

Clout varies among associations

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Many of those who maintain associations have some influence and that it's best if the groups avoid becoming political. Still others argue that associations are most successful and have greatest influence within individual neighborhoods.

And still another school of thought acknowledges associations' success within the neighborhood but feel it's time to stretch their wings and become somewhat involved in the larger realm of city politics.

FARMINGTON HILLS Zoning Supervisor Hal Rowe calls neighborhood associations "the first step in the grass-roots political process." The fact that many of the city's former and current council members began their political careers as association members and officers testifies to the involvement, influence and popularity of associations over the years.

Homeowners' influence is evident when an association president stands before the Farmington Hills City Council and local politicians know that one person represents a portion of their constituency.

That fact makes associations both positive and negative forces in the city, according to Farmington Hills Community Development coordinator Richard Lampi.

"The disadvantages are basically the same as the advantages. They represent a group of people. If they are opposed to the city, they can react in a core group," Lampi said.

Zoning issues and continuing con-

trovery over neighborhood open spaces are generally situations in which associations' clout or influence is most evident.

When an association opposes a developer's plans — even though the developer is meeting all of the city's ordinance requirements — council often strives to strike a balance between what the neighborhood wants and what the developer is legally allowed to do.

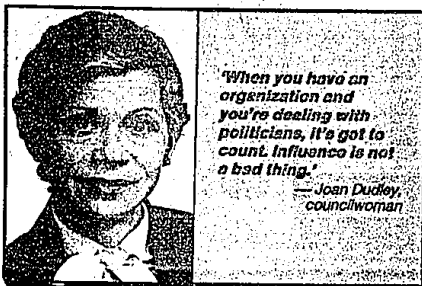
"People that come to the planning commission just have an input, which I guess you can say is impact," Rowe said. "But it is political clout when these people go to the council because they (council members) are the elected ones. That's where the subdivision association has its greatest impact."

But that's not to say council and city officials consistently yield to demands of neighborhood associations. Many an association in the history of Farmington Hills have lost their battles before the city council.

"When you have an organization and you're dealing with politicians, it's got to count. Influence is not a bad thing," Councilwoman Joan Dudley said. "But we have to consider, Does this represent the people of the city or does it just represent the people sitting here?"

Developer Melvin Kaftan, who was recently denied a rezoning request for the site of the former Orchard Lake Road, south of 11 Mile, to build townhouses, offered a different opinion.

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pressure from groups. I don't fault the city council. They (homeowners) are their constituents," Kaftan said.

DURING a council public hearing on Kaftan's rezoning request in April, many residents — particularly of the Oakland Hills Mobile Home Park and the Springbrook Homeowners Association — turned out in opposition. In that particular case, Kaftan said he felt that the council "bowed to these people's loud noises."

But in denying Kaftan's request, council upheld an earlier planning commission recommendation, denying the request did not conform to the city's master zoning plan.

Jack Joynt of the Springbrook Homeowners Association, however, strongly upholds a neighborhood's right to get involved and make their feelings known. "They (council) have to listen to somebody — not just the builders and developers."

Yet Joynt also maintains that the city council doesn't automatically lean toward neighborhood associations' demands simply because they make their opinions known. But he fiercely believes associations should be as loud and influential as possible to ensure the integrity of the neighborhoods and the city.

Whether council is viewed as bowing to neighbors' demands appears to be a matter of opinion, depending

on what side of the fence a critic is standing.

"IT'S OFTEN very subjective on whether they (associations) are viewed as political or not. If they are doing something a council or other people don't agree with, then the association may be called political," Oakland University Professor Don Warren said.

Despite the occasional criticism council receives, however, it continues to support associations' attempts to be heard and acknowledges the potential to influence.

"I think they have a tremendous impact," Councilman Wolf said. "I believe in a popular form of government. The only that is accomplished is with people. When a person approaches the council, it's a filtering process."

