

# Opinion

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## Take pains Be cautious in redistricting

**H**ORACE MANN, a 19th century pioneer of the American public school system, would have been proud.

It was a productive town meeting focusing on pressing educational concerns of the day.

Decorum reigned. And everybody got to talk, despite some sharply diverging views.

There were no recall threats, no slurs and, with few exceptions, no outbursts.

But the real worth of the study session hosted by the Farmington Board of Education Jan. 19 lies in the feedback the public provided about Citizens Planning Panel-proposed boundary and facility changes, particularly at the elementary level.

Superintendent Graham Lewis called the meeting "democracy in action." But many parents persuasively argued that problems in obtaining the details hampered them in reacting thoroughly to the proposals.

THE SCHOOL board defused a potential powderkeg by its willingness to stay all night, if necessary, to let folks have their say about an emotional issue. It also promised to scrutinize feedback from the Citizens Planning Panel, the public and the administration before framing a final plan by the end of March, in time for the next school year.

Options were plentiful — building a new elementary, recommissioning now-closed elementaries, enlarging existing elementaries, changing attendance boundaries, developing a magnet elementary program for special achievers, instituting year-round school.

The only near-unanimous proposal calls for a new elementary school on 11 Mile, east of Halsted, to accommodate a surge in westside residential growth.

Opponents branded the elementary subcommittee's proposals a patchwork quilt that amounted to little more than student shuffling, the kind of thing professional planners would never do.

The irony is that a subcommittee of professional planners would have been roundly criticized for lacking the sensitivity only parents

could provide.

PARENTS, WHO acknowledged that the Citizens Planning Panel had a thankless task, opposed the elementary redistricting proposals on two grounds: travel time and student adjustment.

Some parents said busing children away from the school in their neighborhood to achieve enrollment balance threatened their property values and the sense of family a neighborhood school provides.

They argued that transferring their students would strain friendships, break up neighborhoods, cause long bus rides and disrupt learning patterns during a youngster's most impressionable years.

Many parents said they bought houses because of the elementary school in their neighborhood. But no school attendance boundary is guaranteed — ever. People move, families age, population shifts, schools close. That's the natural order of things.

People give a school its character, not the building. Jagged lines on attendance boundary maps neither provide substance to a school nor ultimately shape its destiny. Motivated students, innovative teachers, streetwise administrators and open-minded parents do. The truth is, kids often are more adaptive than adults give them credit for.

STILL, MINIMUM student transfers should be utmost in whichever plan the school board adopts to ease overcrowding and to work the yet-to-be-built new elementary into the system.

We're eager to review the superintendent's proposed "no boundary change" recommendation, which was revealed Tuesday.

The school board should work from the premise that student transfers will only occur when there's no practical alternative. Children who are moved should not be moved again during their elementary school years, except those who may be temporarily transferred until a new westside school is built.

The sense of community that our elementary schools help to create should be allowed to blossom, not wilt.

O'HANES



## Notes and comment as 1988 presses onward

THINGS I'VE been wanting to say:

● He struck a responsive chord. At a Cultural Awareness Committee meeting Jan. 6, Robert Willis, the NAACP Oakland County chapter president, said the Farmington area is perceived as hostile toward racial minorities.

As he put it: "You have to somehow get to the world and say, 'No, we are not that hostile group.' And I'm sure that's a thing that's not going to come in the next two or three weeks, to say, 'We are the kind of community that will welcome you.'"

Rather than brushing away that perception as an isolated view, the Farmington Hills City Council accepted the challenge and responded quickly.

On the anniversary of slain civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday Jan. 18, the council adopted a resolution declaring Farmington Hills an open community that welcomes all people, regardless of their ancestry.

It pledged to encourage "through cooperation, education and example, the understanding of (our) diverse cultures and religions into one caring, concerned community."



**Bob Sklar**

Farmington council members, are you listening?

The Cultural Awareness Committee is setting the stage for heightened appreciation of our multi-ethnicity.

But it's up to each of us who live or work here to help strip away the seeds from which perceptions of hostility and prejudice have grown.

● Aglow with holiday tree lighting, bright seasonal banners and decorative window displays, Farmington's central business district looked the part of a bustling downtown during the otherwise dreary days of December.

Credit goes to the Downtown Development Authority, the Farmington City Council and the Downtown Farmington Business Association, which have teamed to rekindle Grand River and Farmington Road as a healthy retail crossroads.

Downtown Farmington indeed has

come a long way since those touch-and-go days during the mid-70s when Federal's failed and the entire central business district felt the aftereffect.

● Given the Farmington Hills City Council has taken a hard line in banning dogs from city parks and preventing loitering in adjacent parking lots, it'll be interesting to watch how strictly city officials enforce anti-littering laws there.

Neither Heritage Park nor Pioneer Park is in heavy use yet. Attacking litter during their first years of wide use is critical to getting park-goers in the mood of rigorous enforcement.

Dogs basically create just one form of mess. But people, loiterers or otherwise, create many: aluminum cans, polystyrene burger containers, plastic picnic utensils and other non-biodegradable forms. There's no sign the city isn't committed to assuring that park visitors, expecting a natural habitat, don't instead find countless remnants from someone else's good times.

But I think it's timely for those of us who strongly support litter-free parks to speak up, before the litterbugs have a chance to ply their trade in Farmington Hills' newest and largest parks.

## Stoddard Sad end to banking career

SUMMARIZING the defense case, attorney Neil Fink apparently meant to be funny when he told federal jurors of the 50th birthday present that employees gave to Stanford C. Stoddard. It was a T-shirt with the words: Michigan National Bank — sole proprietorship.

