

Opinion

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

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Take heed Housing needs are growing

SOME HAVE sagging roofs. Others have leaky plumbing. A few have frayed wiring.

All need financial help in the never-ending quest to keep their homes habitable. The image is unshakable. Mention Farmington Hills and subdivisions of highly priced homes quickly come to mind.

Still, not everyone who calls Farmington Hills home can afford to keep their house in good repair. If it's a choice between paying for heat or fixing the roof, it doesn't take long to figure out which wins out.

The reasons vary — layoff, illness, fire, fixed income, divorce. No matter. Other more pressing needs — food, clothing, medical bills — always seem to gobble up available cash.

Bluntly put, there's a pent-up demand for federally financed home repair dollars in Farmington Hills, particularly in the south end.

The city hasn't yet received its 1988-89 Community Development Block Grant of \$297,000. But there's sure to be a waiting list for the \$191,000 earmarked for housing improvements. The lending pot includes \$36,000 in loan repayments.

THESE PRECIOUS improvement dollars benefit eligible seniors, single mothers and families through low-interest loans, deferred loans and grants. Improvements not only brighten the marketability of individual houses, but also the citywide housing picture.

Despite the vagaries of funding the past six years, Farmington Hills' Housing Rehabilitation Loan Board hasn't forsaken its mission. More than \$800,000 has been loaned for periods of three to 15 years to fix nearly 200 homes.

Recycling loan repayments to the lending pot may be a well-intentioned practice. But George Roberts, the feisty loan board spokesman, makes a strong pitch for putting some repayments in a reserve fund.

Bluntly put, there's a pent-up demand for federally financed home repair dollars in Farmington Hills, particularly the south end.

That fund would provide a hedge against delinquent loans, housing emergencies, cost overruns, loan buydowns and elimination of block grants. Money uncommitted by the last quarter of the fiscal year could be recycled for housing repair loans.

The city could compensate for dollars set aside in reserve by splitting the \$42,000 in housing rehab administrative costs. The upshot: adding \$22,000 to the lending pot to help another four homeowners.

Granted, the city operates a tight financial ship. But something as basic to life as adequate shelter should not rely so heavily on the uncertainty of block grants.

HOW VALUED is the housing rehab program?

Take it from one elderly woman: "I got a new well. And if you get down to where water is something you think of everyday and appreciate, then you know what this program has done for me."

Strangely, the program, designed to benefit low- to moderate-income folks, is expected to be driven by block grants and extra capital improvement dollars.

The city provides minimal administrative funding even though it takes in money through building and inspection fees generated by repair work. In contrast, the city picks up the tab for engineering and other preconstruction capital-improvement costs.

The least the city can do is make good on councilman Aldo Vagnozzi's suggestion that the loan board approach the city council for supplemental funding if its lending pot prematurely empties.

Child abuse Money for prevention is short

MONEY DEVOTED to the prevention of child abuse is shamefully inadequate in this state.

We urge our legislators to ensure permanent and consistent financing for child abuse prevention programs in the state budget.

We urge legislators to acknowledge that the prevention of child abuse is as important to the state's quality of life as are improved roads, more prisons and economic development.

We support the designation of April as "National Child Abuse Prevention Month."

We call on legislators and taxpayers to use this designation as yet another vehicle for spotlighting the serious problem and obvious need for secure and permanent financing.

OUR STATE budget reflects a "wait until it happens" attitude. Approximately \$1 billion is spent annually picking up the pieces of children's broken lives through the corrections department and protective and mental health services.

Our legislators have offered no consistent direct contributions in the state budget to prevent abuse before it happens.

A meager \$1.2 million was provided to the Children's Trust Fund last year through the Michigan Income Tax form's contribution box to provide educational, prevention and intervention programs for the state's parents and children.

With a reported 45,000 cases of child abuse in Michigan last year, that simply is not enough.