Mayor Joe Alkateeb encourages associations' involvement in city government and politics.

"Every citizen should be a part-time politician," Alkateeb said. "Should neighborhood associations get involved in politics? Yes. 100 percent. A good government works well only if it's well informed."

Yet there are many who say associations should stay away from city politics.

ROBERT McCONNELL, Economic Development Corporation chairman and former city official, believes there are more than enough political groups floating around. Neighborhood associations should stick to what they do best — protect-

ing the subdivision. "They should not become political," he said.

County Commissioner Moffitt agrees. "I find them valuable because they are not political," he said. "When a homeowners association calls me, I take it for face value. There are no political reasons."

"Politics is a complicating factor in government many times. When that fact is absent, you have greater representation," Moffitt added.

When associations are political, there is a greater chance of disenfranchising its members. Political involvement could tend to factionalize an association and damage its effectiveness in working for the betterment of the individual neighborhood, Moffitt said.

Professor Warren, who has written a book about neighborhood associations, maintains it's difficult for such associations and homeowners to avoid the political process.

"They sometimes do function as sub-governments. All of these groups have a political function. Many times, though, they may not have been explicitly organized to do that," Warren said.

OFTEN, it "takes the right kind of problem" to bring the political side of associations out into the open.

"But you really have to size up the neighborhood and the problem and how the neighborhood sees itself. Does it want to be recognized. Some groups feel that by keeping distance from city hall, they are able to work more effectively."

"Some disagree," Warren said.

Hills voters will consider a parks millage

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five years to finance improvements considered a priority by commission members.

If passed, the levy would be effective July 1. Almost immediately, the special millage would generate \$600,000, based on the city's projected state equalized value of \$1.2 billion. City Manager William Costick said. Within the first year (including the July 1, 1988, and July 1, 1987 collections), the special millage would raise \$1.2 million, he added.

Based on an estimated 5-percent growth rate in the city's SEV, the city would generate \$661,000 in the third year of the five-year special tax period. In the fourth year \$694,000 would be generated, followed by \$729,000 in the fifth year for an estimated five-year total of \$3.3 million, Costick said.

If passed, the 0.5-mill (per \$1,000 of assessed valuation) will cost taxpayers — based on a \$50,000 house assessed at \$45,000 — approximately \$22.50 annually.

In determining how to finance parks and recreation improvements, commission members considered 10 possible funding methods, including donations, money from the city's budget, and grants, for example.

"THE CITY budget has no room (for financing parks and recreation improvements), especially with major road expansion projects. We couldn't get it (revenue) in the volume needed," Fitzgerald said.

Even if the city could receive some of the dwindling grants still available, most are matching — requiring the city to put up at least an equal share. "Without a millage being passed here in the city, a match would be difficult," Fitzgerald said.

"So the only way the problem will be solved is by asking people to pay," he added.

Costick has applied for one \$155,000 match through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). If awarded, the city would use the grant money for development of the proposed youth athletic fields on the northwest corner of 13 Mile and Farmington roads.

"In addition to that grant, we will also be applying for others," Costick said. "But we have to recognize that especially the traditional grants that are federally funded are drying up. And the outlook is getting worse. The opportunity for grants is going to become less and less."

IN THE NEWLY adopted 1988-87 capital improvements budget, city officials allocated \$100,000 for parks and recreation — \$50,000 for Heritage Park and the balance for the proposed athletic fields at 13 Mile and Farmington roads, Costick said.

Whether city officials will bond for any of the proposed parks and recreation improvements is still undetermined. "But any bonding would be short-term," Costick said, with all debt retired within the five-year period.

If the millage passes, the top priorities to be addressed are development of the proposed 13 Mile and Farmington athletic park, west of Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 Mile, Costick said.

"While we are going to follow the general parameters of the (five-year action) program, there will be fluctuations," Costick said, adding that cost estimates could change.

"How much of the actual budget is spent depends and is subject to

review by the planning commission and city council, following engineering and costs," he said.

