

Opinion

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

After victory Schools must fulfill promises

THE AFTERGLOW of victory is over. Farmington Public Schools administrators and trustees must now do their best to fulfill the trust of voters who approved \$7.3 million in bonds for a new west-side elementary.

In the euphoria of voter approval by a 3 to 1 margin Jan. 31, promises made by district officials during the parent-supported campaign must not be forgotten.

We agree that a new elementary in western Farmington Hills is essential to ease classroom overcrowding and long bus rides. No child should have to be taught in a hallway or sit on a bus for an hour each day.

Not one of the district's 12 elementary schools is west of Drake — in the area bursting with growth and 27 percent of the younger students. New homes there have pushed 11 of the elementary to capacity.

The question now is: Just how much of a dent in classroom overcrowding will the new 600-student school make?

In combination with the Highmeadow Common Campus and optional center kindergarten programs, the dent should be substantial.

ONCE THE new school opens in 1990, we expect to see not only dramatically less overcrowding but a more appealing student-teacher ratio, reflective of the trend toward smaller classes and specialized learning/teaching stations.

We also expect to see more designated classroom space for art, music, science and computers.

Officials have promised that the carefully designed school — nestled in a rolling, wooded nook south of 11 Mile, east of Halsted — will be a prototype for upgrading other school buildings.

They also have gone out of their way to underline that while elementary enrollment is projected to rise through 1994, overall district enrollment is declining. So taxpayers should be content in assuming the district won't need more new buildings in the future.

In the euphoria of voter approval by a 3-1 margin Jan. 31, promises made by district officials during the parent-supported campaign must not be forgotten.

In selling the bonds to build the new school, we'll watch closely to assure the district indeed doesn't raise the debt retirement levy beyond the current 1.2 mills, as promised. We're hoping for a bond sale so favorable, the levy could be even lower than that.

Officials CAUGHT a lot of flak for the low-key way they tried to sell a \$27 million bond issue for a west-side elementary and district-wide safety improvements last September.

This time, they wised up and let the Friends of Farmington Schools, an independent parents group, become active campaigners.

Despite last fall's halting issue defeat, the school board has vowed to immediately address the most pressing safety concerns. We applaud the district for the quick removal of all PCB-tainted lighting ballasts.

But other safety concerns remain. We remind the school board that voters made it clear, at least to us, they want as many of the needed improvements as possible paid for through the general fund, the capital fund or the fund equity — not another bond issue.

We're confident the administration and the school board understand the burden they face in converting facility-related promises to reality.

Legislators should complete the three-bill package of day care bills enabling cities and villages to provide for in-home day care.

Services must wrestle with complaints about a home or its operator.

FAXON'S BILL will allow complaints to be handled by local authorities, who can respond more rapidly and are closer to the problem.

The bill ensures adequate control at the state and local levels.

Without a special, locally issued permit, the larger group day care homes (maximum 12 children) may not locate within 1,500 feet of each other or other types of licensed care facilities.

Density would be controlled.

The group day care homes would have to meet standards to receive a locally issued permit. Operators would be required to meet standards for sign regulations, fencing, property maintenance and off-street parking for employees. Local officials would be allowed to inspect both family and group day care homes.

In-home child day care is not a business in the traditional sense. Day care provides a needed service, one that has been provided by neighbors and friends for decades.

Caring for children in a residential area is what a neighborhood is all about. Whether or not regulations exist, parents will continue to seek child care in their neighborhoods. And whether or not regulations exist, neighbors will continue to provide the service.

But with Faxon's bill, standards would be set and enforced. A much-needed and time-honored service could come out in the open, free of harassment and fear.

The increasing demand for in-home child care proves that parents continue to want their children cared for by neighbors and friends in a setting familiar to children.

WORKING MOTHERS won't go away. And the needs of their children won't go away. The best way to face the issue is to acknowledge it and set guidelines that ensure the continuance of such services and the protection of children.

Faxon's bill is a step in the right direction if we are to meet the needs of today's working parents and the needs of a future generation.

As Faxon so aptly put it: "The quality of life in any community can be measured by how we care for our children and our seniors. We're talking about something that's good for children."



Leave or stay, Joe, but don't string city along

I'M WEARY of how serious Farmington Hills city councilman Joe Alkafis is about resigning.

If you're so fed up with the state of the city, then go ahead, Joe, resign.

Remember, you were elected to a third four-year term in 1987 as the top vote-getter in a field of nine candidates — the \$11,000 you spent, by far the most, notwithstanding.

By giving you the most support, voters were saying they respected you and wanted your guidance on the city's top policy-making panel.

Flinging with resignation says to me maybe you're not up to the rigors of the part-time post.

IF YOU'RE so concerned about discussion among city hall employees — which you said "is so thick you can cut it with a knife" — make it your business to separate fact from rumor.

If morale indeed "is at an all-time low," assert your leadership to demand accountability and correction. If you're not willing to do that, you don't belong on the city council anyway.

I'm not much impressed by your "last-ditch effort" to try to iron out differences with fellow council members Jean Fox and Aldo Vagnozzi.

Like Vagnozzi, I thought your year as mayor in 1988 was, overall, productive for the city. But the rest of the council shouldn't be put on trial while you decide whether to quit.