As the originator of the CTF check-off box, state Rep. Debbie Stabenow, D-Lansing, so aptly puts it: "In my book, we are paying a large portion of our \$6 billion state budget for picking up the pieces of child abuse. There is such a demand for financing for after-the-fact problems."

THE CHILDREN in this state who suffer injury, molestation and neglect at the hands of parents they are told to love and trust deserve more

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than an after-thought and charitable contributions.

The grief and shock of child abuse is no secret. Each notorious case brings the grotesque problem to the forefront.

But there's a good chance the 45,000 reported incidents of child abuse last year could have been prevented.

We support CTF and its work in providing parental classes, crisis centers, sexual abuse programs for kids and Latch Key programs in Oakland and Wayne counties.

The check-off box and private direct charitable contributions are the only financial means available through the state to prevent abuse before it happens.

In a society where a child is abused every 15 seconds, we definitely need more money.

No longer can the malignancy of family violence remain behind the protective locked doors of the family home.

NO LONGER can we close our eyes and our pocketbooks to a problem that is marring our present and future generations. The abused child of today will almost certainly become the abuser of tomorrow.

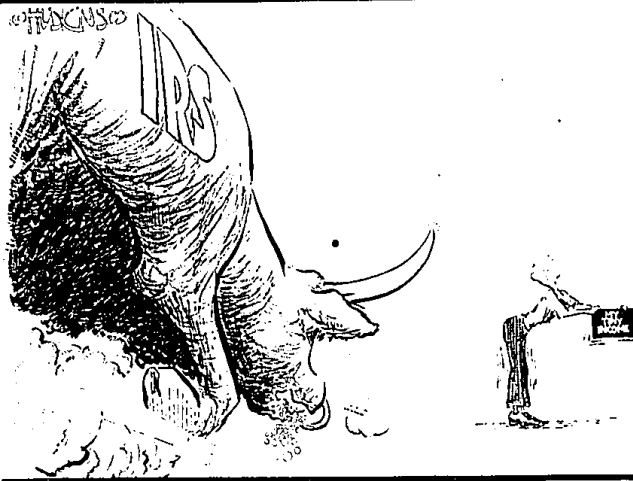
Statistics bear out that claim. Ask state corrections officials. More than 85 percent of the inmates at Jackson State Prison were abused or neglected as children.

The fact is abuse is not an isolated result of poverty or ignorance. In the so-called best of homes, you will find sexually, physically and emotionally abused children.

The facts are that the best way to prevent abuse is education. But education costs money. Too many parents don't know how to be parents. Too many parents unleash their anger and stress on their children. And too many children carry the guilt and behavioral patterns into their futures.

For a problem that so affects the state's children and their families, more than direct and in-direct taxpayer charitable contributions are necessary.

Money in the state budget is required to prevent abuse and the chance that our children will make family violence a way of life tomorrow.



Academic letters are deserving of support

WE ALL like to be recognized.

That's human nature. So why not let senior high students earn academic letters to wear on their school sweaters?

Senior Drew McDougall, a Farmington High honors student and athlete, caught the essence of why academic excellence merits as much recognition as athletic prowess.

As the Student Round Table president aptly put it, "The main focal point of school is academics."

So it's not surprising the Student Round Table, reversing an earlier position, recommended March 14 that Farmington Public Schools approve annual academic letters to senior high students with a 3.3 or better grade point average.

As it directed the administration to turn the recommendation into a proposal, the school board seemed enthusiastic — and rightly so. I echo trustee Janice Rolnick, who called it "a wonderful idea."

IN ADDITION to athletics, letters are now given for such diverse school activities as band, forensics, choir and computer club.

But the 10,700-student district has never offered a true academic letter. And it's high time it did.

Says Lynn Nutter, assistant super-



Bob Sklar

intendent for administrative operations: "The beauty . . . is not only the letter, but the recognition . . . for what we're all about — academic excellence."

Representing all three public senior highs, the Student Round Table feels "the more students that have recognition, the more school spirit there is. And the more . . . involved the students are, the better a school will become," McDougall said.

