

Opinion

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

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Too intense Planners rightly nix rezoning

WE WANT Muirwood Square to survive. Property decline anywhere in Farmington Hills or Farmington reflects poorly on the whole community.

But in our view, redeveloping the 9-year-old shopping center at Grand River and Drake should be done within Farmington Hills' master land use plan.

We oppose rezoning six of 12 acres to the west to let Bestak Building Co. expand Muirwood Square to a 105,000-square-foot center anchored by a supermarket.

The Farmington Hills-based developer's \$10 million proposal looks prudent on paper. But the plan, courageous in its quest, just doesn't fit the location.

City planning commissioners voted 5-3 to not recommend rezoning the acreage from multiple family residential and vehicular parking district to community business district.

We urge the city council to echo that vote. As zoned, the 12 acres would yield 124 more apartments — and less than half the amount of peak hour trips.

WE DON'T see the wisdom in doubling Muirwood Square's size, and further encroaching into a residential zone, when the Grand River-Drake intersection lies along a notoriously congested corridor.

The intersection is riddled with traffic concerns, particularly heavy volume and poor sight lines to the west.

We appreciate Bestak's desire to nip the 20-percent vacancy rate "in the bud" and re-establish Muirwood Square's stability and vitality.

And we appreciate its pledge to keep the westernmost six acres natural if rezoned, except perhaps for a health club for the apartment dwellers.

But if Bestak is willing to partly re-build from scratch by demolishing 30,000 square feet, we wonder if it's possible to creatively prepare a proposal that provides an anchor within the existing community business district.

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WE DON'T buy the notion that when considering land use, the only decision is whether a proposed use is suitable. Nearby land use shouldn't be an overriding factor, but it can't be ignored.

The Farmington Downtown Development Authority's claim that an expanded Muirwood Square "threatens to destroy the viability of downtown Farmington" seems a bit exaggerated.

We don't see the fate of downtown Farmington — well into a \$1.4 million redevelopment project — riding on what happens at Muirwood Square or at the planned Target shopping center at Grand River and Tuck.

Rather, we see the historic charm, new visuals and improving retail mix of Farmington's central business district as solid consumer lures.

Besides, the marketplace should dictate competition, not zoning.

Still, we count six existing or planned grocery stores in a three-mile radius of Grand River and Drake — Stocker's, Kroger, A&P, Farmer Jack and IGA in Farmington and a planned supermarket at 12 Mile and Halsted in Farmington Hills.

WE ALSO contest Bestak's view that the Grand River corridor is a commercial strip. From Farmington Road to Drake, we count just as many places to live.

You betcha: a 105,000-square-foot shopping center at Grand River and Drake "would change the whole area," as planning commissioner Mary Avery aptly put it.

More retail space doesn't seem necessary to satisfy quality-of-life demands in the area. The master land use plan should be adhered to in this rezoning bid.

Smokers

Be polite: Ask before lighting up

TOBACCO SMOKE is harmful. Yet the Tobacco Institute, headquartered just a few blocks from the White House in Washington, is desperately fighting back for respectability with a heavy propaganda campaign.

No longer does tobacco advertising equate smoking with sexual desirability, as it did in the '30s and '40s. No longer does it bother to challenge the mountain of medical statistics by braying back that there's "no scientific proof" smoke is a killer, as it did in the '60s and '70s.

IN A SERIES of full-page advertisements last month, the Tobacco Institute bellowed: "Enough." It produced a poll showing "a majority of Americans" feel attacks on smoking violate American values.

The Tobacco Institute's message is that there are enough taxes; enough bans, rules and regulations telling us what to do; enough attempts to control private life; enough censorship of free speech and advertising; enough physical abuse of women smokers; enough discrimination against one group.

The tobacco folks aren't saying their product is good. They're saying attacks on their products are attacks on the Bill of Rights, your pocketbook and womanhood.

One is reminded of the sleazy Chicago mayor in the 1920s who used to wrap the American flag around his ample torso when orating, and of philosopher Samuel Johnson's dictum, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

WE WON'T be trapped into taking the Tobacco Institute's side on whether smokers of either sex should be physically assaulted.

The point is that smoking — even if legal and constitutional — deserves to be frowned on. Smoking is no longer the norm; it is the exception, and the smoker should be polite enough to ask before lighting up.