If the millage passes, the first step will be design and engineering work on the 13 Mile and Farmington fields, as well as Heritage Park. "So hopefully, by fall, we'll get started so the basics are available in spring 1987," Costick said.

ALTHOUGH FARMINGTON Hills City Council last November approved the concept of forming a foundation to stimulate interest in and financing of development of Heritage Park, progress has not been made. A foundation could be responsible for "some of the spe-

cialized things at the (Heritage) park," such as an animal farm and nature areas, Costick said.

Possible creation of a foundation, as well as consideration of putting the Spicer estate house into the city's historic district, are two issues that will be addressed simultaneously if the millage passes, Costick said. Decisions have not yet been made on how the estate house will be used, including the possibility of using it for administrative offices, he added.

"The use of the whole structure is up in the air," Costick said.

With the majority of proposed improvements based on passage of

the special 0.5-mill, a defeat at the polls would bring plans for major improvements "to a rapid halt," Costick said.

If the millage is defeated next week, city officials will be forced to reassess what can be done without revenue from the proposed levy. Other than the \$100,000 allocated in the capital improvements budget, city officials have not earmarked any money for parks and recreation in 1988-87, Costick said.

"PARKS AND recreation might have to annually compete with other things, roads, etc.," Costick added.

Because of the 1978 state constitutional tax limitation amendment (Headlee Amendment), the city's charter tax limit is at 9.8 mills — exactly what the city is levying in 1988-7. Consequently, the city cannot — at least this year — levy millage to accommodate parks and recreation needs, Costick said.

Following the five-year special millage period, city officials would have to determine how, if at all, the remaining suggested improvements in the master parks and recreation plan's action program would be completed. "It's hard to speak now for what will be the feeling then," Costick said.

Setting priorities Heritage Park focal point of Hills' plan

Development of the 212-acre Heritage Park represents a major portion of the \$7 million in improvements listed in Farmington Hills' five-year master parks and recreation plan.

Although the five-year action plan includes 21 suggested parks and recreation improvements, the special 0.5-mill levy is expected to finance nine top priority improvements, totaling approximately \$3 million.

Improvements expected to be accomplished within the five-year period with revenue generated by the special millage include:

- Development of a 15-acre youth athletic park on the northwest corner of 13 Mile and Farmington roads.

- Upgrading of approximately 16 Farmington Public Schools-owned athletic fields. The fields would be upgraded to standards required for play by Little League and other youth athletic organizations. It's still undetermined which fields would be upgraded. Plans include working with school district officials to determine what improvements should be made, said Eric Wurminger, Farmington Hills assistant special services director.

- Construction of a storage building for use by youth athletic organizations. The proposed building's site is still undetermined but a centrally located spot is desired. The building would include three bays to provide enough storage for equipment. Wurminger said. Estimated cost, \$10,000.

- Development of an entrance, main road, gate, signs and landscaping for Heritage Park. "We want to get Heritage Park to a point where it's usable," City Manager William Costick said.

- Development of nature, hiking, cross country ski trails and sledding hills in Heritage Park. Estimated cost, \$187,000.

- Development of picnic areas

- Development of native species arboretum in Heritage Park for an estimated \$28,800.

- Renovation of Spicer estate house. Estimated cost, \$398,100.

- Construction of visitor center in Heritage Park. The center would include meeting rooms, office, kitchenette, storage, restrooms, small concession and auditorium. Estimated cost, \$415 million.

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Chaldean grads saluted at Southfield ceremony

About 100 students, in cap and gown from 29 area high schools, gathered in Southfield Saturday for a graduation ceremony at Our Lady of Chaldeans Cathedral, the archdiocese for the Chaldean community.

The fourth annual commencement exercise, presented by the Chaldean Federation of America, began with a Mass celebrated by Bishop Mar Ibrahim.

Filling the church were parents, friends and educators from area school districts.

