

Opinion

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

10A(F) O&E Thursday, July 14, 1988

Right direction

City hall addition a better idea

WE CHALLENGED him when he proposed an office building to house Farmington Hills' Department of Special Services in Heritage Park, home to some of southeast Michigan's most panoramic vistas.

Now we applaud city manager William Costick for acknowledging that proposal isn't the only way to provide adequate room for the special services department and to free up space for other overcrowded departments in city hall.

"I was unaware of the huge sentiment among residents that the park shouldn't have an office building there," Costick told the Observer.

We didn't hide our opposition last March when Costick 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, a 60-car lot and a public restroom wing.

A 5,000-square-foot office building, no matter how nicely designed and landscaped, simply has no place in a natural beauty park.

The administrative building, costing upwards of \$500,000, would have been nestled in a bermed, illuminated area south of Normandy Hills, a residential subdivision.

THE CITY manager's noble pursuit of more pleasant working conditions notwithstanding, we maintained in March that the Department of Special Services should remain based at city hall. Sure it makes sense to staff some parks and rec folks at Heritage Park, a 210-acre passive expanse of nature at its best. But no good reason has emerged why they couldn't be in a wing of the new visitors center, planned for the park's 4,200-square-foot historic estate house.

Make no mistake about it: The Department of Special Services' main presence ought to be at city hall, from both an efficiency and image standpoint.

Costick is now studying the merits of expanding the city hall to the south by up to 5,000 square

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feet. The addition would be on the west side, behind the newly remodeled city manager's office, formerly the police department.

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With the help of Farmington Hills architect Leon Kohls, city administrators will prepare a design, use and cost plan for the proposed addition. As Costick says, any addition should match the existing structure's architecture. The city hall complex is no place for clashing, costly architecture.

WE SHARE the concern of councilmen Joe Alkateeb and Ben Marks that the proposal could be construed as a piecemeal attempt to solve recurrent overcrowding at the underbuilt city hall. But a master site use plan doesn't come cheaply. Costick pegs the cost at \$10,000 — or more.

Besides, the proposed addition, coupled with an administrative intent to limit increases in staff, wouldn't be incompatible with a future master plan.

Shaded rest and picnic spots dot the city hall complex, making it a refreshing respite from the concrete and glass municipal centers in other cities.

Whatever improvements come to the southwest corner of 11 Mile and Orchard Lake, care must be exercised to preserve some of the city hall's natural surroundings.

Whether at Heritage Park or city hall, once such surroundings are gone, they're gone. They don't regenerate.

That should never be forgotten.



Second gazebo would help boost downtown

IT'S A community effort you can't help but get caught up in.

With so many lives tugging for attention, it's exciting to see a team of community activists pooling energies to raise enough cash to build a gazebo and install benches on a pie-shaped piece of city-owned land in downtown Farmington.

The site is north of Grand River, between the Farmington Place senior citizen complex and the Village Commons shopping center.

The gazebo would not only mark the eastern entry to the central business district, but also provide a shady place to relax or enjoy a sack lunch. A brick-accented walk, greenery and pedestrian lighting are part of the conceptual design.

"It won't be just a place to sit and rest your feet," says Downtown Development Authority executive director Wendy Strip Sittsamer. "It'll be a place to watch what's going on in downtown Farmington, too."

The design blends nicely with the DDA's 5-year revitalization plan that will yield \$1.4 million in streetscape improvements, new sidewalks, new trees, pedestrian lights, more parking.

THERE'S NO prouder salesman for the roughly \$40,000 project than



Bob Sklar

funeral director Walt Sundquist, Farmington's resident spirit booster: "It would bring people together in a community setting. After all, that's what the downtown is all about."

Indeed, it is. The flat-roofed gazebo wouldn't compete with the Warner Gardens Gazebo at the Farmington Historical Museum, which marks the western entry to the central business district. Because of a lack of nearby parking, that gazebo caters more to museum visitors and concert goers than to passersby.

Heck, I think two gazebos, one on each side of the central business district, would complement each other. People would be more apt to use them because of the double reminder that they exist.

For a downtown to truly be a town center, it must have other draws than just shopping. That's where visuals like gazebos, where folks can

gather on weeknights as well as weekends, come into play.

Storefront downtowns like Farmington's are throwbacks to an earlier era when downtowns were the town square. People went there not only to visit the butcher, the bakery or the bank, but also to gather and chat. Few other leisure activities were as readily available.

TIMES HAVE changed. And one of the keys to a small downtown's survival is how successfully DDA improvements inspire private investment.

A study committee chaired by city councilwoman Shirley Richardson hopes to inspire donations of money and materials from civic groups, merchants and residents for the planned gazebo.

Committee members will eagerly outline their intent to civic, business or homeowner groups. To line up a speaker, call the DDA: 478-7476.

Prospects for the gazebo are boundless. As Richardson put it, "In two or three years, it might be feasible to have a players group, a small band concert or a choral group."

"I'm very, very enthused. And I know a lot of others share that enthusiasm." Including me.

