

Opinion

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O&E Thursday, January 26, 1989

Spicer house

Renovation OK already given

RENOVATION WORK should proceed at the Eleanor Spicer Estate House, future site of a visitor center in Heritage Park. It shouldn't wait until Farmington Hills officials decide whether to seek a Michigan Equity Program grant to defray part of the \$430,000 cost.

The deadline to apply for a matching grant isn't until fall. So the city wouldn't know whether it qualified until 1990, when costs are higher.

Even if it qualified, chances are it wouldn't get anywhere near the amount of money needed to complete the one-year renovation project.

Last fall, before they knew about the equity grant program, council members authorized city staff to proceed with renovating the 63-year-old house.

The authorization was a directive, not a suggestion. A visitor center for the city's showpiece park should be considered a basic, not a luxury.

As councilman Aldo Vagnozzi aptly put it: "We can't willy-nilly counter something we've approved."

Dennis Fitzgerald, who chairs the parks and recreation commission, is right in not wanting to pass up a grant just because "we've already made up our minds" to proceed with renovations.

IN TURN, the city council showed accountability in directing Fitzgerald to analyze the strings attached to such a grant and report back by March. No major renovations are planned until after that.

Councilwoman Jean Fox is justifiably concerned about "what we have to sign away to the state to get the money." The grant would require the visitor center, overlooking a panoramic view, to be designated a regional cultural facility.

We, too, wouldn't want the visitor center to compete culturally with its neighbor, the Community Center of Farmington-Farmington Hills.

Although we see the two complementing each other, and don't know how a regional designation would detract from the park's local orientation,

A visitor center for the city's showpiece park should be considered a basic, not a luxury.

we'll reserve judgment until Fitzgerald presents his findings.

As for "mortgaging our soul" to the state, we'd remind Fox that the Michigan Land Trust Fund put up \$1.2 million toward the city's \$2 million purchase of the 210-acre site from the Spicer family in 1985. The state's imprint is already on the park.

We agree with Fox that "we need to get going as soon as the frost is out of the ground to begin to get this place to look as we know it can look."

We also agree with Fitzgerald that "we promised the community something more than a house — fiscal responsibility. To turn down an opportunity to finance the renovation simply by rushing ahead and doing it scares me."

IT SCARES us, too.

But make no mistake: the .5 mill that Farmington Hills voters passed in 1986 exclusively for parks and recreation capital improvements indeed can be used to renovate the estate house.

Renovating the house and developing a visitor center are two of nine priority projects in the five-year Farmington Hills Master Parks and Recreation Plan adopted before the 1986 vote.

Given the range of work needed to improve the house so it meets building code and municipal liability requirements, even before structural improvements to accommodate specific uses, an equity grant down the road wouldn't be wasted.

Meanwhile, we trust the historic district commission takes on a larger role in charting the house's future.

Remember: we're talking about saving a historic farmhouse in a public park dedicated to spotlighting the city's heritage!

Acts of violence and vandalism motivated by a victim's race, religion, national origin, gender or physical or mental handicap carry an extra two-year prison term and fine.

times the actual damages suffered. This could prove particularly important against an organization such as the Nazi Party or Ku Klux Klan or the "skinheads."

It empowers the victims of such hate groups to seize and sell the group's assets — guns, knives, distinctive clothing, cars, clubhouse, etc. — in effect dismantling the group. The court can use the proceeds to compensate the victims.

BUT THE LEGISLATURE deliberately deleted a part of the bill, which included crimes directed at gay men and women among those that deserve added penalty, although gay bashing, too, is on the rise.

One reason given was that gay men and women are already protected by laws currently on the books. But so are the other minorities to whom this bill gives added protection.

Another reason given was that homosexuality is more of a medical problem and should be dealt with in that community.

"The medical and psychological community does not consider homosexuality to be an illness," says Dr. Dennis Sugrue, director of Henry Ford Hospital's Center for Human Sexuality.

"It's rather unfortunate, archaic thinking."

IT'S OBVIOUS that prejudice and ignorance were hard at work here. Contributing to that were representatives from the Observer & Eccentric area who voted against the House bill with the sexual orientation section in it — or those O&E-area senators who voted specifically to take that provision out before it got to the Senate floor.

They are: Rep. Mat Dunakiss-R, Lake Orion; Rep. Gordon Sparks, R-Troy; Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Commerce; and Sen. Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford.

By pointedly denying gays the added protection of a recognized minority, the Legislature left a door ajar for gay bashing — making it less offensive to commit a crime against that group.

It's ironic that a bill designed to give added protection to minorities is, in itself, discriminatory. Homosexuals who suffer the same prejudice and bigotry as other minorities are now, in the eyes of Michigan, a little less equal.

HIDKINS



Don't hoard panelists; newsletter is insightful

TYING UP some loose ends:

• I understand where he's coming from. But I don't agree with Farmington Hills councilman Joe Alkateeb that it's wrong to tap one board or commission to fill a vacancy on another.

