

# Opinion

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

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## Overdue

### Road cries out for upgrading

**I**T'S NO panacea. But it should help. An administrative plan to improve safety and aesthetics along northern Orchard Lake Road will go a long way toward making Farmington Hills' main retail corridor seem more than a giant parking lot.

"We've got an image of Orchard Lake Road. With the cooperation of everyone here, we can enhance that image for the benefit of residents, visitors and property owners," senior planner Callum Murray told a gathering of city leaders Jan. 20.

Murray and traffic engineer Kevin McCarthy "engendered oohs and ahhs from their attentive audience as they unveiled ideas to turn a drive along Orchard Lake Road into something other than Russian roulette. Four of the city's most dangerous intersections line the stretch between Oakland Community College and 14 Mile.

Drivers face a real-life "dodge-em"; 101 driveway approaches, 12 intersections and nine traffic lights. More than 40,500 cars travel the route; the number is growing by 7 percent yearly.

**B**UT NO sooner did Murray and McCarthy indicate hopes than city manager William Costick put them in perspective, saying: "To accomplish a project like this, it's going to take a lot of cooperation — a lot of private money as well as public money."

Still, the presentation was timely. Feedback from Orchard Lake Road property owners will be sought this spring as 1988-89 budget planning begins.

So the plan is more than a distant hope. Says Costick: "We don't hope to get everybody's cooperation simultaneously. But we're going to start the ball in motion."

Targeted improvements include closing 10 percent of the 101 driveway approaches to cut down on seemingly endless access points. Incoming driveways will be widened, rebuilt, marked and signed, as needed, to improve traffic flow and safety.

**"We've got an image of Orchard Lake Road. With the cooperation of everyone here, we can enhance that image for the benefit of residents, visitors and property owners."**

— Callum Murray  
senior planner

A traffic light will be added at Bristol Lane, north of 12 Mile, to provide a gap in traffic for motorists trying to enter Orchard Lake Road from nearby driveways.

Special traffic changes are planned near K mart and Tally Hall, a treacherous spot where mashups or near-mashups seem almost as prevalent as store sales.

**T**O COMPLEMENT improved traffic conditions, the city plans to reinforce private beautification efforts through plantings in the right of way and on parking-lot islands.

Councilman Joe Alkateeb raised a good point in suggesting that plans include low-level lighting to help link the 2.4-mile stretch as Farmington Hills' downtown.

Though exciting, the plan is really a reaction to a problem that would have been better attacked through a master road beautification plan, something nonexistent in Farmington Hills.

As landscape architect John Grissim aptly put it, let's provide continuity in landscaping "before it's too late."

He said Orchard Lake Road, Northwestern Highway and western 12 Mile Road are in desperate need of a plan that coordinates beautification.

We'd urge the city council to hear Grissim's power-up plea: "We got to get going. We're growing so darn fast. We're going to lose it."

Drive around the city, and it's quickly driven home just how true Grissim's words ring.

## Soapy's way

### Williams had his priorities

**A**S GOVERNOR for 12 years, G. Mennen Williams appointed dozens — if not hundreds — of judges, and he had a reputation for picking excellent ones.

As a state Supreme Court justice for 16 years, he reviewed the decisions of lower court judges and decided on disciplinary measures, when necessary.

One day during his last year on the high court, Chief Justice Williams visited the editors of Observer & Eccentric Newspapers to talk about how the courts were financed. At the end, we asked him advice on a practical problem — how to assess judicial candidates for endorsement, since they can't discuss specific cases and tended to talk in generalities.

**F**IRST, WILLIAMS said, he looked at their college transcripts. He wanted bright, educated minds in the courts.

**The late Michigan statesman had a formula for assessing candidates for the bench.**

Second, he looked for religious commitment. It didn't have to be any particular faith. The point was that a judge had to be answerable to something higher than human law.

Third, he looked for community service. It wasn't enough to be on bar association committees or make good money winning cases. There had to be a notion of public service.

That was how G. Mennen Williams, who died Tuesday at 76, picked judges. That was how he himself lived. That is what he taught us.

## Not perfect

### But our weather is better

**I**NSTEAD OF griping about southeastern Michigan's weather, we ought to boast about it.

Southeastern Michigan's economic development leaders should be constantly comparing our mild climate to the wretched excesses of neighboring regions.

Those hurricanes are on the Gulf. Those avalanches are in Colorado. That foot-and-a-half of snow fell on a Mississippi River metropolis with only three snowplows. Those forest fires threatening luxury homes during a drought are in California.

Floods are rare compared to many areas of the country because our 31 inches of precipitation are spread across all 12 months.

Droughts occur, but they're relatively mild. Southeastern Michigan gets an average of 32 inches of snow per winter. Buffalo gets 88, Cleveland 50, Pittsburgh 47.

**L**AST SUMMER was a mite warm by our standards.

**Southeastern Michigan economic development leaders should be constantly comparing our mild climate to the wretched excesses of neighboring regions.**

But consider the searing heat of the Great Plains and prairie states on the same latitudes as this. That was heat.

In places like Dallas, August is so wretched that you never hear a bird sing, a dog bark or a playing child shout outdoors.

Our crop failures are far fewer than in most agricultural areas, thanks to the Great Lakes.

The only drawback is that the lakes give us more cloud cover than other areas. But we never said southeastern Michigan's climate is perfect. Just better than everyone else's.