Probate judge

Young tops field of candidates

WHAT'S IMPORTANT in a probate judge? Tough question. Oakland County Probate Court handles few high-visibility cases such as murders or mortgage scams. In fact, few cases ever require a trial.

Estates . . . guardianships and adoptions . . . mental commitments . . . juvenile cases. Much of the work is technical and managerial. Few lawyers — including five candidates for one vacancy — know the entire area. The voter has to pick someone who seems to make sense, who acts competent, who appears trustworthy — and hope the winner can handle the job.

Judge Norman Barnard will retire at the end of the year. Voters will nominate two of the field in the Aug. 2 primary and choose between the two Nov. 8.

JOAN E. YOUNG is a known quantity and a highly trusted person in the Oakland Courthouse and can make a competent probate judge. Moreover, Young has the capacity to add luster to the court.

One way to size her up is to look at how her current bosses, the 14 circuit judges, evaluate her. As circuit court administrator for the past five years, she has presented the court's point of view to the County Board of Commissioners and the outside world. Everything seems to be handled competently and with dispatch. Young fields tough questions on the number of judges, the 200 employees and the \$12 million budget very persuasively.

Young has had more than the average person's share of professional assignments and recognition: chairing the state Teacher Tenure Commission; serving on the state Supreme Court's task force on gender issues; and speaking on court management issues.

The Oakland Bar has done landmark, pioneering work in the field of alternative dispute resolution — a fancy name for settling cases without costly trials — and who was co-chair of that task force? Joan Young. In short, she's a heavyweight at 1200 N. Telegraph.

Young also is bilingual, speaking plain English as well as legalese. A good listener as well as speaker, she is the sort to win respect and confidence from a lay person — particularly a kid who has to appear in court. A one-time social worker, she could bring a different perspective on juveniles.

The field of candidates is relatively good, and no one candidate is perfect. But Joan Young



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merits one of the nominations and probably election.

FOR THOSE confused by all the countywide judgeships at stake, here is the lineup:

• Circuit Court — incumbent Judges David Breck, Alice Gilbert and Francis X. O'Brien are unopposed. Only two candidates are seeking a fourth circuit judgeship — Edward Sosnick and Robert Houston — so there is no need for a primary.

• Probate Court — Judge Sandra Silver is filling out, by appointment, the term of the convicted judge John J. O'Brien. She will be challenged Nov. 8 by George Fulkerson.

• Probate Court — five candidates are seeking two nominations in the Aug. 2 primary. Again, we recommend Joan E. Young.

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.

Park official lauds column

To the editor: Thank you for your column titled "Kennington still a gem," which appeared in the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers of Thursday, June 2.

Tim Richard had a nice mix of historical facts with personal experience about Kennington Metropark, and I'm especially pleased with his remarks about Leroy C. Smith, who often gets no credit for his most important contribution in establishing the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority.

John K. Sterling Jr., Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority

Hills is nice place to live

To the editor: It is a hot summer day in the city of Farmington Hills.

Men and women jogging barefoot, a young man jogging barefooted, a young lady lying in her back yard sunbathing a bikini, all enjoying the sun and life.

Farmington Hills is a beautiful and peaceful place to live. It is a nice community. While I walk to work or just walk in my sub, I can

enjoy the peace and the pleasant surroundings.

True, we have problems. Yet as a community, which is well managed by city manager William Costick, we are blessed.

The next time you go out barefoot or just enjoy life, remember the troubles other cities are having, that we don't have. This is our home. Take pride in it.

Vernon C. Kiepinaki, Farmington Hills

Thompson defended

To the editor: Please be advised that in the article appearing June 9, Jeffrey Laib makes a representation that there is not one former assistant prosecutor in 18 years who has worked for Richard Thompson that has endorsed him.

I was an assistant prosecutor for many of those years that Richard Thompson was chief assistant prosecutor for Oakland County. I worked under him as senior trial lawyer and later on as director of the Oakland County Organized Crime Strike Force. I wholeheartedly endorse Richard Thompson for prosecutor without any reservations.

The fact that many former assistants do not endorse him because of his hard-line stance and demanding requirements of his staff in no way

reflects adversely on Richard Thompson for prosecutor.

He is a demanding chief assistant prosecutor who requires that his staff put in long hours and strictly adhere to no plea policies on serious offenses.

This results in increased pressure on lawyers and the necessity to try a large number of cases, which demands substantially more work than entering a simple reduced plea, which is generally at the victim's expense. In other words, to make the criminal justice system work easier, the victim and the public at large are sacrificed.

Richard Thompson effectively reversed that trend and put the Oakland County Prosecutors Office in the forefront of requiring defendants to be liable criminally for the actual offense they committed.

This was not at all easy to accomplish and there was much resistance from the judicial system, the defense lawyers bar and lawyers on the prosecutor's staff who were not used to working at the levels that Richard Thompson required.

Those of us that worked in the office and saw the results can deeply appreciate and take great pride in having been affiliated with a person like Richard Thompson. He genuinely cares and carries out his policies without compromise, requiring his staff to perform at their highest levels at all times.

Most of what Brooks Patterson stood for is because of chief assistant prosecutor Richard Thompson.

Robert L. Bessing, former assistant prosecutor

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