

Opinion

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

14A(F)

O&E Thursday, October 13, 1998

PCB

Make removal school priority

WHILE TRYING to ease elementary school overcrowding and meet mandated asbestos removal requirements, the Farmington Board of Education faces an equally important challenge: erasing PCB from district buildings.

There's no federal mandate — yet — to remove older light ballasts containing polychlorinated biphenyl, a potential health hazard in large and extended doses.

But there's a clear community mandate. Says one Longacre Elementary parent: "We owe it to our children to provide a safe and healthy environment in which they can learn."

PCB came to light in the wake of leaking ballasts at Longacre over the past two years.

Longacre parents said they didn't learn that ballasts had leaked in their school until the resource room was sealed off when a ballast dripped last month.

Parents said administrators were lax not only in sharing with them the scope of the PCB problem in district classrooms, but also the steps being taken to correct the problem at Longacre. Administrators should have gone out of their way to apprise Longacre and other parents of the threat the chemical poses. Other schools also have logged PCB dripping incidents. Given the age of district buildings, the threat of PCB leakage is ever-present.

DESPITE NO federal mandate, the district wisely acknowledged PCB's potential danger and tied its removal to the \$27.25-million bond issue that voters defeated Sept. 19.

But Longacre parents revealed more about PCB in their hour-long presentation to the school board Sept. 26 than the district did during its summer-long bond issue campaign.

Superintendent Graham Lewis said the district didn't spotlight PCB leakage during the bond issue campaign because it didn't want to be accused of luring voters for a new school by preying on people's fear of toxins.

That explanation notwithstanding, the district

Until older ballasts have been replaced in all 1.5-million square feet of ceiling in the district, however, PCB can't be downplayed.

might have been more successful in selling the bond issue if it had publicized the leakage.

PCB can be found in light ballasts in all 27 of the district's buildings because it wasn't barred from fluorescent light ballasts until 1978.

Farmington schools are light years ahead of most districts in moving to replace older light ballasts. But the bond issue failed and PCB looms — although it's gone from Longacre classrooms and from more than 70 percent of the entire school.

UNTIL OLDER ballasts have been replaced in all 1.5-million square feet of ceiling in the district, however, PCB can't be downplayed.

We concur with trustee Susan Rennels, who wants a written policy for handling incidents of PCB leakage, better communication with parents about PCB dangers and a timeline for replacing older ballasts.

She called for working the \$2-million ballast replacement project into the operating budget instead of waiting for a future building renovations bond issue. We urge that schools with documented dripping be tackled first.

Granted, it would be more cost-effective to replace ballasts while installing modern lighting that accommodates new classroom technology.

But safety must reign. If a future building renovations bond issue passes, great — ballast replacement can be accelerated.

Meanwhile, the district should answer Rennels' three-pronged call immediately. Methodic ballast removal must continue beyond Longacre — without delay.

Proposal C

Say yes to clean environment

IT'S TIME to cut the lip service and commit our votes and pocketbooks to cleaning up our state's environment. Our future depends on it.

We endorse passage of Proposal C on the Nov. 8 ballot. A "yes" vote will authorize the state to issue \$660 million in general obligation bonds to clean up our state's environment, the second most polluted in the nation.

Pollution has long been a companion to our lifestyles. But we can no longer afford such companionship. Our environment is in danger.

PASSAGE of Proposal C will ensure \$660 million in bonds for environmental cleanup. Its passage will ensure that \$445 million is used to clean up 300-400 of the state's worst toxic sites in the next 10-20 years. Low-ranking contamination sites with economic development potential would receive a maximum \$45 million for cleanup. Up to \$5 million may be used to certify vacant or abandoned manufacturing sites as contamination-free for redevelopment and to encourage the preservation of undeveloped land.

Passage will mean grants and loans to local

Pollution has long been a companion to our lifestyles. But we can no longer afford such companionship. Our environment is in danger.

communities and businesses to reduce solid waste, help close 80 unsafe landfills and provide alternatives to the landfills. Passage will enable the recycling of 25 percent of the current waste and management of another 40 percent with waste-to-energy plants by the next century.

