

Medbury residents oppose foster care home

By Joanne Mallazowski
staff writer

Medbury Street residents oppose a proposed adult foster care home for residents with closed-head injuries. "I can't believe all the people on the street object to it, and it's being jammed down our throats," resident Kathleen Klatzer told the Farmington Hills City Council April 25. She was joined by other Medbury residents who brought a petition of opposition to the proposed small group home, which would house six adult residents with closed-head injuries. As they promised the week before, Medbury residents turned out in force with their concerns, complaints and fears about the proposed home at 29620 Medbury, near 10 Mile and Middlebelt.

"I COULD be asleep at night, wake up and one of these kids be at my bed," resident Marjorie Schulkins said. She also expressed concern about her property value and the type of supervision that would be provided for the six adult residents. Schulkins' concerns were echoed by other Medbury residents. Safety,

particularly for small children, over how the proposed home would be operated, traffic and property values were at the top of the concern list. TOM KENNEDY of the state Department of Social Services, which licenses adult foster care homes, said the proposed home's applicant, S&L Associates Inc. of Farmington Hills, is undergoing the licensing process. "We don't have conclusive evidence for adequate qualifications at this point," he said. If the applicants do not have proper qualifications, a license will not be issued, he said. If the home is licensed, it would bring the city's total for adult foster care homes to 14 and for closed-head injury residents to two, said Karen Birkholz, assistant to the Farmington Hills City manager.

BUT AS with the majority of the adult foster care homes in the city, the Farmington Hills City Council

listened attentively and told the residents the issue is out of their hands. The only item within the council's domain is notification to the DSS that the proposed facility is not within 1,500 feet of another. Residents maintain that an overconcentration of such facilities exist in their area. They pointed out that American House and Marian Oakland West, residential facilities for the elderly, are within 1,500 of the proposed home for closed-head injury residents. BUT DESPITE residents' complaints, state statutes do not include senior adult facilities within the 1,500-foot limit, Birkholz said. Kennedy, who helps regulate adult foster care facilities in Oakland County, told residents there is no history of formal complaints against homes for closed-head-injury residents. "They are simply not an aggressive, highly mobile type of

population," he said. Closed-head injuries result from blows to the head, such as in a traffic accident. Depending on the length of unconsciousness, the victim may suffer anything from temporary disorientation to permanent disability. THE CLOSED-HEAD-INJURY victim has problems with memory, with attention span, with tolerance for frustration and often with basic social amenities, according to officials at the William Beaumont Hospital Barnum Health Center, Birmingham. Kennedy assured residents, who have requested a privacy fence around the facility, that he has had no reported problems with residents wandering. "These facilities present less of a profile of complaints than other kinds of homes such as those licensed by the mental health department," Kennedy said. "Individuals

placed in these homes have never been institutionalized." KENNEDY ALSO told residents that the state requires one staff person for every 16 residents. In practice, most homes have one staff member for every two residents or a 1-on-1 basis, Kennedy said. Residents also expressed concern about property devaluation and that adult foster care homes are, in reality, businesses within a residential area. A study conducted by the city assessor's office, however, shows that there isn't any evidence indicating a drop in property values in areas near adult foster care homes, Birkholz said. "In each of the locations, there have been sales of the properties adjacent to the AFC (adult foster care) homes after the homes were licensed," according to a report by Ted Hinman, deputy assessor.

"WHEN THESE sales are analyzed in conjunction with the rest of the subdivision, the influence of the AFC home on the sales price does not indicate a measurable impact, positively or negatively," the report continues. Some city council members shared residents' sentiments about the business side of foster care homes. "I'm afraid some of the homes emphasize the profit, not the care," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said. Councilwoman Jean Fox agreed. She told Kennedy that the public views foster care homes more as a business operation than a "social welfare thing." Fox also criticized the state's control over group homes other than allowing a city to notify whether homes are within 1,500 feet of each other. "You can't expect us to be overjoyed with another home in our community."

Woman crusades against child abuse

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Frederick paid for a friend's college education. She gave her charge card to the parents of one abused child she buried so they could have new clothes for the funeral. After an auto accident, the car gave her such painful memories she had it repaired then gave it as a gift to her son-in-law. She can't remember how much equipment she has bought for her church. She has dressed up as a clown for a block party fund-raiser for needy children. She is a regular visitor with gifts

for the patients in veterans hospitals. She is the guardian and caretaker for her aunt with Alzheimer's disease. MOST RECENTLY, this woman who retired from Ford Motor Co. in 1980 took on the job of running Novi Optics because its owner was ill. Besides, she said, "the business needed a lift." In all of those instances, she said, she acted "because I was led to do it, led to do what I could do to help." Her attitude toward life can be summed up in a reaction she had

when learning that a raincoat was stolen from her unlocked car. "I still have seven raincoats. I really don't need eight," she said. Even so, her voice still cracks when she recalls the stories of one or

another of the children she helped to bury, after death by strangulation, rape, incest or stabbings. "I'm busier than I've ever been in my 73 years of living, but I will al-

ways keep helping the children. And I am going to put this business back on its feet, and now I have to get ready for another lunch," she said. (Detroit state Sen.) Jackie Vaughn is going to be my escort."

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Taxes up in Farmington

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Also rising in the new fiscal year will be retail water and sewer rates, prompted by wholesale increases from the city of Detroit, Deadman said. Recent metering changes and readings are "more representative of what this community uses." The city will recover a fee decrease given to residents last year, plus an increase of 5 percent.

THE CITY traditionally stays

within its budget, varying by only several percentage points each year. "We try to operate to within a small range. We generally live within our budget," Deadman added. It is monitored on a month-by-month basis, with some expenditures watched by line item. The city council began meeting last week to review the proposed budget. Other budget work sessions are scheduled this Wednesday, May 4, at 6:30 p.m. and Thursday, May 5, at 7 p.m. A public hearing for the budget has not yet been scheduled.

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