

Opinion

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(BAP)

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Slow down Rethink park office building

HERITAGE Park is home to some of southeast Michigan's most panoramic vistas. It's the crown jewel in Farmington Hills' growing parks network.

So it makes sense to base some Department of Special Services Parks and Recreation Division administrators there.

But a 3,000-square-foot office building, no matter how nicely designed and landscaped, simply has no place in a natural beauty park. As proposed by city manager William Costick, the one-story, sloped-roof building would house the special services department as well as a public restroom wing.

Costick has asked the city council to spend up to \$6,000 for conceptual design plans for a rustic-style office building with meeting rooms, landscaped grounds and a 60-car lot. The administrative complex, costing upwards of \$500,000, would be nestled in a wooded, illuminated area south of Normandy Hills, a residential subdivision.

Costick says the complex would not only improve cramped work stations at city hall, but would also place the special services department in the midst of its top responsibility, which is parks management.

The city manager's noble pursuit of more pleasant working conditions notwithstanding, we believe the Department of Special Services should remain based at city hall.

ENLARGING THE city hall or buying nearby land for an adjacent facility might be options worth exploring.

We have no problem with a field office at Heritage Park to help serve the city's expanding parks and rec programs. Our first choice would be in a wing of the new visitors center, planned for the park's historic estate house.

Dennis Fitzgerald, who chairs the hard working parks and recreation commission, pointed out that the 4,200-square-foot farmhouse is larger than most visitors centers nationwide. So at least on paper it should be able to accommodate some parks and rec offices. Public restrooms could be

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built elsewhere on the grounds.

Only after more definitive reasons as to why that option wouldn't work — wiring, walls, whatever — would we support consideration of a separate, but downsized park office.

Councilwoman Jean Fox raised a key point when she questioned whether the city's pledge to keep the park passive when it sought a half mill for parks development two years ago would allow a new administrative building.

DRIVES ALONG 12 Mile or Northwestern Highway provide all the views of office buildings you'd ever want.

The last thing you'd expect to see in Heritage Park is another office building. As Fox put it, "You go out there and you're refreshed. Are you going to be refreshed if you come along another parking place with 60 more cars?"

We also echo councilman Aldo Vagnozzi's belief that the Department of Special Services' main presence ought to be at city hall, from both an efficiency and image standpoint.

The department, boasting a wealth of people-oriented services, is often the one bright spot for many folks visiting city hall on less upbeat business.

Councilman Joe Alkateeb gave everyone a chance to mull over the city administration's well-intentioned but incompatible plans for a park-house special services department Monday night when he won a two-week delay in making a decision.

"The problem is still there," he told the administration and design architect Mike Kirk. "We need to find a better solution."

Indeed, we certainly do.

A better way Bring back statewide primary

ENOUGH OF THIS caucus farce.

A bill has been introduced in the state Legislature to bring back Michigan's presidential primary.

We support it wholeheartedly. So should you. Hopefully, the Saturday, March 26, Democratic Party caucus will be the last. A statewide presidential preference primary could be reality by 1992. And once again Michigan voters would have a fair say in who would be the nominees for the presidential sweepstakes.

We saw how ridiculous the caucus system can be when the ordinarily staid Republicans haggled in Grand Rapids. A split caucus made fools of them all and transformed a very important process into a travesty.

We called for a statewide primary at the time of January's GOP debate.

Caucuses are just too limiting to be trusted with the serious business of selecting presidential candidates.

Some Democrats privately fear that caucuses' traditionally low participation levels might skew results and award a disproportionate share of delegates to candidates with hardcore, but shallow support.

Even though Democratic caucuses are open to anyone willing to declare themselves a party member, some party leaders worry that mainstream Democratic voters might sit the process out — never realizing they're eligible to vote.

THE LESS said about the recent GOP caucus mishmash, the better. Suffice it to say a handful of party activists battled and bickered while most mainstream GOP voters sat on the sidelines

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shaking their heads in wonderment at the tragicomic goings-on.