Passage will provide \$50 million to allow the state to acquire additional \$365 million in federal money for a new wastewater treatment loan program for local communities.

And the passage of Proposal C will provide \$25 million for Michigan's share in an eight-state Great Lakes Protection Fund.

Our future is at stake. We can't afford not to say "yes" to Proposal C.

Proposal D

Recreation projects benefit all

IN A state blessed with natural beauty surrounded by the Great Lakes, open areas free from concrete development and family recreation facilities drive right to the heart of our quality of life.

We support passage of Proposal D authorizing the state to issue \$140 million in general obligation bonds to continue improving state and local parks and recreation projects.

A "yes" vote Nov. 8 will allow the state to split the \$140 million between state and local needs. A "yes" vote will not mean a tax increase to improve our open areas. The bonds will be repaid from the state's general fund.

IN AN AGE where development surrounds us with accompanying traffic and noise, parks and recreational facilities are no longer a luxury. Open, undeveloped areas are a necessity to the quality of life not to mention our tourist industry, one of the largest in the country.

Attention to local needs is particularly important in urbanized southeast Michigan where booming development and the problems it brings

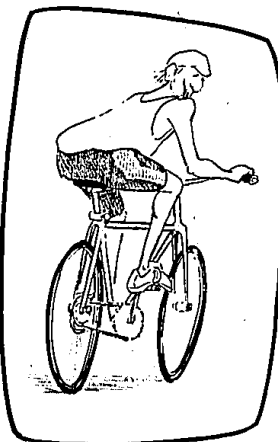
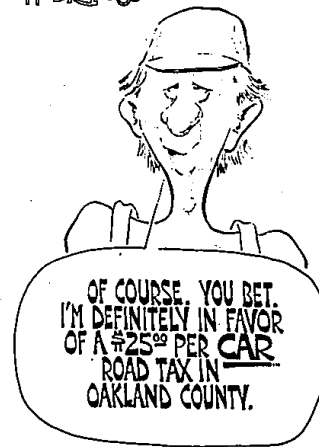
A yes vote Nov. 8 will allow the state to split the \$140 million between state and local needs. It will not mean a tax increase. The bonds will be repaid from the state's general fund.

has slowly pushed parks and recreation lower on the scale of priorities.

It's difficult for local governments to argue the need for parks and recreation money when so many other problems — roads, solid waste, crime — now demand such immediate and expensive attention. That makes passage of Proposal D all the more important.

We recommend voters say yes to Proposal D on Tuesday, Nov. 8.

THINKING



New west-side school — very much needed

NOT CONVINCED a new west-side elementary school is merited?

Take it from two Farmington Public Schools parents whose children attend Longacre.

Overcrowding in district elementary "is a desperate situation," says one.

Says the other: "Kids are eating lunch at 10 o'clock in the morning, and they're packed in like soldiers."

At Larkshire, hallways are used to teach vocal and instrumental music.

At Flanders and Gill, each of the five first-grade classes have 28 or 27 students — above the desired limit of 24, which would give "those small ones the individual attention they need so much," assistant superintendent Lynn Nutter said.

"In discussing a new school, we're not talking about a frill or luxury," reads a Concerned Parents Coalition memo. "It is vital to serve the children living on the west side of our district. Those children now spend a large part of their day traveling back and forth to school on buses."

Redrawing attendance boundaries certainly wouldn't be an acceptable option. Parents have underscored that.



Bob Sklar

NOT ONE of the district's 11 elementary schools is west of Drake — in the area bursting with growth.

New homes there have pushed at least five of the elementary's capacity. Elementary enrollment is up 54 this year and is projected to rise through 1999.

Superintendent Graham Lewis rightly advised the school board not to mourn too long after the Sept. 19 defeat of a proposed \$27.25 million bond issue for a new west-side elementary and districtwide safety improvements.

Reminding that "education is our business," Lewis said the new school "is the centerpiece. We have to go ahead with that."

"We can't just be complacent," he added.

So the school board has no choice

but to go back to voters this winter for a smaller bond issue just to build the new elementary. Inflation is sure to boost the \$7 million price tag — by no means a "golden calf budget," as trustee James Abernethy put it.

