the quality of a newspaper — especially one heavily colored with community news.

We firmly believe that is how it should be. So if you'd like to share your opinions, write us. In our view, letters to the editor reflect the vigor, diversity and wisdom of the community.

We reserve the right to edit and condense letters. In most cases, letters should be limited to 300 words.

Letters must be original copies —



Bob Sklar

- A bond sale for citywide road improvement, including 12 Mile.
- Federal, state or county grants, which are as rare as silky smooth roads after a Michigan winter.
- A cooperative development arrangement calling for special assessments on developers whose property would front the improved roadway.
- Encouraging state legislation that would earmark more property tax revenue generated by local economic growth for local roads.

AT RUSH hour, there are near-gridlocks throughout the city. Bluntly put, that is the price of prosperity — of setting the pace in new housing and office development.

But with 4.9 million square feet of new office development projected along 12 Mile by 1991 — primarily west of Farmington Road — that corridor will continue to harbor the worst traffic conditions.

Even though 12 Mile is under county jurisdiction, the road commission is projected to be \$625 million short over the next decade.

With tax increment financing in flux, it well may require a combination of funding sources to bring about the badly needed roadway improvement west of Farmington Road.

Chances are Farmington Hills residents would agree to sharing the cost if they knew those who stood to turn substantial profits along the corridor paid their fair share for improving the road.

WHAT ABOUT the businesses that threaten to move on unless the road is improved at someone else's expense? Maybe we should just wish them well.

Should we be so unsure about the city's corporate status to worry that other, more community-conscious businesses wouldn't step forward to fill the void?

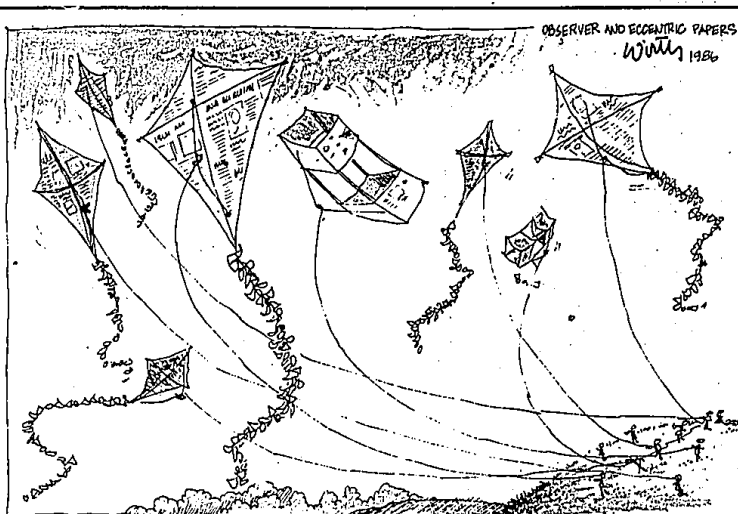
The delay in improving 12 Mile may slow corridor development — and slow expansion of the city's non-residential tax base. But maybe, in the natural order of things, the city will be the better for it.

typewritten or legibly handprinted. Carbons, reprints and photocopies will be discarded.

Letters must be signed and include the address and telephone number of the author. Names of authors will be withheld from publication only for reasons we consider to be compelling.

Send letters to: Readers' forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024. We'll be happy to consider printing them.

— Bob Sklar



## The best era for kites

KITE SEASON began Christmas morning when I was a kid. The shirts and pajamas that came in the Hudson's boxes were wrapped in a strong grade of tissue paper that was splendid kite material.

Sure, we could buy kites at the dime store for 10 cents and a ball of twine for 19 cents. But it was a lot more fun to design, build and fly your own.

Store-bought kites were of one standard design: the two-sticker. But if you made your own, they could be more exotic.

MY FAVORITE was the star kite. You arranged three sticks like a snowflake and connected alternate points with string. That gave you two, overlapping, equilateral triangles. When you added the wrapping tissue from the Hudson's box, you had a six-pointed star.

It caught a lot of wind and was a strong-flying kite.

Another favorite was the granddaddy three-sticker. It had two vertical sticks and one horizontal, basically a variation on the standard two-sticker kite.

One of the best fliers was the box kite, but it had two important disadvantages: It took a lot of work and crafts-



Tim Richard

manship to build, and a strong wind would grab it and bust your string in a hurry.

The one box kite our household produced was almost immediately gobbled by the kite-eating tree on Pierson Avenue next to the farmer's field south of Seven Mile.

THE POST-WAR era when I was a kid was a great time for kite-building. Earlier, my dad's generation made theirs of newspaper and used flour and water for paste. We had it better.

I've already mentioned the wrapping tissue. A lot of our dads were craftsmen and used power saws to cut up scrap lumber we picked up at the new housing sites of northwest Detroit. In a few minutes, my dad could produce a couple of season's worth of kite sticks. And we could afford better glue.

Our home-made kites were bigger,

too — 36 to 40 inches high.

Today's kids probably have as much fun flying kites as we did, but I don't see any homemade kites in the kite-eating trees of the western suburbs.

I work on computer terminals, both in the office and in Lansing, and the dads in my neighborhood are mostly salesmen. Most of us would have trouble cutting kite sticks for kids.

TODAY THERE are some pretty exotic store-bought kites, I'll admit, made out of light plastic.

I even own one. It's from San Francisco's Chinatown and has a dragon face with a lot of flapping tails. It's so pretty that I'm a little afraid to fly it. So we use it as a front door decoration.

But I'm glad to report that one institution — Oakland County parks — is keeping alive the artistic science of kite building. At 1 p.m. Saturday, April 12, they're having a kite-flying clinic at Independence Oaks County Park, Sashabaw Road 2½ miles north of I-75, near Clarkston, in case you're interested.

Fee is \$2 (for materials) plus vehicle admission at the park gate. When you're done, you'll have your own kite. I guarantee you'll enjoy it, and you know a newsman can't print a lie.

## Rouge + friends = cleanup



Teri Banas

That is what's behind the June 7 cleanup day that community activists and volunteers from all along the Rouge hope will mark the start of an annual observance.

IN THE PROCESS, this notorious, sometimes noxious river, is doing something quite curious. It's bringing together a mix of people from an assortment of backgrounds and private interests.

Take, for example, the collection represented last week. There were those from League of Women Voters, like Helen Boxer and Verona Morse of Southfield, the powerful Michigan United Conservation Clubs, the Dearborn Heights-based Wayne County Taxpayers Association, and the UAW.

"The UAW is here, available to help politically, influentially and financially.

We have a whole staff available in the conservation department to assist. Just shout," said the rep.

There was also Nancy Watkins, an employee of the Wayne County Parks and Recreation Department, and a self-styled "public enemy number one" among developers because of her strong opposition to developments that damage flood plains and river patterns.

There was also Chester Marvin with the Wolverine's 4-Wheel Drive Club. What was his interest? "I was involved with Project Pride. We've pulled out vehicles from the river with our truck since 1979."

Finally, Dick Ralston of Novi said he found himself drawn toward attending because of his active involvement with the Big Brothers, Big Sisters organization.

"If this is feasible, I just think this river could be a fantastic resource for kids. It's part of the good ole days, go down to the river and fish."

In all likelihood, the Rouge will never again be a recommended fishing site. But there's nothing wrong in hoping that someday, some kids will grow up — like Dave Vrabel did — with untainted memories.

**The river, which is 125 miles long and looks and smells like an open sewer in parts, has become a celebrated cause these days. It is — environmentally speaking — notorious.**