Academic letters, patterned after Clarencville High's "lamp of knowledge" letters, would be awarded to students who earned a 3.3 or better grade point average, the National Honor Society minimum, for an entire school year. Maintaining that average in future years would bring an academic pin to be worn on the academic letter.

At Clarencville High's first academic letter ceremony in January 1987, 93 students were honored for

posting a GPA of 3.0 or better in math, science, social studies and English.

I AGREE with the Student Round Table's recommendation to not only boost the minimum GPA for Farmington students, but also base the letter on an overall GPA.

But I'd rather see the academic letter the same color as the athletic letter. There's no reason to make them different colors. A "lamp of knowledge" adorning the academic letter should be sufficient.

There's little chance an academic letter would minimize other achievement letters because it's projected that recipients would equal the number of students who earn them for athletics or band.

I've never been terribly impressed by students whose motivation is individual honors instead of a well-rounded education. For some, avoiding physics or calculus is a ticket to a higher GPA.

Still, an academic letter no doubt would be a spur for pursuit of excellence in our senior high classrooms, based on Clarencville's experience.

So I say, let's turn the "lamp of knowledge" on an academic letter program in Farmington Public Schools.

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.

Minimal grant hikes possible

To the editor:

For the first time since 1979, families who are supported through AFDC grants (grants which are already only 58 percent of the poverty level), received a 3 percent increase in the 1987-88 Governor's Budget. This minimal increase amounted to \$1 per month or 13 cents a day per recipient.

Concerted pressure was placed both on the governor as well as on key legislators to bring about this small step forward.

Since then the effort to provide a floor of decency for all families and children has met with difficult times.

As of April 1, there will be a reduction in the personal need allowance of \$1 per month for all welfare recipients. This decision was made by the Department of Social Services as a way to guard against further erosion of grants which has been threatened by some members of the Senate.

The actions by the Department of Social Services as well as threats by key senators are further examples of how the burden of balancing the budget is placed upon the backs of the poor. One dollar reduction does not seem like much, of course. Who cannot afford to give back a dollar? However, those who can afford it the least are those who are being asked to "contribute."

The sacrifice is not shared by the governor or the legislators. In effect, poor children in Michigan are being punished by the state. This is, indeed, a deplorable situation and serves to further denigrate the poor.

The Metropolitan Detroit Welfare Reform Coalition calls upon the governor and the legislature to protect grant levels from reduction and create a way to provide a living income.

Carol King, chair,
Metropolitan Detroit
Welfare Reform Coalition

Rude drivers — insensitive

To the editor:

Thank you, Bob Sklar, for your article, "Subs Aren't Dragways" Feb. 18.

I live in Kimberly subdivision. The subdivision has no sidewalks. All pedestrians need to use the road, but rude drivers don't like to share.

The rude driver ignores crosswalks and the pedestrian rights of way, ignores stop and yield signs, ignores the safety of the children, pushes pedestrians off the road, and is very noisy.

The same kind of driver drives like that at the Mid-U Shopping Center, at 11 Mile and Middlebelt, not caring about anyone, if he or she hits anyone, and is totally selfish of others.

The Farmington Hills Police Department is the best in the business.

Yet it cannot control all. Driving should be a pleasure, a right. Yet some don't care about anyone else.

Vernon C. Kleipinski,
Farmington Hills

Cityhood may be way to go

To the editor:

Maybe the time has come for serious consideration being given to West Bloomfield Township becoming the City of West Bloomfield?

All one has to do is look south to Farmington Hills. The job that city manager Bill Costick has done for this community regarding roads during the past year speaks for itself. True, becoming a city can create other problems, but the advantages may far outweigh the dependence on county and state governments to address roads and traffic congestion considerations.

The township has its police and fire protection in place as well as other community facilities to serve taxpayers. Why not explore the pros and cons of city versus township governments and publish such information for your readers.

A proposition on the fall ballot might be a timely step.

Ken Poye, president,
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