

# Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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## Traffic

### Woes go beyond main roads

**C**ONGESTED TRAFFIC is a sign of the times. Ten years ago, the Grand River-Farmington Road intersection signaled the crossroads for an ailing retail district. Today, it's the gateway to booming northwest Oakland County.

In recent years, speeding, growing noise and cut-through traffic have been the biggest quality-of-life threats for families living in the nearby neighborhoods.

Given that, the Farmington City Council acted responsibly Dec. 7 in commissioning a new study to address downtown traffic, particularly cries for lower speeds, no "through" traffic and improving the downtown bypass.

Chances are the newly commissioned study would have come about anyway. But it's hard to pinpoint when. The city council didn't previously volunteer that a new traffic study was high priority.

The Farmington Department of Public Safety has caught flack for allowing Grand River, Shiawassee and Farmington Road to become speedways. But let's be honest: officers haven't been idly watching. Patrol cars are evident at all hours. Speed, and you're risking a ticket and fine.

**CITY LEADERS** should have dismissed the significance of traffic problems downtown. But instead, they acknowledged the urgency in re-evaluating traffic patterns. Credit them with beginning Grand River traffic counts even before commissioning the \$4,500 study.

They also inspired a sense of community by eagerly agreeing to work with Old Village Association (OVA) residents in developing a way to regain their neighborhood from the onslaught of traffic.

OVA Traffic Committee recommendations include lower speed limits, "no parking" areas, more traffic signals and signs, special traffic enforcement officers and increased access to the

**But let's keep emotion from clouding effect.**

M-102 bypass around downtown.

The Michigan Department of Transportation is only now starting to install its long-promised traffic light at Grove, to help pedestrians cross Grand River without playing Russian roulette.

Chairman Kenneth Chiara wisely didn't try to pass off OVA Traffic Committee recommendations as demands. As he put it: "We are not traffic engineers. We are only neighbors concerned about the safety of our residents."

**BUT LET'S** keep emotion from clouding effect.

Banning parking on southbound Farmington Road at Grand River to create a left turn lane would further deplete already limited parking spaces downtown.

Increasing access to M-102 would require buying up a lot of private property, tearing down buildings and incurring the wrath of bordering residents.

Limiting through traffic to Grand River and Farmington Road would create the potential for rush-hour gridlock on those narrow arteries.

Recommended changes could trigger other ramifications as well. That's why they're destined for scrutiny by all involved — traffic engineers, city leaders and residents alike.

Injury accidents in Farmington are down and no one has died in a crash since 1981, thanks in part to increased use of seat belts. But there's no hint that improvements to the Grand River corridor aren't in order.

Meanwhile, the traffic study coalition will represent more than a joint effort. It will test just how well representative democracy works at the grass-roots level in a small town where people pride themselves on working together.

**A cigarette tax increase might be a short-term answer to Wayne County's longstanding budget problems, but the solution should not go up in smoke.**

and sometimes funded by state and federal policy — is sometimes harmful to Wayne County when firms move to greener locations. Wayne County communities also give tax breaks that may attract firms but which also reduce the county's property tax intake.

**THAT SAID**, it seems likely the state Legislature will move this week to help Wayne County. That's fine, but these caveats should be included in a bailout plan:

- Revenues raised to eliminate the deficit should be of a finite nature. When the debt is eliminated, the tax or fee increase should similarly "sunset."

- Wayne County residents and officials should realize that they must live within their means and that there are some worthwhile services — such as parks — which the county may not be able to provide if the voters won't pay for them. A county millage increase may be needed beyond the bailout.

At the same time, McNamara should resist cutting areas such as mental health whose recipients are among those with the least representation and who already are getting the short end of the stick.

Finally, state legislators must come to the politically unpopular realization that some problems require a metropolitan solution. While Wayne County sits a stone's throw from the poor house, neighboring Oakland County views life from a penthouse. County commissioners there are adding positions thanks to a budget that spends 8 percent more than last year, even though the county doesn't need to levy its entire authorized tax rate. One of Oakland's big debates in the last year was how to distribute a budget surplus. Wayne County officials must salivate with envy.

Oakland County does a good job managing its money. But its financial health is due greatly to a large, expanding tax base. If Wayne County had access to a larger share of southeastern Michigan's building boom, it might better deal with its finances. Share-the-wealth programs are not very popular, particularly in well-off enclaves of Oakland County, but radical and unselfish leadership is needed to protect the government and assets of Wayne County.

**NEWS ITEM: WAYNE COUNTY SEEKS BUDGET HELP BY INCREASING CIGGY TAX.**



## News mill grinds on as year nears close

NEWSBEAT NIBBLES as 1987 draws to a close:

• Mayor Ben Marks called it "a historic meeting."

I'm not sure how historic it was. Still, it not only brought the Farmington Hills City Council and the Farmington Board of Education together across a table in Heritage Park's Estate House Dec. 6, it was informative to boot.

Marks said he didn't think the two governing boards were ever adversaries, even though that aura seems to persist.

Others who have followed local politics say if the boards never had an adversarial relationship, they were mighty close at times in the past.