EXCUSE

## The Return of SUPER SEWER



## Matt Leiter, a victor; cast vote responsibly

SOME OF what's on my mind:

• **Life goes on.** But Matthew Leiter's memory won't be forgotten.

Characterized as warm, witty and giving, the 17-year-old junior left an indelible imprint on faculty, staff, coaches, teammates and fellow students at North Farmington High School.

A reserve forward, Matt collapsed and died shortly after playing the final minutes of his first varsity basketball game Jan. 26, the victim of apparent cardiac arrest.

A basketball junkie, as he was fondly called, Matt had been striving to improve in hopes of starting next year.

Raiders coach Tom Negoshian told our sports editor, Dan O'Meara, "He got into the game, scored his first basket, and he was smiling and happy as can be, with all of his goals still ahead of him. Because of that, I can say he was the victor."

So full of vigor and purpose after turning around academically and socially, Matt was just beginning to live life to the fullest, family members said.

Coping with the sudden death of a seemingly healthy teenager can be a devastating blow for the ill-prepared.



Bob Sklar

That's why it was so nice to see North Farmington High's crisis team spring into action, providing psychologists and counselors to help students through the mourning period.

Negoshian, who kept his players together most of the day following the tragedy, caught the essence of what's important now: "I'm not even worried about the (remaining) games. I'm worried about the emotional stability of the rest of the kids, that they're able to carry on with the rest of life."

"I think that's what we all should care about."

The gutsy way Matt found his niche, not only in basketball but also in life, should be inspiration enough for anyone.

• **It's hard to believe** some voters have threatened to reject Farmington Public Schools' request to renew 5.75 mills for operations in protest to

citizens committee-proposed school attendance boundary changes.

As we asserted in endorsing the request, you don't jeopardize the well-balanced education of this community's young people for the sake of making an unrelated political statement. Besides, the proposed changes now seem to have little school board support.

The renewal represents \$8 million — 12 percent of the district's \$66 million operating budget.

Bluntly put, sweeping cuts, touching every facet of programming, staffing and facility improvements, would accompany a no vote.

Sure the district has been a hotbed for land development and property values. So taxpayers indeed have a right to press for a corresponding lower tax levy, beyond the effects of the Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment.

But the time to do that is at the truth-in-taxation hearings each spring. There, taxpayers can stand up and say, "Hey, you're getting more dollars because property values are up. Make the case to us that you need the extra dollars."

Vote responsibly Tuesday. As trustee James Abernethy put it: "I can think of no action that would be more counterproductive than a no vote as a protest vote."

## 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.

## Parks panel very diverse

To the editor:

Your Bob Sklar assumes in his editorial, "Historic District Panel should review Spicer" (Jan. 21), that only one group is represented in the Parks and Recreation Commission's efforts to determine use for the Spicer House.

He is wrong.

Our commission is made up of people representing many interests and we try to represent the interests of the entire community. Our commission is made up of people from varied backgrounds, including historical.

We have called on all our experience as we reviewed the decision we would recommend to city council. When we didn't think we knew enough, we asked for professional input.

Mr. Sklar also suggests that . . . "two groups with different expertise . . . rather than just one" would be better. The question is, why just two groups? The community is made up of many interests, not just historical.

When the Parks and Rec Commission began its efforts to determine what to do with the entire 211 acres, including the buildings, it surveyed the entire community, not just one or two groups. The Observer helped us do that.

All through our discussions about what to do with the buildings, two things remained constant, in order of

importance:

1. Serve the community and taxpayers best and most economically.
  2. Preserve the historical and architectural integrity of the buildings.
- Having one group, the Parks and Recreation Commission, with its varied background, and calling upon the community and outside professionals, is the most efficient way of serving the people of Farmington Hills.

John J. Bailey, vice chair,  
Parks and Recreation Commission  
Farmington Hills

## Magnet idea not board's

To the editor:

After 14 months as a member of the Farmington High School Boundaries Citizens Committee, I feel compelled to tell you that the committee discussed, at length, the magnet school concept for the high school level.

After weeks of in-depth discussion and reviewing other districts' programs, our committee unanimously voted against the concept for the Farmington high schools. At no time did the committee suggest it should be a "strong future consideration," as stated in the Jan. 21 Observer article.

The magnet idea appears to be coming from the superintendent's office — regardless of the committee's recommendations. Comprehensive high schools seem to be the sensible approach to educate our high

school students. Advanced placement classes are offered at all high schools for those with extra needs.

On the whole, I feel our schools are providing a fine educational experience for the district's students. I feel we must remember the district is a public school system, and if a private education is desired, there are a number of alternatives.

Jody Smith,  
Farmington

## Tragedy was handled well

To the editor:

On Jan. 26, North Farmington High School experienced a tragic event, the death of a student, Matt Leiter, a good student, good athlete, but mostly a good friend to many.

We wish to express our gratitude to Mr. Donald Cowan, principal of North Farmington, and his fine staff, for the professional and compassionate way events were handled. And will continue to be addressed.

Last but not least, we thank our cross-town rival, Farmington High School, for the reception we received on Friday night, Jan. 29, at the basketball game.

Your caring and understanding was evident by your sportsmanship and kind words to a grieving team and student body. Thank you for being such great friends.

Carolyn E. Lowe,  
newsletter editor,  
The Raider Rap

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