

Candidates plan to bring government home to voters

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As far as Hill, 27, is concerned, time or the lack of it is the major reason why voters are seemingly not attuned to county government. "Time is short. We now have the two-career (family). Historically, women took care of the community activities. Now this societal gap needs filling."

Wolf, 53, believes people aren't overly interested in county government because the issues simply aren't glamorous. "These aren't big sexy issues," Wolf said, referring to solid waste, a home rule charter, jail space and road improvements.

While campaigning, both candidates have encountered voters whose greatest interest is the presidential race. "Our founding fathers assumed we would know the state and locals better. The reverse is true now. A president can dominate the airwaves. A county commissioner can't."

BOTH CANDIDATES work outside Oakland County. Wolf, a Detroit Edison community and governmental affairs representative,

works in Ann Arbor. Hill is a Democratic Caucus legislative research analyst for the Michigan House of Representatives in Lansing.

Despite their distance from the county, both candidates have plans for staying in touch with constituents.

As when he was Farmington Hills mayor in the early 1980s, Wolf would like to set up a regular meeting place where he can speak with constituents and familiarize them with his issues and listen to what voters consider important.

Wolf believes voters are unfamiliar with county government because commissioners are more involved in policy than day-to-day operations of the county. Hill sees county government as one that, at its best, provides basic services for residents.

"It's not necessarily an arena of issues for major disagreements. It's more of a need and you fulfill that need. You won't get immediate results. Nothing is ever completely solved. You make improvements," said Hill, who would like to use cable television as a means of communicating with constituents. Both candidates plan to use a

newsletter to communicate with voters as well as attendance at public meetings. Hill would like to have a local office and a WATTS line but is uncertain how either one would be financed.

WOLF ALSO would like to meet with community leaders, homeowners and civic groups to discuss specific topics when necessary. "I will make every effort to bring county government closer to the people so that their ideas and opinions can be a part of my decision-making process," Wolf said.

Hill doesn't believe his work with the Democratic Caucus in Lansing will serve as a conflict if he's elected to the county commission. He sees it as a plus because of his contacts with legislators and his ability to put his finger on data and information quickly.

Many of his colleagues, Hill said, are officials in local and county government. "The state Legislature differs from the county, which deals with administrative things. We (in the state) don't like to try to micro-manage local government," he added.

County hopefuls differ on home rule charter

home rule charter ideas debated, 4A editorial endorsement in 27th district, 12A

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Farmington Hills Republican Don Wolf believes Oakland County should have a home rule charter. His opponent, Farmington Hills Democrat Steven Hill, is hesitant.

"We can work on solutions to roads, a jail. These things will be solved in some way. But a home rule charter will determine what our government will be in five years. This is an important issue," said Wolf, 53.

Wolf and Hill will square off Nov. 8 for Oakland County Board of Commissioners 27th District seat, which represents all of Farmington Hills and the majority of Farmington Hills.

Hill, 27, believes there are certain advantages to a home rule charter but still feels the need to weigh all the facts. He is a Democratic Caucus research analyst for the Michigan House of Representatives.

"I tend to lean toward a home rule charter, but the state Legislature can make friendly amendments, add stuff to it. There's a potential for it. I've seen it happen," Hill said.

Wolf believes it makes sense to

bring the road commission and the drain commission, for example, under control of the county executive.

"For our governmental body to be responsible, this is a sensible way to do it," said Wolf, a Detroit Edison community and governmental affairs representative.

HILL BELIEVES the road commission should be separate from the county executive and the board of commissioners.

"It is important to maintain independent authority and policy input in the development of our transportation system. The road commission's greatest deficiency results from its excessive partisan composition."

But Hill calls the possibility of a home rule charter "tempting" if officials want to ensure that certain powers are retained. A home rule charter, he said, would define county governmental powers and provide uniformity.

Hill's hesitancy, however, continues to remain with the possibility that the state Legislature — a home rule charter is in state law — could add items later.

"They (new provisions) would have to apply, whether you wanted them or not," he said.

Though Wolf supports a home rule

charter, he would not initiate that effort.

"I would consider it if it came to the table," he said. But he continues to list the advantages of a home rule charter.

"The process isn't as smooth as it could be. Everything (administrative services, for example) right now is duplicated."

WHEN IT comes to the possible privatization of county services or functions, both candidates approach the issue cautiously. Both said that privatization of services cannot be uniform and must be determined whether it is cost-effective and worthwhile based on each individual case.

"Caution is needed before adopting a course of privatization," Hill said. "In order for any county service to be privatized, the following question has to be asked: 'What are the long-term costs as opposed to short-term gains in privatizing a service?'"

A second question that should be asked, Hill said, is what the long-term consequences are to the quality of service.

"If it can be shown that a negative consequence will result in either case due to privatization, then it should be opposed."

Village cooperative dispute centers on flowers vs. sod

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sition on the corner, it's easily destroyed by auto accidents and utility companies working in the area. "The utility companies will replace sod, but they won't replace the flowers," Volker said.

Hutton dismisses all the beautification committee's reasons for sod. "There's not a garden in Michigan that's in bloom in December. Even if you put in sod in the winter, it's not green," she said.

As far as accidents in the right-of-way or when utility companies work in the area, Hutton said she has always gone right back and fixed up the garden.

"THEY GAVE me this rule, this law (about sod) and I just wouldn't obey. And now they're mad," Hutton said.

To reach a compromise between herself and the cooperative's directors and beautification committee,

Hutton offered two alternatives. One included using sod as a border around the flowers. Another was using bushes and flowers. The bushes would remain through the winter.

But Hutton said the directors and beautification committee apparently weren't interested in any compromise. Her garden and alternatives went back and forth between the beautification committee and board of directors.

At a recent study session of the board, there was no discussion. Two members, including president Bob Clarke, who did not respond to the Observer's inquiries, left the meeting.

That left five members, and they couldn't do anything," Hutton said. When asked about the two alternatives proposed by Hutton, Volker said president Clarke would have to address the issue.

Hutton, who maintains the city's gardens at municipal buildings, ap-

pealed to the city, which owns the right-of-way at the Nine Mile and Gill corner.

BUT CITY officials aren't getting involved.

"The city relies on adjacent property owners to properly maintain the right-of-way in front of their property," said Dan Potter, Farmington Hills special services director. "We basically wouldn't interfere unless we felt it was contrary to what the city wants."

The city, Potter said, has no policy or restrictions on whether flowers or sod decorates a right-of-way.

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