

# Opinion

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

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## Public forum It's a basic right for citizens

**L**EAVE PUBLIC questions and comments where they were for years, near the top of the Farmington Hills City Council agenda, except on public hearing nights. Then move them to after the hearings.

Let's also enforce the three-minute time limit for each speaker during public questions and comments. If a legitimate concern can't be resolved quickly or directed to an administrator, add it to the agenda, after others in the audience for specific agenda items have spoken.

This scenario should resolve the festering dispute over where public questions and comments should come on the council agenda.

The public's right to speak should always be front and center — councilman Joe Alkateeb's curious comment about how it's "a courtesy from the Farmington Hills City Council to the residents of this city" notwithstanding.

Yes, Mr. Alkateeb, the charter lets residents seek placement on the agenda by writing a letter. But that's an awfully formal procedure for what we see as such a basic right — addressing the city council.

**MAYOR TERRY** Sever may think it's wisest to float public questions and comments from meeting to meeting to accommodate folks on hand for other agenda items.

But we'd remind him that may give the impression the public forum isn't as important as other agenda items.

More disillusionment could be the unintended result in a city where few attend council meetings or use the public forum.

The truth is, some of what's brought up during public questions and comments is more important than other agenda items.

But listening to the city council debate issue after issue for two or more hours before getting a chance to speak could deflate anyone's sails.

As resident Masha Silver aptly put it: "This podium and this microphone are second only to our vote as a means for us, the citizens of Farmington Hills, to express our concerns and our needs to you, the city council."

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ing Hills, "to express our concerns and our needs to you, the city council."

We have no problem delaying public questions and comments on public hearing nights until after the hearings are completed.

Folks who face having to sit through five hearings shouldn't also have to wait through 30 minutes or more of public questions and comments if they don't want to.

**BUT ON** other nights, we think a punctual gavel and moving more involved discussions to later in the agenda should reign. Speakers should respect the mayor's request to wrap up comments or consider placement later on the agenda.

As far as floating public questions and comments on non-public hearing nights when unfinished business, requiring public feedback, is on the agenda, that's where we draw the line.

We don't think it would hurt residents interested in commenting on a pending ordinance from sitting through public questions and comments. The experience might give them greater insight into or appreciation for city government.

To quote Ms. Silver, "In a democracy, everybody here has a stake in sharing as open and as wide a public forum as possible. And this certainly means making the public forum as accessible and available as possible."

Mayor Sever, you wanted "30 days to work on an agenda that is fair to accommodate those who want to speak."

We trust you'll succeed.

## Grass roots Protest helped defeat pay raise

**R**EJECTION OF the hotly debated congressional pay increase is a good step, one that helps return the U.S. House of Representatives to its rightful place as the "people's branch" of the federal government.

We heard all the stories — of representatives having to live together in crumbling Washington town houses, of the raise being "just a drop in the bucket" compared with the massive federal budget and that the raise was initially recommended by a federal review panel and had bipartisan support.

Quite frankly, we weren't moved. We all have house payments or rent to struggle with every month.

**HOUSE MEMBERS** rejected the increase 380-48 Tuesday afternoon. The matter was similarly rejected in the Senate. The matter will now be delivered to President George Bush, who should put it to rest for good. The raise would have also benefited federal judges and top government officials.

Perhaps some increase is necessary, just to ward off inflation. Nonetheless, 51 percent is too large a windfall by anyone's standards.

While the increase would have benefited those other groups, its chief support appeared to come from the House and that worries us.

It worries us that a House seat has increasingly become lifetime employment — and lucrative employment at that, once speech fees are also taken into account.

It worries us that our representatives are increasingly becoming isolated from the cares and concerns of their constituents — that they even considered such a whopping raise is indication enough.

Looking back, it wasn't meant to be that way. If the U.S. Senate is, essentially, a "millionaire's club," so be it. The House was designed to be an institution closer to the people.