I've never thought of them in that light, even during the controversy that broke out two years ago over Farmington Hills' proposed tax increment financing authority to pay for improving the western reaches of 12 Mile. That was a difference of opinion.

Last week's meeting, as Marks said, should put the adversarial aura "to rest once and for all."

I left the meeting delighted to learn about how many projects the city and the schools are involved in, and their willingness to build on that cooperative spirit. City manager William Costick's interest in tapping assistant superintendent Judith Whitt's staff development program as he develops something similar for the city is the exact reaction, I think, Mayor Marks hoped to elicit.

I agree with the mayor that the meeting should be the first of periodic get-togethers. As he put it, "When



**Bob Sklar**

you come right down to it, we have the same intentions, the same goals. Our services come out of the same taxpayer dollars."

The ice now broken, future meetings should include the Farmington City Council and tackle more meaty issues — the state of the property tax, Heritage Park as an educational resource, sidewalk and pathway needs, recreational services.

• They lost the game. But they still came out winners.

Throttled by Grand Rapids Catholic Central in the state Class B high school football championships, the Farmington Hills Harrison Hawks and their coach, John Herrington, stood tall in defeat. They graciously credited GRCC with outgunning them on the gridiron that particular Saturday in November.

But don't think the Hawks didn't have the will to win.

As Chris Cox, the All-State linebacker who doubled as the center on offense, emotionally put it: "It's a pretty sad moment. This was my last game at Harrison. I can't say how much I wanted to win."

• Overlooked by her surprising defeat for re-election to the city council was Joan Dudley's call for

continued sidewalk and expanded bike path development along major roads in Farmington Hills.

Having connecting sidewalks and pathways along major roads indeed would offer a healthy alternative for trips to a neighboring suburb or a nearby store. It also would make walking, jogging and bike riding safer.

Lack of money is a key reason why so few bike paths are evident along the city's thoroughfares. But other cities have tax dollars dedicated exclusively to pathway development. Next year, I'd urge the Farmington Hills City Council to explore the merits of that method of funding.

• The turnout for the Downtown Farmington Christmas Walk Sunday, Nov. 22, wasn't overwhelming.

But no matter. The decorations and entertainment helped reinforce the city's small-town charm. And you couldn't help but feel impressed by the cooperative spirit between the Downtown Development Authority and the Downtown Farmington Business Association.

Sure the DDA is pouring \$1.4 million into central business district public improvements. But without the support of the folks who have day to day contact with downtown visitors, namely the merchants, no amount of sidewalk, greenery and amenity improvements would much matter.

One suggestion: next year, move the walk to a Saturday, when more people are more apt to plan a visit downtown.

• Stop by the Farmington Historical Museum on Grand River for an enjoyable trip back in time. Hours are expanded for the holiday season.

## Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

### Government: just got bigger

To the editor:  
The High Risk Occupational Disease Notification and Prevention Act, House Resolution 162, is big government at its worst.

This act seeks to balloon an already mind-boggling amount of litigation our courts must deal with on a daily basis. The real tragedy will come about when H.R. 162 begins to squeeze our farms and businesses.

Like many other proposals, this act is born of the best intentions. Insuring the protection of American workers is a responsibility which every congressional representative must accept.

H.R. 162 would require the mass notification of workers exposed to any type of toxic material. Affected individuals must then be shifted to non-hazardous positions in the company. If these could not be found (in case of so many small firms), the company would be required to compensate the individual for a year.

On closer examination, troubling possibilities begin to emerge. Individuals coming into contact with any level of hazardous substance will re-

quire notification, not simply federally proscribed danger levels, but any contact whatsoever.

One dangerous aspect of this bill is the broad language used to define a hazardous substance. Because sunlight is a carcinogen, almost every agricultural worker would require notification, which could lead to litigation against his or her employer. Businesses and farms would be required to purchase expensive health insurance or begin equally costly programs of medical monitoring.

It is an undisputed fact that some hazardous substances are indigenous to certain industries. Yet H.R. 162, despite its title, contains little provision for alleviating current problems with hazardous substance exposure. H.R. 162 addresses past injuries but contains little preventive medicine.

Clearly, a better solution would have been to strengthen existing federal machinery designed to monitor and safeguard the work place.

As H.R. 162 is passed on to the Senate, I hope the wisdom of our founders is kept in mind when our senators examine this proposal. Increasing the size and scope of an already vast federal domain is not always the answer.

William Broomfield,  
U.S. representative.

18th District

### Girl Scouts offer thanks

To the editor:

The Larkshire Girl Scouts would like to extend a big thank you to all the wonderful people at the Grand River-Halsted K mart.

We collected money to buy clothes for a needy child at our school. We hoped to be able to buy several outfits for this young student. Thanks to the generosity of K mart, we were able to purchase six complete outfits and accessories and we were able to supplement this with a \$25 toy donation.

The K mart staff was very helpful, and so nice to work with. There was not a "Scrooge" in the store as we shopped. We know for sure the holiday spirit is alive and well at K mart.

Thanks so much for all of those employees who helped us make this such a special Christmas for a needy child.

Deborah Klode,  
Larkshire School  
Farmington Hills

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Sculpture atop City-County Building in Detroit.