In comparison, the primary system gives more people a say in the nominating process. It's also easier to understand.

We've heard arguments against primaries. We know there are those who believe a "cross-over" voters are bound to gum up the works.

We know 35 cities, including Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills and Troy, would also be required to reschedule local elections if the primary were held March 17, 1992 — the date currently being discussed in the Legislature.

We also know some people consider primaries too costly. Frankly, none of those arguments are persuasive enough to block reintroduction of a state presidential primary.

It's true some GOP pranksters crossed over during Michigan's 1972 Democratic primary, casting ballots for George Wallace, who was anathema to state Democratic leaders.

But the bill being debated in the state Senate contains an important safeguard to prevent that kind of nonsense from recurring.

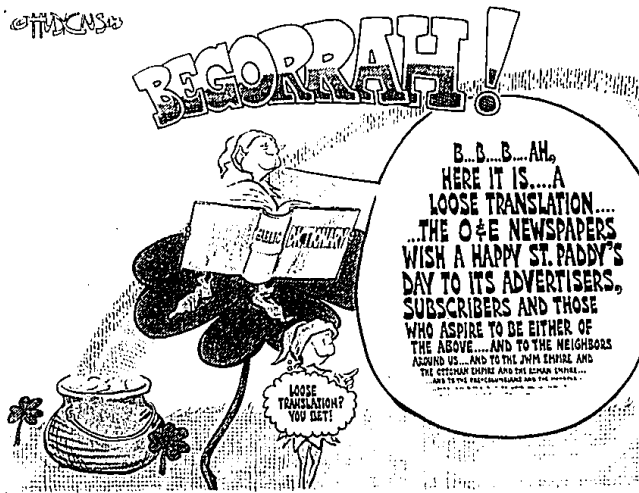
VOTERS WOULD be required to state their party preference at least 30 days in advance of the election to be eligible to vote. That, we believe, would prove more than adequate in discouraging pranksters. (In any event, national Democratic Party rules require voters to declare themselves party members before voting in their primaries.)

There are also ways to get around the scheduling difficulties. The 35 affected cities could either reschedule local elections or issue separate paper ballots to conduct the presidential primary.

As to cost, there's no getting around it — a presidential preference primary would be expensive. Michigan Secretary of State Richard Austin estimates it would cost the state around \$7 million to conduct the proposed 1992 primary. But a few million dollars is certainly worth it when it comes to choosing the leader of the free world.

If democracy is worth fighting for, it's worth paying for, too.

STICKS



Creative arts fair — an extra special time

HE WASN'T sure whether just drawing the dog was enough to satisfy the artist.

But he wanted her to know anyway that he would have liked to tell her personally how much he enjoyed her work.

"I'd like her to know I came back 10 times already to look at it," said Paul Barber, coordinator of the fifth annual Farmington Public Schools Creativity Springs Alive arts festival, March 4.

"But by my way of thinking, she'd like to see reaction to her work. I'd love the artist to be here to see the ooohs and aahs, the accolades, the appreciation."

Barber has been the energy cell behind this celebration of creative talent, which lets students express ideas and skills in different art forms.

ONLY TIME will tell how many students, prodded by what Barber calls "stimulation and nurturing," are able to parlay their creativity into productive problem solving. But I can't disagree with Barber when he says "part of quality raising is quality awareness."

A walk through the Farmington High gym March 4 underscored that creative expressions take countless



Bob Sklar

forms: scientific experiments, architectural designs, industrial technology, story writing, computer technology, television programs, journalism, marketing, inventions, art, poetry, dance, drama and music. You could enjoy everything from posterboard scenes, homemade stationery, student newspapers, a model steam engine and computerized housing designs to Haiku, yarn art, pottery, jazz music and classical dancing.

