



Farmington Observer

Volume 99 Number 47

Thursday, March 17, 1998

Farmington, Michigan

140 Pages

Twenty-Five Cents

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Magnet school lottery planned

By Casey Hans
staff writer

If applications for an elementary magnet program at Highmeadow School exceed the school's limits, enrollment will be determined by a lottery, school administrators said Tuesday.

All students — not only gifted — will be able to apply, but those in crowded schools will have a better chance of attending. Called "Common Campus," the magnet program was designed several weeks ago as

an alternative to massive elementary redistricting for Farmington Public Schools.

"Experienced districts with a magnet program have advised us that the lottery is the fairest way to handle enrollments," assistant superintendent Mary Lou Ankele said in a report. "We believe that parents know their children best and will make a wise choice between the environments in the home school and the Common Campus."

Gifted and talented students, who represent 15 percent of the district's

population, were originally slated to get the first chance to register for the two-year pilot.

That idea was rejected because of extensive overcrowding conditions at Longacre, Wood Creek, Larkshire and Flinders elementary, which will get two thirds of the 300 slots at the specialized school, according to Ankele. The remaining 100 spaces will be available to students at other schools.

Details of the program were presented to the Farmington school board Tuesday. "Overcrowding has

presented us with an opportunity," Ankele said.

Development for the program began in early February, after hundreds of Farmington parents spoke out against elementary boundary changes, proposed in light of extensive growth in elementary schools. At a meeting several weeks ago, the school board approved the magnet school concept as an alternative, plus building of a new elementary school on the district's west side.

Farmington school employees visited other magnet programs in Liv-

onia, Plymouth/Canton and Montclair, N.J.; they have also held numerous meetings to create a plan that can be ready this fall.

Trustee Janice Rolnick, and several parents at Tuesday's meeting, said they were disappointed the school would not exclusively house gifted students. Some also said they thought gifted students should be given first consideration, as originally discussed.

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Farmington FOCUS

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BITING comments. Farmington councilman Arnold Campbell suggested at a recent meeting that the city research possible regulations for pit bull dogs, known for their deadly bites. Campbell said he was interested in regulations passed by other area cities. Frank Lauhoff, public safety director, said there had been only a few incidents related to the dogs in the city.

TIMETABLE addressed. A new elementary school on the Farmington school district's west side could open as soon as September 1999, although it will be a "tremendous task" to do that, deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan said.

A bond issue to pay for the planned new school will most likely be taken to voters this fall, he said.

MORE music. Farmington High School social worker Katy Holleran will perform her brand of music during a Japanese ethnic presentation Wednesday at the Farmington Community Center.

Holleran plays Koto music on a zither-like instrument, which she will demonstrate during the dinner and program "Passage to Japan." Japanese customs and history will be discussed by Izumi and Steven Myers.

FOOTNOTES: One year ago this week — Betty Paine, who has raised more money and enlisted more supporters than her predecessors, will step down as executive director of the Farmington Community Center June 1.



RANDY BOST/Staff photographer

Middle school salute

Seventh graders Stacy Cemborski (left) and Katie O'Brien play the cornet and trumpet, respectively, in a band class at East Middle School in Farmington Hills. East is one of

four Farmington middle schools celebrating National Middle Level Education Week this week. For the story see Page 6A.

Take asbestos out of Spicer, Alkateeb says

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills city councilman Joe Alkateeb wants asbestos removed from the 62-year-old Eleanor Spicer estate house before the public uses the facility.

"As a public body and knowing the hazards of asbestos, we are going to use the building in the meantime . . . and if we are, we are exposing ourselves to a potential lawsuit by someone," Alkateeb asked.

Alkateeb insisted that the removal of asbestos from the Eleanor Spicer estate house be the top priority in a phased three-year restoration program for the historic facility.

"Once that building is used by the public and us knowing it . . . I don't think we are doing our job justice by voting for phase one as is," he continued.

The three-year restoration and renovation program calls for using the Spicer house as a visitors center for Heritage Park, on Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 Mile. The city council also approved putting the house in the city's protected historic district.



Joe Alkateeb
councilman

basement of the house in the second and third years.

"It is not in a friable form. It is immersed in the material on the walls on the plaster," special services director Dan Potter said.

Air-quality tests taken in the house show the house is safe, he added.

Asbestos fibers, if breathed, can cause lung cancer and other illness. The cancer may not show up for 40 years; the danger increases with earlier exposure.

The council took the first step in restoring and renovating the often controversial historical house by re-

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Citizens group fights suit to extend Northwestern

By Jeff Counts
staff writer

A lawsuit filed by the Oakland County Road Commission to force the state to extend Northwestern Highway is facing opposition from at least one citizens' group that has long been active in fighting the highway's extension through West Bloomfield Township.