By giving House members mere two-year terms, the framers of our Constitution clearly

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intended to provide for a volatile, shifting body. They wanted a body that could immediately react to public demands compared with the relative security they provided with senators' six-year terms. Remember, too, that House membership was initially the only federal office directly elected by the people.

While some degree of carry-over is necessary, we believe the framers would be shocked that some legislators are now making a career out of Congress.

While the ever shrinking pool of pay raise supporters argued the increase was necessary to keep "good people" in government, their arguments didn't hold water. Even without the increase, members of Congress still earn \$89,500 a year. That salary exceeds those of most of their constituents. The proposed \$135,000 salary was simply too much to take.

Somewhat the notion of a "people's House" got lost over the years. Until now.

According to the will of more than 80 percent of the general public, at least according to public opinion polls, House members heavily rejected the pay increase in Tuesday's vote.

It was an issue that simply wouldn't go away. Some area residents mailed tea bags to their representatives in a symbolic protest. Others wrote a song about the pay raise fiasco.

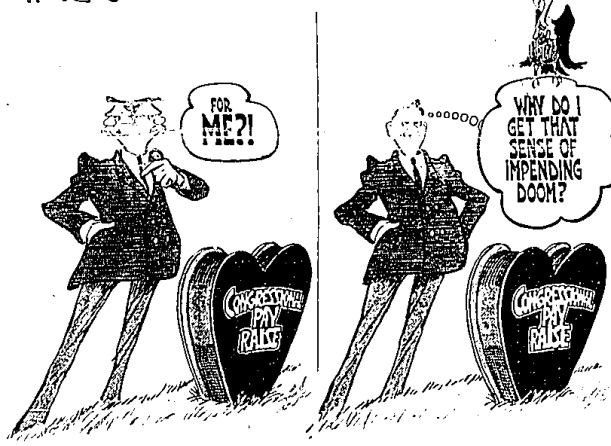
**THE STORM** of grass roots protest surrounding the pay increase forced members of Congress to twice change their minds. They didn't approve the increase, nor did they take the coward's way out, by putting off a vote until after the pay raise was scheduled to go into effect.

But it shouldn't end there. Limits should be placed on honorariums, speech fees paid by political allies. Campaign financing also needs to be re-examined, especially when some long-term area congressmen are sitting on as much as \$500,000 in unspent campaign contributions that they can convert into retirement accounts.

Rejection of the pay raise, however, is still a good first step. It's a sign that the House is still the people's branch — even if we the people occasionally have to shake the tree.

How area congressmen voted. Yes means they rejected the raise. Yes: William Broomfield, Dennis Hertel, Sander Levin, Carl Pursell. No: William Ford.

STYLING



## Redevelopment taking on a new thrust in Hills

**IN ONE** of the most perceptive comments of the evening, Stockton resident Rosa Plum told a joint meeting of Farmington Hills' city council and planning commission that redevelopment will soon be a byword.

"It'll probably be the hardest challenge before you," said Plum, who got involved in council watching when rezoning became an issue in her east-side neighborhood. "It'll give you a chance to correct our errors."

With its undeveloped acreage dwindling, fast-growing Farmington Hills indeed will be forced to change its direction in the key area of land use planning.

Make no mistake: As long as Farmington Hills continues to be a prestige address, developers will look to the city with creative redevelopment projects — and plenty of greenbacks — dancing in their eyes.

Even though the city continues to be a pacesetter in residential and office construction, telltale signs of redevelopment are everywhere.

**ANTHONY S. Brown** Development Co. of Birmingham is developing



**Bob Sklar**

ing The Orchards Corporate Center, where the Forest Hills subdivision once stood east of Orchard Lake Road between 12 Mile and I-496.

Owner James Butler of Southfield is overseeing a \$3-million face lift at Kendallwood Shopping Center, an aging retail center at 12 Mile and Farmington Road.