PARTICULARLY CLEVER was the "Invent America" display. It challenged students to invent solutions to everyday problems by using analytical and imaginative thinking. Inventions included eyeglasses with wipers, a no-spill wonder cup, a baby-crying quiet machine and a remote-control car starter. Beechview Elementary kids built small-scale reproductions of Farm-

ington landmarks like the old Owen House and today's Village Mall.

Gill Elementary youngsters made a patchwork quilt of lifestyle scenes. Larkshire Elementary youngsters served up plaster masks of themselves accompanied by a short autobiography.

From Longacre Elementary, there was a drug awareness display, from Wooddale, a handcrafted Winter Olympics setting.

THE INTENT isn't to make something for the festival. Teachers select projects done as classroom assignments but which offer a special flair.

Not every project makes the show. And not every display captures somebody's fancy. But, hey, disappointment provides incentive to strive even harder the next time.

As Barber put it, "We all enjoy cats on the back. They help build self-confidence. Any time you can build that in kids, they'll enjoy life more."

The teenagers who raised hell along Orchard Lake Road last winter drew bigger headlines. But take it from me: the artistry I saw at Creativity Springs Alive, although less sensational, deserved equal community attention.

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.

We treasure darling photo

To the editor:

Thank you for the darling picture of our daughter, Mary, on the front page of the Observer Feb. 25 captioned "Puppy friend."

Mary is the youngest of five children and her front page photo will be one we will always treasure.

Carol and Bob Latchney,
Farmington Hills

Column was unfair attack

To the editor:

It seems the editorial pages of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers are becoming filled with increasingly virulent attacks on attorneys who represent accident-injured people.

The latest punch comes from Steve Barnaby's column, "It's time to stop those who prey on tragedy" (Feb. 18). His simplistic attack on attorneys is served up like some sacrifice at a shrine to the insurance industry, corporations and their defense attorneys.

In Barnaby's myopic view, personal injury attorneys "prey" on victims — they're "ambulance chasers" and "self-employed scalpers" who try to figure out "another scam" to make "big bucks out of public misfortune."

You can do better than that Steve

— you left out "hired mouthpieces," "sharks" and "vultures."

Thanks, too, for opening my eyes, when all along I thought I have been making a living helping victims of drunk and negligent drivers, poorly designed and maintained roads and defective products.

At the same time, my colleagues and I can take satisfaction in the fact that our legal efforts have contributed to improved safety on the roadways and the removal of hazardous products from the market place.

For example, products liability lawsuits on behalf of innocent severely injured or deceased consumers have led to the recall, redesign or removal from the market of flammable baby clothes, asbestos, exploding Drano containers, the Dalton Shield and the Pinto automobile, among numerous others.

I appreciate that is not enough to focus on the benefits that have been accomplished for injured individuals and society. There persists an erroneous perception about us because of the well-publicized small minority within our profession who ignore ethical standards.

Recently, a few lawyers engaged in reprehensible conduct in soliciting clients from the next of kin of victims of the Northwest Flight 255 disaster.

Efforts are under way to expel such malefactors from practicing law and otherwise to enforce the policy resolution of The American Trial Lawyers Association.

I wouldn't expect Mr. Barnaby to accept a blanket condemnation of his profession because of a few malicious or negligent journalists like the reporter whose false story of a rape charge destroyed a person's reputation and led to a million dollar verdict against the newspaper.

Therefore, let us resist the temptation to stereotype and to inflame prejudice with ignorant and biased characterizations. Let us serve the common good by seeking the truth.

Alan C. Helmkamp,
Livonia

Care centers — good option

To the editor:

Your editorial March 3 calling for action to reduce the reroutings made by Botsford General Hospital was enlightening but lacked mention of two very fine alternative facilities in our area.

My husband and I and our three children have lived in Farmington Hills for 15 years and have had numerous opportunities to utilize the emergency facilities at both Henry Ford Medical Center in West Bloomfield and Providence Emergency Care Center in Novi.

In all instances, we received efficient and thorough care by pleasant professionals.

Judith A. Hall,
Farmington Hills

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