"We'll do everything we can do to fight it," said Lorna McEwen, co-president of Concerned Citizens for West Bloomfield. "I think the suit is a waste of taxpayers' money."

The lawsuit, filed last week in Oakland County Circuit Court, asks that the Michigan Department of Transportation continue the road from where it ends at Orchard Lake Road through West Bloomfield, Commerce, White Lake, Highland, Rose and Tyrone townships to Fenton.

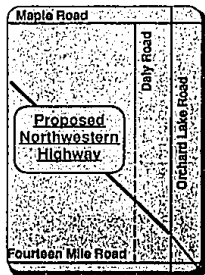
"I think it's a ploy by the road commission to get road money for other projects in Oakland County," said state Rep. David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield. "I'm opposed to any extension of Northwestern."

A spokesman for the road commission, Walt Doherty, refused to comment on Honigman's statement.

TENTATIVE STATE plans have called for extending the highway one mile north of Orchard Lake Road to Maple.

However, MDOT's William Hartwig said there are no plans on the books to extend Northwestern.

Hartwig, a project manager, said he was unaware of the lawsuit, and added that when he met with West



Bloomfield and road commission officials about one year ago, there were no plans made to extend the highway.

"Our position is that if the local residents feel a road would improve their situation, we'll take a look at it," he said. "Right now we're not actively pursuing an extension."

Any extension has been opposed by Concerned Citizens for West Bloomfield, which claims that it would dump traffic on Maple Road.

McEwen said that the citizens' group is opposed to anything that would bring more traffic to West Bloomfield.

"The township has voted in opposition to an extension," said McEwen. "I just hope the township's action reinforces that with the state and county."

Northwestern was supposed to be a major route through the

northwestern portion of Oakland County when construction was started in 1957, but money from a \$25 million bond issue ran out and the road ended at Telegraph.

THE PROJECT sparked lengthy court litigation in the mid 1970s, and eventually in 1977 the state Court of Appeals ruled that Oakland County could seek financial damages if the state didn't finish the road.

The current lawsuit asks that the 1957 contract be upheld and it contends that the state's refusal to finish the road has caused overcrowding on other alternative county roads. The county also contends that because of the overcrowding the cost of maintenance and the risk of traffic accidents have increased.

The project has been controversial for more than 20 years, with homeowner groups protesting any extension while the county and state fought over it in court.

In response to questions about the lawsuit Doherty read a prepared statement that was attributed to John L. Grubbs, road commission managing director.

"A contract signed March 7, 1957 between the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Oakland County Road Commission called for the construction and extension of Northwestern Highway as a limited access highway to U.S. 33 near Fenton. The work was never completed."

"The road commission has consistently requested of MDOT that it finish this project. These requests have gone unanswered. Therefore, the Oakland County Road Commission filed suit in an attempt to bring this matter to fruition."

THE ESTIMATED \$377,000 program was proposed by the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission and endorsed by the historic district commission. The plan calls for restoring the house and stabilizing it to prevent further deterioration while improving it for use as a visitors center.

The plan originally called for removing asbestos in the walls and

Special services eyes new offices

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Some are willing to take a look at it. Others aren't.

The Farmington Hills City Council is set to take a serious look at building a new facility for the special services department in Heritage Park.

Council members agreed to wait, think it over for two weeks and again discuss on March 26 whether architectural plans and cost estimates should be drafted for a proposed 3,000-square-foot building in the park on Farmington Road, between 10 and 11 Mile. Plans would cost about \$5,000.

Architect Mike Kirk of Kirk & Koskela architects, Detroit, who made the renovation plans for the Spicer estate house, estimated the cost of a new building at about \$350,000. He acknowledged that the price would be closer to \$500,000 when the cost of landscaping and other site work, including a parking lot, is added.

With city manager William Cock's blessing, special services director Dan Potter documented in a report the need for a new building at the park. Among the reasons are

cramped conditions at city hall and city hall renovation plans that include moving special services.

THE ADMINISTRATION proposal calls for putting the new building near the park's entrance on Farmington Road. Screening would be used to buffer it from houses along the thoroughfare as well as from the Normandy Hills subdivision immediately north of the park, according to Potter.

Other reasons offered for a new building include expanded parks and recreation programs, which will require the special services' proximity to the park as well as more space. Yet city administrators' ideas for a new building were not met fondly by some council members.

"I have some philosophical problems with this proposal," said councilman Jean Fox, an advocate for maintaining the 21 acres as a passive park. "What happened to the original concept of a natural beauty park?"

A parking lot, lighting and utility lines are incompatible with a passive park, Fox said. The city's master land use plan also shows the

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