"I LOVE THE enthusiasm of parents seeing their children marching in together," said J. Julia Hakim of Birmingham.

A member of the commencement committee, Hakim also was there to see her daughter, Nicole, sing the national anthem.

was Beverly Gellner, Southfield schools associate superintendent for instruction, while senior class representative Hailham Silito of Oak Park also spoke to the graduates.

Kamal Eshaki, chairman of the commencement committee, told the students that the past 12 years were a stepping stone to the future, to which they must carry on the traditions and contributions of the Chaldeans.

"What you are is God's gift to you; what you become is your gift to God," he said.

EACH GRADUATE received a certificate, and in addition, 10 plaques were awarded.

The Chaldean Federation also awarded three scholarships. Jacqueline Acha of North Farmington High received a \$1,000 scholarship, and \$250 awards were made to Sabera Gumma of South-

field-Lathrup High and to Robert Chamli, also from North Farmington.

The Bishop's award went to Linda Kassab from Southfield-Lathrup.

High schools, besides Southfield-Lathrup and North Farmington, with students participating in the ceremony were Avondale, Berkley, Brother Rice, Detroit Catholic Central, Farmington, Ferndale, Groves, Harrison, Hazel Park, Kimball, Lamphere, Madison, Marian, Mercy, Mont, Oak Park, Pershing, Rochester Adams.

Other participating graduates were from St. Clement, Shrine, Southfield High, Sterling Heights, Troy Athens, West Bloomfield, West Highland and Western high schools.

Following the ceremony, graduates gathered with their parents for a reception and dinner.

District's future is explored

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public benefits. This year, a record 54 employees retired from Farmington Public Schools, where only 10-15 would have normally retired.

In the area of physical resources, heating/ventilating problems, barrier-free buildings and general aesthetics were areas of concern for the district, according to Jack Lawing, the district's director of administrative services, who chaired this committee.

Lawing's committee discovered more than 1 million square feet of buildings to review, and surveyed building principals and supervisors to determine problem areas.

THE COMMITTEE'S study was broken down into the areas of special education, ancillary services, elementary schools, middle schools and high schools. Lawing called the proposed, needed work "an expensive proposition."

"Dramatic things have happened in our district," reported John Summerlee, assistant principal at Harrison High School and chairman of the committee.

His two-person committee reviewed information from the district's personnel office, a study from Michigan State University and a recent study done through the district's

Elementary School Boundaries Committee, to arrive at its five-year projections.

The mix of declining enrollment and retiring employees will be an important factor for the district to consider, Summerlee said. He estimates that more than 30 percent of Farmington's employees will be eligible to retire during the next five years, and that by 1993 there may be a turnover in Farmington as high as 200 employees.

WHEN REVIEWING the early education program in Farmington,

Mary Lou Sommerville said "the concept of 'the more the better' or 'the earlier the better' is not necessarily appropriate."

The supervisor of Alameda Early Education Center and chairwoman for the early childhood committee said "play is child's work."

"If we try too soon to put pencil in kids' hand . . . we're going to lose something down the road."

Her committee also called for an extended day for kindergarten and a commitment to early education staff development and in-service for that level.

Garver victorious

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Her first few days as Miss Michigan were spent "filling out loads of contracts for tons of appearances," she said in a phone-call interview.

For the summer, she'll be working with Miss Michigan Pageant director Jack Bushong, the pageant's official hairdresser Peggy White, other pageant officials, and chaperones as she fulfills a heavy schedule for appearances in summer festivals, fairs, parades and store openings.

SHE IS also being called upon as

a performer for other local pageants around the state, and she will be back home to turn over her Miss Farmington crown to Miss Farmington of 1988 at the close of the pageant here Monday, July 14, in Vladimir.

Whatever time is left over, she'll spend "popping up at Patricia Stevens," she said, and with the help of state pageant officials who will be with her in Atlantic City, N.J., when she represents the state in the Miss America Pageant in September.