Smoking is un-chic, like halitosis or body odor. The smoker has a constitutional right to smoke, to have sweaty armpits, to speak, to buy an ad and to be safe from thugs. And the rest of us have a right to ask the smoker to (thrr-rumph!) stand further away.

That smoking is losing its grip on Michiganians is evident in the 1988 report from the American Lung Association's southeast Michigan office in Southfield. Among adults (18 or older), smokers declined from 32.4 percent of the population in

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1982 to 28.9 percent last year — in other words, one-tenth fewer smokers.

UNFORTUNATELY, the incidence of smoking is still high among Michigan women aged 18-34 — 33.7 percent compared to 30.7 and 20 percent for older groups.

Why? The speculation is that young women pick up smoking as they enter the work force in greater proportions and more responsible jobs; that teenage girls smoke as a diet technique since smoking curbs one's appetite (just as it drains one's health).

The American Lung Association reports that nearly 12,000 smokers were among the 28,800 Michiganders who died of heart disease, bronchitis and lung cancer in 1987. That's 42 percent — considerably more than the percentage of smokers in the overall population.

The American Cancer Society, also headquartered in Southfield, estimates cigarette smoking is responsible for 85 percent of lung cancer cases among men and 75 percent among women — 83 percent overall.

At this point, we make no new case for governmental action against the tobacco industry, but we see plenty of need for plain Americans — including smokers — to enforce the rule that tobacco smoke is unpleasant. Items:

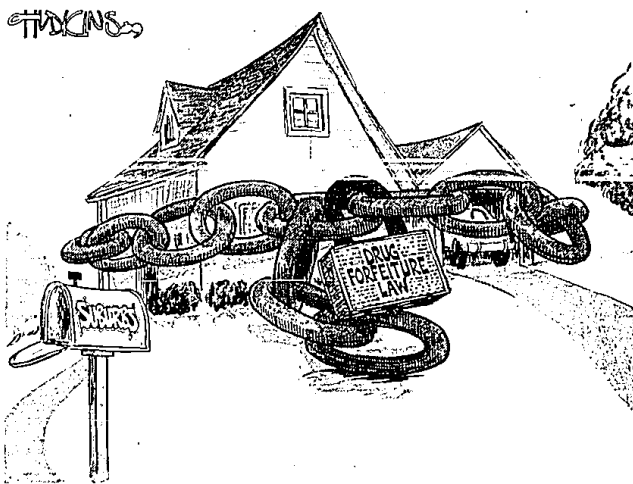
- Don't smoke around innocent children, whose health can be harmed by "sidestream" smoke from burning cigarettes. Take a walk outdoors when you have a cigarette — the exercise will do you good.

- Educate children on the addictive properties of tobacco and the need to resist peer pressure. If you're a smoking parent, confess your addiction.

- Be encouraging to smokers who try to curb the habit or quit. It often takes five or six tries before they succeed.

Smoking, even if constitutional, is unpleasant and un-chic.

TUCKERS



The decision to shoot: It can often be deadly

IN A perilous split-second, a Farmington Hills patrolman had to answer the ultimate question for a police officer: "Do I shoot?"

There's no easy answer.

When an officer says yes, he won't shoot to wound. "He's going to take proper action as far as safety, not only for his life but for any other persons who may be in the area," said police Chief William Dwyer.

Lt. Richard Murphy was blunter: "You shoot to kill, not wound." So you can't waver if you're going to pull the trigger. "Once that bullet leaves the gun," Murphy said, "there's no stopping it. No officer I know really wants to take a life and still go home at night."

That's one reason why police in both Farmington Hills and Farmington are moving to a sophisticated firearms training program — one that provides a precise readout on an officer's accuracy, reaction time and judgment.

A Farmington Hills officer pulled the trigger Feb. 11 for the first time in five years on road patrol.

FEARING FOR his life, the 31-year-old officer fired at a suspected armed robber driving toward him on a dead-end residential road.

"Kill me, I want to die," yelled Cecil Wilson, 42, of Marshall, Mo., moments before he was stopped with a single shot from the officer's 12-gauge pump shotgun, police said.