Council debate arose Jan. 9 when Mayor Terry Sever nominated board of zoning appeals member Larry Lichtman to fill the planning commission seat vacated by Philip Arnold, appointed to fill a city council vacancy.

"I don't think it's a good idea for us to rob one commission to fill a vacancy on another commission," said Alkateeb, who expressed his reservations but supported the mayor's nominees.

He didn't elaborate but it's clear Alkateeb thinks that filling a vacancy by tapping an experienced member of another board or commission could dilute that board or commission.

I wouldn't constantly move board or commission members around. Continuity does have its place.

But spreading around a person's expertise by moving him or her to



Bob Sklar

another board or commission, especially upward, isn't all bad.

In this case, Lichtman moved up a notch from the BZA to the planning commission.

It's no secret he's a city council contender with strong credentials, who, in councilman Aldo Vagnozzi's view, has a clear vision of the kind of city Farmington Hills should be. So I don't object to him moving up to the planning commission.

As for the vacancy Lichtman left on the BZA, Sever's choice, Peggy DuPont, not only adds a second woman to the pivotal panel but also she is the kind of person likely to do her homework well.

Elevating a BZA alternate to Lichtman's seat would have made sense. But I think Sever was right on in seizing the opportunity to increase

the number of women on the board when DuPont agreed to serve.

• In reading Farmington Public Schools' January newsletter, I found the inner spread, "Good Things Are Happening Our Schools," particularly interesting.

In contrast to the heavy-duty topics of asbestos removal and budget reserves, it's heartening to learn that the schools have 15 National Merit semifinalists this year, that community education offers 100 enrichment classes, that student crisis teams are available to assist students at each high school, that 80 percent of all graduates go on to college or other advanced training programs, that cooperative education places 240 students in jobs to reinforce classroom skills and that 600 microcomputers are used to teach students computer technology.

• Remember to vote in Farmington Public Schools' special election next Tuesday. Voters will be asked to approve \$7.3 million in bonds for a badly needed west-side elementary. Last week, the Observer supported the request.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Article helps inform public

To the editor:

The North Farmington High School Students Against Driving Drunk chapter would like to thank you for printing, on Nov. 28, the article, "20 easterlies solid liquor to million."

It is nice to know that other people are aware of the problems that contribute to drunk driving.

North Farmington hopes that you will continue to publish such articles. Thank you again for making people aware.

Gregory Grotzki,
SADD advisor
North Farmington

Adoption a real option

To the editor:

The column, "Adoption Option Is a Good Choice," by Tim Richard, which appeared in the Observer Dec. 28, was of great interest to me.

It is true that today the problem of teen pregnancy remains a very serious one, contributing to pregnancy complications, child abuse and neglect, lack of education and job skills, and higher costs for social service and community support.

It is also true that the adoption option is viewed as a last resort by most of these young women. But it is a very viable option which is pre-

sented by most social service agencies.

St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center of Farmington Hills has operated a residential home for pregnant, single young women for 35 years. The focus of our service is to help these young women make a good decision about their own and their baby's future.

To this end, adoption is discussed, along with the realities of parenting, and the girls are presented with the opportunity of listening to a panel of adoptive parents who tell how much it has meant to them to adopt and love a child.

The young women also hear a panel of former residents of the home, both some who have kept their babies and some who placed them for adoption, talk about their decision and why they made it. We have found these to be very effective, providing much food for thought for girls involved in the decision-making process.

I don't believe that adoption is a "dirty word" to social agencies. After all, they are involved in helping childless couples complete their family by adoption. I do believe, however, that most social workers are aware of a fact that we have learned from many years of working with single parents: if a young woman is pressured into placing her baby for adoption and is not really comfortable with that choice, she will be pregnant again, probably within the year.

It's imperative that young people be presented with all the options, and also look realistically at the consequences of their decisions. Some young, single people are prepared to

be adequate, loving parents. Others are not, and a wide variety of social agencies work to provide counseling in this decision making process.

St. Mary Patricia Larabell,
executive director,
St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center,
Farmington Hills

Mayor lauds city spruceup

To the editor:

"Downtown Farmington looks just great." That is what I was told over and over again during the holiday season.

The credit goes to a lot of people, not only at City Hall and on the DDA, but especially the property owners and merchants in downtown Farmington.

There were 30 people involved in the installation of the Christmas lights in the trees along Grand River and Farmington Road. There were also 30 merchants who took part in the window decorating contest. It's because of that outstanding participation that this program got started; it has put vitality back into this central area.

All of us in Farmington are proud of our downtown. I can tell you there is more to come. It has taken a total commitment to get the momentum going; we know it will require a lot of attention to keep downtown a good shape. But the effort is worth it. Our future looks bright.

Richard Tupper,
Farmington mayor

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