EVEN RICHARD Headlee, the chief critic to the September bond issue, agreed in principle that there's "tremendous logic" for a new school.

If voters say yes in a winter vote, there's a chance the new school — nestled in a rolling, wooded nook on 11 Mile east of Halsted — could still be open by September 1999, the district's original target date.

Contrary to what some may think, the district can't use operating reserves to build a new school — clearly a capital project — because there's not nearly enough uncommitted money in the district's capital fund to cover the \$7 million-plus cost.

Short of possibly borrowing the money and using some of its county-allocated millage for a period of years to pay off the loan — a method that would siphon money earmarked for operations — the district has no other payment options.

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.

The pledge: very special

To the editor:

I am thoroughly disgusted with your patriotism editorial regarding the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag, written on your Opinion page, Thursday, Sept. 15. Your headline should have read: Observer Takes Stand Against Pledge of Allegiance.

How ironic, two days before U.S. Constitution Week (Sept. 17-23), that you write such a sad characterization of our pledge is nothing but "a chant." A chant is defined as a "monotonous rhythmic call or shout." Are you serious?

You further make a foolishly outrageous analogy that our custom of children in public schools reciting the pledge is the same as "spoon-fed nationalism in the schools of totalitarian states." Give us a break!

Why shouldn't our children be taught to be supportive of this nation, the flag and the principles as represented by the pledge? What do you suggest as an alternative? Does the pledge not also represent the Bill of Rights protecting our newspaper, too?

I was taught the definition of each word within the pledge while a fourth-grade student in our public schools. That was right and proper. That was the beginning of my lessons on good citizenship.

If you do not support the Pledge of Allegiance today, what will you do tomorrow? Maybe, that teaching the principles of the U.S. Constitution in public schools itself is un-Con-

stitutional? Why? Because some parent may be a closet Communist, leading to support revolution? Just what are you advocating?

I seriously question your understanding of the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag and its importance to the well-being of our society. I feel sorry for you.

Alfred V. Diebel
Farmington Hills

Broomfield supports bill

To the editor:

I read with interest Steve Barnaby's column in the Sept. 22 issue of the Observer.

Let me clear up any misconceptions about my stance on the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project. Recognizing those who have given their lives in the Vietnam conflict is an issue which certainly deserves the support of Congress.

On Sept. 23, I added my name as a co-sponsor of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Bill H.R. 3628. The allegation that I oppose this project was disturbing and, frankly, very wrong. U.S. Rep. William Broomfield, 16th Congressional District

Spirit broken by invaders

To the editor:

I planted my garden in early spring and as the days passed, I viewed my efforts with great satisfaction.

My husband, several years earlier,

had built raised vegetable beds and put down stone borders for pathways. It was a pretty scene.

Friends who came to visit, interested or not, were always escorted outdoors to see the beautiful vegetables and flowers. The rabbits I saw occasionally added a charming rustic touch, I thought.

Early in July my neighbor complained these same charming rabbits were eating their newly planted vegetables. A raccoon had also been seen in the neighborhood. My garden seemed to have a charmed life, I thought.

My rude awakening came one afternoon. The rabbits and I had both decided the lovely red leaf lettuce was ready for picking, but they came the night before. Only little stems remained of my crop. One by one, herbs, flowers and vegetables fell prey to the hungry invaders. The sprays and chemicals all non-toxic, from the garden shop were of no avail. Finally, only red peppers, tomatoes and corn remained.

The corn had grown six feet and the ears were plump and promising. That was my favorite vegetable.

After being lulled into a false feeling of security, I received a final jolt. The beautiful corn stalks all lay on the ground, chewed off at the base.

Every ear had been eaten and the empty cobs were scattered around, a nighttime snack for the raccoon, no doubt.

This culmination of my failure to cope with Mother Nature has been the final straw. I know there's always next year, but my spirit has been broken.

Anne Edelman,
Farmington Hills

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Rich Perlberg assistant managing editor
Dick Isham general manager
Richard Brady director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Agninin president