

# Opinion

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

(12A1F)

O&amp;E Thursday, February 2, 1989

## Stark reality

### Tree protection long overdue

Woodman spare that tree!  
Touch not a single bough!  
In youth it sheltered me,  
and I'll protect it now.

— from G.P. Morris's poem, "The Oak"

**N**EEDED FOR a tree protection ordinance in Farmington Hills becomes quickly apparent when you scan the newest subdivisions — and see expensive homes on shadeless lots.

The stark reality of uprooted trees is driven home as you pass by some of the housing developments now under way.

That's why the ordinance, enacted last week, would have been more useful 10 years ago — before the building boom of the mid '80s.

The city is now 80 percent developed. But the ordinance could still help save landmark or mature trees on remaining land slated for development.

Though thinning in number, tall trees are still among Farmington Hills' most precious natural resources.

The tree protection ordinance, effective Feb. 13, requires a city permit to remove or relocate most varieties of trees. A permit also is required to disturb the land within a landmark tree's drip line.

**PERMITS WILL** be issued only if a tree poses a safety hazard, is badly diseased or damaged, threatens utility service, blocks access to a lot or absolutely stifles a lot's development.

If such an ordinance saves even one mature or landmark tree from indiscriminate removal by a developer, it will have served its purpose.

We still don't think the ordinance should apply to owners of occupied single-family lots. Not only is it impossible to monitor private wood lots, we don't think the city should be in the business of infringing on homeowner rights.

Most landmark or valued mature trees are in

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older developed sections of the city where homeowners know the fine points of wood-lot management — and aren't apt to irresponsibly strip their land.

But at least the ordinance — revised before adoption — now gives more leeway to homeowners on large lots.

At review, we'd encourage the city council to reconsider applying the ordinance to occupied single-family lots. We'd also encourage it to specifically address public rights of way and subdivision open spaces.

**BUT MAKE** no mistake: the basis for the ordinance is to alert developers up front, at site plan submission, that the city wants trees saved. Good reason must precede bringing in the buzzsaws.

The city has taken the lead by carefully carving a road through the majestic trees along Drake, north of 11 Mile. It spent a lot of extra money — but the money was well spent.

We particularly like the ordinance provision that, in many cases, calls for relocating or replacing trees removed with city permission.

We also like the provision making each unauthorized tree removal a separate offense punishable by up to \$500 and 90 days in jail. But we think offenders also should have to replace the trees.

Let's not shirk tree protection.

As one Farmington Hills resident bluntly put it in a letter to the city council:

"The devastation of our city's landscape cannot be undone by legislative action after the bulldozer and earth movers have wreaked their destruction."

## Worthy causes

### Don't make them beg for funds

**E**ACH YEAR at tax time, some worthy causes become beggars.

It's repetitious, expensive and degrading for the Children's Trust Fund and the Non-game Wildlife Fund to trot out sob stories in order to induce taxpayers to keep them going.

In past years, the state income tax form contained a checkbox line. It allowed you to donate part of your tax refund to those two state programs, but it was usable only by the 1.5 million taxpayers entitled to a refund.

This year Lansing is making it even easier. State Treasurer Robert A. Bowman points to lines 24 and 25 of the 1988 Michigan Income Tax Return MI-1040, saying voluntary contributions may be designated for either fund by entering the amount you want to donate. This will either increase your tax due or reduce your refund. It means 4.5 million taxpayers can contribute. That is supposed to be progress.

**THINGS HAVEN'T** been going well for the funds.

The Children's Trust Fund collected \$1.7 million at its peak (1986) from 200,000 taxpayers. Last year its take dropped to \$927,000 from 156,000 contributors.

The Non-game Wildlife Fund received a bit more than \$500,000 from some 89,000 designated taxpayers.

The gimmick of asking for voluntary contributions began with the children's fund during the deep recession of 1979-82. We are now in the seventh year of economic recovery, but still this fund must beg.

How the fund is administered tells the story. In

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this area, the Association for Retarded Children (Oakland County) received \$11,610; Common Ground (Birmingham — parenting skills) \$9,915; Children's Protection Program of Mercy Hospital, \$12,500; Wayne County Intermediate School District (pregnant teens service), \$20,000; YMCA of Western Wayne County (Inkster — family resource centers), \$22,717; and so on.

The Non-game Wildlife Fund supports programs for the peregrine falcon, eagles, loons, timber wolves and other endangered species, and surveys of bogs, wetlands and prairies.

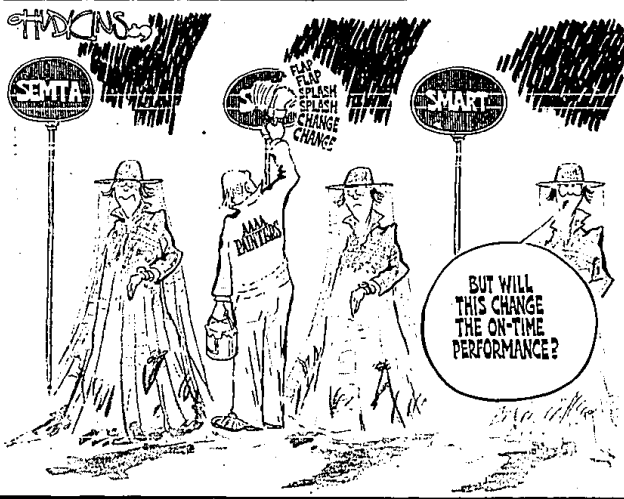
**BIG QUESTION:** Are \$1 million for the children's fund and \$500,000 for wildlife enough? Just the right amount? Too much?

