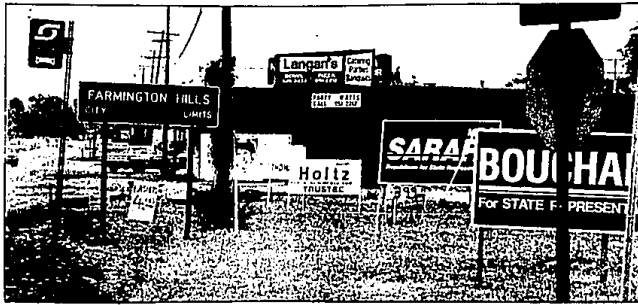


# Illegal campaign signs face removal



By Casey Hane  
staff writer

Two Farmington Hills zoning inspectors — half the city's department — spent two days last week driving around the city removing political signs placed in the right of way.

Left untouched, however, were political signs in residential neighborhoods, which are now legal thanks to a liberalized ordinance passed in late 1986. This is the first major election in the city since the law changed.

Zoning department director Lee Blizman said last week complaints are being received daily about political sign placement.

"We have had a lot of signs placed in the right of way," she said. "Also a lot of people have been calling on specific people asking, 'What are you going to do about the sign here, or the sign there?'"

The city's main enforcement method is confiscating improper signs. No tickets have been issued.

"We're just trying to keep them out of the right of way," Blizman added. "What you really want... as with any zoning ordinance, is compliance."

Confiscated signs are kept for 10 days by the city. Blizman said she hopes to look at the Hills ordinance and at surrounding communities to see how effectively it is working. "I expect to be doing some research to see if there's a better way to do it," she added.

Complaints of destruction to the political signs are also on the rise this election year, said police Chief William Dwyer. Signs have been torn down, spray-painted, and torched, he said.

"We're not turning our backs on any violations," he

said. "People observed damaging signs are going to be arrested and charged."

He asks residents observing any destruction of signs to call the police department and make a report. Violators face a misdemeanor charge of malicious destruction of property under \$100, which can bring up to a \$500 fine and 90 days in jail.

At least one Farmington Hills resident is not pleased with the ordinance allowing political signs. Steve Beauchamp has lived in the Kendallwood subdivision for the past eight years, and said the political signs throughout the city look "tacky."

"It's just making the subdivision look like a carnival," he said. "It's really a shame — it's going to go on for about four months. I happen to think the vast majority of people don't want these things."

The Farmington Hills City Council approved a change in the ordinance in October of 1986, following a protest by local resident David Haron and threat of a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union. Previously, noncommercial signs were allowed only in light industrial zoning districts. The change exempted political signs from the city's regular ordinance.

The ordinance's first test case in November of 1986 during a city council election when 438 signs had to be removed because they were in the public right of way.

In nearby Farmington, public services director Earl Billing said his department had received no complaints about political signs this year, but has also removed "a few" from the public right of way.

Farmington allows political signs, but requires they be removed within 14 days of election day. It also restricts sign types, sizes and has lighting guidelines.

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This grouping of political signs appears on a corner near Greening Street and Northwestern Highway on the border of Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield Township. Farmington Hills is in its first major election year dealing with a liberalized 1986 sign ordinance.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

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