Bob Sklar

A loaded black pellet gun, identical in appearance to a 9 mm semiautomatic pistol, was found on the passenger seat of Wilson's car, lying next to his outstretched right arm. Farmington Hills police ordered two separate investigations into the shooting. But Dwyer called it justifiable "based on our preliminary investigation."

The officer, standing outside his patrol car with shotgun in hand, three times ordered Wilson to surrender but fired when he feared the man would drive alongside and either shoot him or pin him against his patrol car, police said.

WILSON'S WIFE, Lois, said it's possible her husband, who battled depression and crack cocaine, decided to commit suicide by forcing the officer to shoot.

The officer was reassigned to desk duty until the investigations are complete. "He's a good officer," Murphy said. "And he's doing fine."

The department will provide counseling so he can deal with post-shoot-

ing flashbacks or second guessing.

Since Murphy came to Farmington Hills from the streets of Detroit in 1970, he recalls only three other times when officers used fatal force — once at an armed robbery and twice during family trouble. Maybe three other times, suspects were wounded, he said.

No Farmington Hills officer has ever been shot.

TV HASN'T done much for putting police work into perspective. Many officers go through their career without firing a gun in the line of duty. But they can never let down their guard.

When Farmington Hills' 51 patrol and surveillance officers report to work, they have no idea what awaits. Seemingly minor calls — an open building, a traffic stop, a family fight — can escalate beyond control.

"With the number of guns and the amount of drugs out there, nobody's immune," Murphy said.

All signs point to the officer who shot Cecil Wilson acting in self defense. Time will heal some of his emotional scars. But the memory of that fateful night will never die.

Counseling may help. But his professionalism probably is his best assurance of a smooth return to the road.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

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.

Diner finds nice cuisine

To the editor:

A "breath of spring" has come into downtown Farmington at the Potpourri Restaurant at 33572 Grand River.

The new owner/chef, Richard Guyn, a Farmington native, has brought an innovative and artistic flair to everything he serves.

His energy and enthusiasm for fine cuisine and satisfied customers is encouraging. Our town welcomes this.

Marian Bliznik,
Farmington Hills

Trees are no menace

To the editor:

This letter is in reference to your Feb. 13 story, "Farmington trees do job on sidewalks." I speak for trees.

What value can we place on a tree — a majestic maple that has become as much a resident of Floral Park as the homeowners themselves?

Those beautiful, large silver maple trees flanking the few streets of which Floral Park is comprised

lend an elegance to this small city subdivision that could be attained by no other means: All the new sidewalks, driveways, carports, porches, and awnings in the world cannot approach the gentle grace these trees lend to Floral Park. It is ironic that they should be branded a "menace" by the mayor of the city.

Menace? I call them otherwise — I call them friends. I lived in Floral Park for eight years; I know the shade provided for cyclists, walkers and children playing on the sidewalks those trees provided. I know the sound of them in the night and the cooling breezes they provide. They are irreplaceable.

It would be barbaric and foolhardy to remove these trees or to enable short-sighted homeowners to do so through economic assistance. There is no going back after a tree is cut down. Take a drive through the subdivision; the treeless frontage looks barren, lifeless.

Tell Mr. Waack he can watch his home value plummet as the trees leave the neighborhood. Tell him he can consider the \$77 per sidewalk square an investment in his home value and in nature. Tell him to redirect his campaign toward the city — perhaps the city can find a way to help defray the cost of replacing these sidewalks "at risk."

The solution lies not in removing precious trees that bespeak the heri-

tage of beautiful Farmington, the solution lies in rethinking the situation; a new perspective is vitally needed.

Victoria Najjar Appel,
Farmington Hills

Look again at the downtown

To the editor:

I am wondering how many others in the community are as disappointed as I am with what has happened to the Downtown Farmington Center. We have lost parking spaces to make room for the new large store being built on the one end.

Surely whoever is building this does not think that people will shop in the A & P and then walk around to the area in the back of the store to their car with groceries.

What area is busy with trucks unloading food. As far as I am concerned, the downtown area has been spoiled. Let's just hope that we don't lose any stores up there because of the lack of parking.

Whose idea was all this? Is this what is called "Beautification of Downtown Farmington?" Look again!

Nancy Newell,
Farmington

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