No one makes a rational, collective decision. What the funds get is determined by how soft-hearted a taxpayer feels at the moment he/she hits lines 24 and 25 of MI-1040.

There's a better way. The state Legislature, composed of 148 more or less rational souls, should find money in the budget for these programs if it agrees they are worthy causes.

No money? Nonsense. In a year of a supposedly "tight" budget, the Legislature in 1988 scraped up \$7.3 million for Gov. James Blanchard's Neighborhood Builders Alliance; a system of grants to community groups to improve their neighborhoods. That \$7.3 million was almost five times as much as the Children's Trust Fund and Non-game Wildlife Fund received through begging.

We won't be so mean-spirited as to say "don't give to these funds." We think it would be better, however, for you to write your local state representative and state senator and tell them to make money available in the budget to stop child abuse and save wild animals rather than to pass the buck by making them beg.



## Letters, letters, letters: pipeline to community

FROM THE mailbox:

• Farmington Public Schools fourth grader David Ragland wrote to say how much he likes Eagle Elementary School.

It's "one of Michigan's best schools because all the teachers are very nice and tell you all you need to know for your grade," he wrote.

David told about how his third grade teacher, Shelly Sokol, "always has a smile on her face when she comes in the room each morning" and about how his fourth grade teacher, Marilyn Schipani, "is nice and never grumpy."

The two also run the after-school science club, the Fourth Grade Science O's.

"On Sunday night, kids hate to go to bed, but some of Eagle's kids are excited to go to bed because they are looking forward to going to school because they have so much fun," David wrote.

"I enjoy Eagle a great deal," he concluded.

In my mind, David's assessment is about the best endorsement a school could get.

• Council watcher Vernon Kielplinski of Farmington Hills wrote to clarify why he thinks the planning commission should be elected, a sug-



**Bob Sklar**

gestion he made Jan. 23 after Mayor Terry Sever announced a planning commission vacancy.

"It's just that in the case of the planning commission, this would prevent the mayor from picking people who would only favor his or her opinions," Kielplinski wrote.

"The commission holds a lot of power — power which should not be abused."

Kielplinski's thought is intriguing. In some communities, for example, library board and parks commission members are elected.

Electing planning commissioners, who wield the most power after council members, indeed might remove even the appearance of a conflict or favoritism when filling commission seats.

My prime reservation is the lousy

turnouts in city elections. In the last two such elections, only 14 percent of those registered cared enough

about what was going on to vote. I'd be more apt to consider a change in the selection process if that percentage was doubled or tripled. A representative vote would be more likely then.

• Letters I receive come in various forms — typed, handwritten, scrawled.

Some are informative. Others are enlightening. A few are downright nasty.

Sometimes, I even get a complimentary letter, thanking us for extending a helping hand.

James Macy, Food Bank of Oakland County director, wrote just such a letter.

"God bless the Observer & Eccentric and its readers."

"Your participation in our annual appeal is a great source of inspiration to the thousands of volunteers who give their time and energy, the very stuff of their lives, in an effort to provide food to the needy."

"Each year, the generous response of your readers continues to grow. The people of Oakland County do indeed desire to reach out and provide for their own."

Macy's words gave me a special sense of pride in the county I call home.

## 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.

### Column was enlightening

To the editor:

This is in reference to Catherine Trainor's column in the Observer & Eccentric, dated Thursday, Dec. 29, 1988.

I felt sad, angry and uplifted as I read about the unpleasant experience that you encountered when you stopped for lunch at Livonia Mall.

I am a black middle-aged "human being" who shops and attends the movies, on a regular basis, at the mall.

It shakes me up to think that when I walk into a restaurant, department store or bookstore, the person that is being paid a salary to serve the public may "cringe" at the thought of waiting on me.

I am a 14-year resident of the city of Farmington. I could write a book about the insensitive and ignorant remarks that have been made to me over these many years.

It is depressing (at times) to know that just because of your skin color you are repulsive to some people and some people actually "hate" you and think that you are inferior to them.

I say "at times" I feel depressed, but most of the time I think "how ignorant and pitiful you are."

I'm glad that you have a forum (the Observer & Eccentric) whereby you can express an enlightening

by many white people.

Maybe, the opinion of a person in your position will influence the thinking of some narrow-thinking people in our society.

Thanks again for being indignant and more than that expressing your indignation.

Deloris Rose,  
Farmington

### Move walk for safety

To the editor:

While walking on the sidewalk south of Grand River from Chatham Hills Apartments to the Grand River-Halsted Plaza, there is a very dangerous 50 feet, which is in front of the Jamestown Apartments.

This stretch of sidewalk borders on Grand River where cars travel very fast and anyone walking is in great danger.

I hope that this short stretch of sidewalk could be moved over to be in line with the rest of the sidewalk in this area before someone is seriously injured.

Another improvement that could be made would be a bike path on Freedom Road since many people bike and jog there.

John C. Bow,  
Farmington

### Valvona has served ably

To the editor:

The absence from the Farmington Hills Planning Commission of one of its ablest and most valuable members is indeed a loss for the entire city.

Vince Valvona was a source of information for the right of other members of the commission because of his expertise in developing raw land into the stuff of which villages, towns and cities are, in fact, formed.

I may speak for all of us who have served with Vince Valvona in saying that we are disappointed that his name is not to be among those read when the mayor offers his reappointments.

Vince has dared to be outspoken without bias or prejudice toward any proponent when it was necessary to give his respected input.

He has answered the developers on their own turf.

He has acted always with integrity and openness.

His presence on the building authority notwithstanding, Vince's considerable knowledge and his genuine willingness to serve on the planning commission has given us all the expectation that he would be with us for another three-year term.

Joanne E. Smith,  
Farmington Hills

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