Some joke. The jury convicted the former chairman of the board of defrauding the bank in a deal involving rent on a Jackson building of which Stoddard became owner. The judge on Jan. 8 gave Stoddard three years in prison. He's free on bond during an appeal.

Meanwhile, a federal administrative law judge last fall found against Stoddard in a case brought by the U.S. Comptroller of the Currency, regulator of national banks. The finding was that Stoddard should be banned from working for a national bank. The list of counts is long, but the gist is that the banker from Birmingham didn't know where the bank's interests left off and his own interests, his own property, his own church and his own family began.

THROUGH IT all, Stoddard maintained his innocence in an interesting way.

His defense cited elaborate calculations to demonstrate that the prices in the Jackson transaction were fair. What the defense didn't address was the propriety of his being on both sides of a bank transaction.



**Stanford C. Stoddard**

**As the U.S. attorney put it, Stoddard "failed to put his fiduciary duty to depositors above his own gain."**

In the comptroller hearing, Stoddard's approach was best exemplified in testimony of a business associate, a manufacturer, who said, "The best way to get and keep a customer was to be a personal friend." The manufacturer thought it perfectly proper that Stoddard invited business associates to his daughter's wedding and had Michigan National pick up the bill.

Stoddard and his friends seem perfectly sincere that such practices are not only legal but proper. The average person, however, is appalled at the blurred line between personal expenses and business expenses.

And that appears to be the reason for Stoddard's downfall. As the U.S. attorney put it, Stoddard "failed to put his fiduciary duty to depositors above his own gain."

In other words — "sole proprietorship."

IT WAS A SAD end to the career of a truly historic figure. And Bud Stoddard will loom large in history books as a worker of economic change than will the judge who sentenced him, the attorneys who tried him and the jurors who convicted him.

He pushed, pushed, pushed for statewide banking, a goal realized last year with a new bank law allowing holding companies to bring all subsidiary banks under a single charter. Now you can live in one corner of the state and cash on the other because it's all the same bank.

Stoddard pushed Saturday banking for the benefit of small customers and to the horror of stodgy members of the industry.

He pushed credit cards, and today Michigan National is reportedly the largest credit card issuer in the state. He saw automatic teller machines as the wave of the future.

His father, Howard J. Stoddard, launched the business in the Great Depression of the 1930s with a single Lansing bank and expanded. Bud Stoddard took over in 1972, after his father's death, and expanded the empire across the state.

How to sum it up? One thinks of the lines about "the noblest Roman of them all. . . the elements so mix'd in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man!'" It was Antony's tribute to Brutus.

## 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.

### Coverage is not complete

To the editor:

It is with some reluctance that I comment on your recent editorial dealing with election expenditures. In view of the Observer's excellent coverage of the recent city campaign.

While how much a candidate raises and spends is a legitimate part of campaign coverage, your paper's handling of the issue seemed excessive at times and incomplete in others.

Campaign spending is a necessary part of the story of an election but its role should be part of overall coverage, which includes candidate qualifications, performance, program, effectiveness and record of community activity.

For instance, in the story based on pre-election campaign finance reports, most of the item was devoted to details of the statements filed by Mrs. Jean Fox and I. Since Mrs. Fox and I filed complete statements and did so on time, we were scrutinized to the extent that some of the other candidates were not because they missed the deadline.

What bothered me about that report was the overemphasis on so-called partisan contributions — Republicans for Mrs. Fox and Democrats for myself.

Raising money for political campaign is difficult, especially when you are running for local offices. Strangers are not going to contribute to your campaign and even many friends won't. So you end up going to

people you have worked with politically and family members.

Since Mrs. Fox has been active in the Republican Party, most of her political supporters would naturally be Republicans. The same is true with myself on the Democratic side.

Probably the fairest way to handle campaign contributions and expenditures is to list them all and let the voter decide. In my campaign, most of the more than 100 contributors were Farmington-Farmington Hills residents and most gave \$25 or less.

I do agree with the editorial's concern over the escalating costs of campaigns. The problem is finding a solution that treats all candidates fairly.

The known choices — legislated limits on contributions and expenditures, voluntary agreements on spending limits, and public financing — have not solved all the problems.

Limits cannot be applied to a candidate's own contributions, according to court rulings. Voluntary limits only work if all candidates agree and fully report their expenditures.

Any applications of limits, even if they could be made to stick, would give an edge to incumbents, who are better known and have other advantages. Public financing has been tried with some success in the presidential and governor's races because of the income tax deduction method of raising the funds. We have no such source of money in local races.

Until a better plan is developed, we will have to struggle with the present one, as imperfect as it is. What would help cut down on the influence of money in campaigns is if more individuals would get involved and more organizations would invite

candidates to election forums or debates. Candidates might also consider joint mailings to cut down on costs.

Aldo Vagnoni,  
Farmington Hills

### Board must oppose plan

To the editor:

It is essential that the school board publicly state its opposition to the citizens' redistricting plan before the Feb. 9 millage renewal vote.

Despite the lack of any direct link between the millage and the redistricting plan, the political reality is that the millage may be defeated unless the board takes immediate, clear and public action to voice its intention to reject the redistricting plan. I draw this conclusion based upon the intensity of organized community activity in opposition to the redistricting plan.

Please do not overlook in your statement the residents of Sections 15-18, who want their children to attend North Farmington, not Harrison. A major consideration in the selection of our homes was based on our children attending North. Our children's friends will be attending North. Any transportation to Harrison for our children would involve the documented most dangerous intersection in Oakland County, 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

Ann Quising,  
Farmington Hills

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