Pending rezoning, Farmington Hills-based Bestak Building Co. has unveiled plans to enlarge Muirwood Square, at Grand River and Drake, to 84,000 square feet and have a supermarket anchor.

Southfield-based Schostak Brothers & Co. plans to convert Tally Hall's 40,000-square-foot festival food court on Orchard Lake Road into a retail center anchored by an F&M health and beauty aids store.

In another development affecting

the Orchard Lake Road retail corridor, city planners are considering ways to improve traffic flow between Hunters Square and Orchard Place.

**MEANWHILE**, RESIDENTS, with some city assistance, are trying to upgrade the image of Olde Town, Farmington Hills' oldest platted neighborhood near Inkster and Eight Mile. In my mind, boosting city support for housing rehabilitation and road improvements could do even more good there.

Redevelopment means more than reviewing site plans and enforcing construction codes.

It also means closely monitoring landscaping, berming, property upkeep, pedestrian lighting, investment potential and zoning clashes. Much can be learned just by listening to residents and their experiences.

As a Farmington Hills taxpayer as well as a council watcher, I'd urge city manager William Costick's year 2000 study committee to give particular attention to how redevelopment could help improve our quality of life in the 1990s and beyond.

## 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.

### Who leads us in Hills?

To the editor:

The dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had the same wants as ours. No different than any of the many citizens of Farmington Hills. Yet who are these people that govern us, who decide the fate of so many people and affect so many lives?

The "Public Questions and Comments" portion of the agenda was moved by Mayor Terry Sever. Why? He has created quite a stir. Members of the city council along with the mayor, the questions remain. Who are you and who do you represent?

Even if an item does not make the Farmington Observer, it does not make an item any less important. It does not matter whether or not the Observer agrees or not.

When a man or woman goes before the city council to speak, it is important to him or her. In fact, it may be an item that could affect others.

There is only one thing worse than the change made by Mayor Terry Sever. That is when any city council or any other governing body of the United States forgets its sole purpose. It is no different with the press.

It is to serve with pride. Or else the things that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Constitution, and the words "We The People" will be lost.

Vernon C. Kieplaski, Farmington Hills

### Don't slight recreation

To the editor:

Your many articles on the dedication of the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services and the Parks and Recreation Division to develop Heritage Park are very informative to the citizens of Farmington Hills.

They all tell how the city continues to request funding for development of the park but fails to mention why the same dedication and funding is not directed to recreation in the city.

The Jan. 23 articles, "Getting 'real' about loops and twirls" and "There's more to ice skating than ice cream," described how adults can enjoy active recreation when the facilities are made available.

The listing of the eight closest cities to Farmington Hills, all of which provide the facilities, and our city only listing a pond on Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile, further highlights the disparity between the recreation programs of the area.

Recent cold weather allowed the ponds in the area to freeze and provided areas for skating. Every area of ice was filled with ice skaters and hockey players enjoying for a very short period what other cities have available during the whole winter.

The residents of Farmington Hills' interest in recreation is as great as any of our bordering cities, but the only difference is the Department of

Special Services and the Recreation Division's lack of interest in recreation for the residents.

I believe the residents of Farmington Hills deserve a well-rounded, first-class recreation program now. Our only hope is that the new mayor can lead the city in a new direction.

Kenneth Fortler, Farmington Hills

### Head Start gives thanks

To the editor:

During our two decades of service to the needy, the Farmington Head Start Program has been truly fortunate in receiving assistance from our community.

Among the many kindly souls who share with us, we count: EDS, Farmington Hills Market, Real Estate One, Century 21, IGA Market, Oak Farm Market, McDonald's, The Michigan Group, Swiss Colony, City Management Corp., Metro Bank, Data Systems, Fireman's Fund, Taystee Bread, Knart and other individuals.

These fine people "adopt" children or families, purchase clothes or groceries or toys, provide Christmas trees, pay utility bills and otherwise spread Christmas spirit.

Phyllis Howard, director, Farmington Head Start

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