Just make up your mind quick. Your credibility is crumbling.



Bob Sklar

YOU HARP that Fox and Vagnozzi, as well as council watchers Rosa Flum and Luella Hempel, have tried to tear apart the city in the past year.

Fox and Vagnozzi, duly elected in 1987 just like you, have every right to view the city differently than you.

They attended recent study sessions with the parks and recreation commission, the planning commission, the 2000 committee and our state lawmakers. Where were you? Don't sling darts if you're not willing to take an active part in such worthy joint meetings.

You admitted you didn't attend the December meeting where the city council elected new officers because you wanted to be mayor pro tem but knew Fox had the votes, thanks to what you called telephone campaigning.

I detest council business being conducted by phone. The only time the mayor or any council member should call other members is to inform them of legitimate city business. Call a special council meeting if discussion or action is necessary.

But, Joe, not showing up at the meeting to protest the telephone

campaigning, and missing other important agenda items, is hardly the kind of reaction voters expect of an elected official.

FLUM AND Hempel, meanwhile, are taxpayers just as you are. They have every right to poke and prod — and ask who's accountable.

Don't sell them short. Last summer, if you recall, they disclosed councilman Ben Marks' respected check to the city, which left a sewer tap-in fee he owed unpaid for 18 months.

You knock Fox for being so outspoken about land use decisions because you're concerned about the planning commission, an essential volunteer advisory board, taking undue knocks.

But you correctly note that part of the reason for Fox's complaints is the result of the city council sometimes giving planners "the wrong direction."

You admit your passion for serving has waned. And you brand 1988 as crummy despite some clear steps forward for the city, including tougher zoning and cluster housing controls.

You don't resign, you owe it to the 4,000 voters who supported you in 1987 to serve out your term with distinction. I appreciate the long hours you put in as an electrical engineer. But your attendance record at council study sessions must improve.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Home day care Bill sets necessary standards

TODAY WORKING parents in need of good, safe day care for their children are the rule, not the exception.

But in many communities, parents' search for day care facilities close to home is thwarted by community zoning ordinances and attempts to curb, if not prohibit, home day care in residential areas.

That's why we urge passage of a bill to be reintroduced by state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, which would ensure that all home child care operators:

- are licensed,
- are required to follow a set of appropriate standards,
- are allowed to operate in residential areas.

THE BILL would give parents the security of knowing their children can be cared for in a residential setting without local officials using zoning ordinances to close the home.

Senate Bill 687, as it was known in the last legislative session before its death by one vote, would apply to cities and villages.

The state Legislature has already given its blessings to accompanying bills covering townships and counties.

Legislators should complete the three-bill package of day care bills enabling cities and villages to provide for in-home day care.

In far too many cases, local zoning ordinances have succeeded in driving home child day care underground. The ordinances have forced operators to avoid licensure and ordinance penalties.

Consequently, today's in-home child care providers receive minimum control and monitoring. An overburdened state Department of Social



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.

Doctor eases his back pain

To the editor:
Thank you for publishing the "People" article by Loraine McClish about Dr. Sherry Accetta (Oct. 31), the new chiropractor in town.

I have suffered from constant low back pain since 1986. I couldn't sit for more than one hour, birthday parties and family get-togethers were torture. I could not take my wife to the theater or out for dinner.

I had pain-blocking shots four times with no relief. The only relief was a narcotic pain pill and lying around doing nothing. I was resigned to spending the rest of my life in pain; my active life was over.

Then I read your article and went to see the talented young lady. She looked at the same X rays (as previous doctors) and showed me four or five problem areas; and she started treating me. I have had 20 treatments; after 14 treatments, I was able to sit in a restaurant for one and a half hours without pain.

Christmas Eve, I sat for five hours with my family and Christmas day, I sat for 10 hours — both times without pain.

This talented young lady with gifted hands has enabled me to rejoin the human race and spend the rest of my life without pain.

Roland Mutschall,
Farmington Hills

Aid to seniors is appreciated

To the editor:

For most of us, the holidays are a time of celebration, reverence and family gatherings, but for many individuals, especially older adults, it's a time of isolation and hunger.

The Senior Alliance has initiated a program to address the needs of homebound seniors. Our Holiday Meals-on-Wheels program began at Thanksgiving and has become successful because of the large amount of community support. It has been wonderful to see the number of individuals and organizations that truly appreciate what they have and give so willingly to others.

Our sincerest thanks go out to the dozens of volunteers who gave up a portion of their holiday to visit those individuals who were alone.

Young and old alike came from many communities to participate and often brought a homemade gift to accompany the meal.

Also, a word of praise must go to the three area hospitals — Riverdale Osteopathic, Boniford General in Farmington Hills and Westland Medical Center — that prepared more than 600 meals for us during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Thank you all for your invaluable assistance and desire to make someone else's holiday a little happier.

Martla Fleming,
chairman,
Senior Alliance

Thank you for ballot support

To the editor:

Thanks so much for your help and support during the bond election.

We appreciate your endorsement of the new school on the editorial page and other good, positive information during the last month.

Tina Jensen,
Friends of Farmington Schools

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