

Opinion

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

12A(F)

O&E Thursday, March 2, 1989

Tight budget How much relief's needed?

DURING RECENT years, Clarenceville Public Schools have been mired in financial difficulties.

First of all, the small district is geographically splintered, including the northeast corner of Livonia, the southeast corner of Farmington Hills and the northwest corner of Redford Township. About 600 Farmington Hills children attend Clarenceville schools.

Second, the district is primarily a bedroom community with very few commercial and industrial enterprises to enrich its tax base. Unfortunately, the property tax burden falls on the shoulders of homeowners.

Third, because of its relatively low tax base and low student enrollment, Clarenceville is an "in-formula" district — left at the mercy of the state administration and Legislature that give and take back money as regularly as the tides change.

The in-formula status of Clarenceville has financially strapped the district in recent years.

STATE AID payments have increased at a smaller rate than the cost of living and so the income Clarenceville receives from the state has not kept pace with inflation.

Because homeowners share a heavy burden of paying the district's operating costs, the board and administration have been reluctant to come to the voters and request new millage. In fact, the district has not done so for eight years.

In recent years, though, the district has been prevented from doing so because Redford Township was being taxed at its limit as a general law township. (Because Farmington Hills and Livonia are cities, their charter tax limits are higher and did not have an impact on Clarenceville.)

"In 1988, Redford voters approved charter township status, which raised Clarenceville's, Redford Union's, and South Redford's millage limit by 3.5 mills. Redford Union, operating in a deficit, was under orders from the state to get its budget in the black. A special election was

The in-formula status of Clarenceville has financially strapped the district in recent years.

held and voters approved 3.5 additional mills to make the district solvent.

Now Clarenceville is getting ready to take advantage of its ceiling being raised by 3.5 mills. The school board has called for a special election for April 24 to request an additional 3.5 mills.

DURING THE next two months, our readers in Clarenceville will have a decision to make on how to vote on the millage request.

There are a few questions to ask the school board and administration.

While the need for additional funds is clear, does the district really need the income 3.5 mills generates? Why is the district asking for the exact amount in millage as the amount the ceiling has increased by?

Because Redford became a charter township, county millage once allocated to the township will likely be allocated this spring to school districts within Redford's boundaries. Thus the 8.9 allocated mills Clarenceville now receives might be increased by one mill. That is speculation, but allocation board officials say it is likely. If so, does the district really need 2.5 mills instead of 3.5?

Residents have lived through program cutbacks, and staff faces pay freezes. The plight of the district is understood by Clarenceville residents. An arbitrator has recommended additional taxes of "not less than 3 mills."

Still we need to feel comfortable that the 3.5-mill burden we are being asked to shoulder is really needed. Let's seek that comfort by asking questions now so we go to the polls informed on April 24.

Consolidation Murphy should continue efforts

THIS TIME Drain Commissioner George W. Kuhn gets good marks for backing off a fight with the Oakland County executive.

One week Kuhn was saying, "I cannot in conscience support" a bill giving the county board power to sell bonds for its solid waste program. A week later, Kuhn sent word to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners government and transportation committee that, well, maybe he wouldn't fight after all. It was a more placid ending to the latest chapter in Kuhn's 12-year battle against the executive system.

The administration of Daniel T. Murphy, county executive, and Roy Rewold, county board chairman, are seeking permissive legislation from the state with twin objectives: to set up a separate solid waste department under the executive, and to give the board power to sell bonds.

It's a big project. The entire solid waste system may cost \$850 million to \$1 billion, with the benefit of ending Oakland's dependence on landfills.

Kuhn's position, at least on the surface, was that his office has sufficient bonding authority; he would be a good scout, authorize the solid waste bonds and turn the cash over to the solid waste agency.

KUHN'S ACTUAL agenda is to consolidate the public works department (which supervises the solid waste program) with his drain office, creating a new public works commissioner. That pub-

Murphy has made it a goal of seeking a home rule charter for Oakland during his four-year term. He should find lots of support from people seeking clean, simplified administration with clean, simplified lines of authority.

lic works commissioner would be George Kuhn, of course.

Last year Kuhn was in Lansing seeking a law to guarantee that most of the drain commissioners — including Oakland's — would remain elective. With luck, he could have saved his office as an elective one. Fortunately, the bill died in committee.

The voters in 1974 made Oakland the first Michigan county use Public Act 139 to consolidate all the loose ends under an elected executive. Voters rejected 1) the old, hydra-headed system and 2) an appointed county manager. As the first person elected to the spot, Murphy — correctly — viewed it as a public mandate to consolidate much administration under the executive.

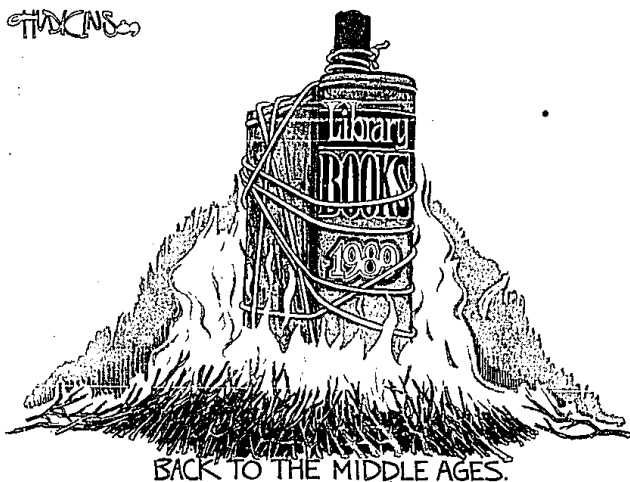
Murphy's agenda has been to consolidate the drain commissioner under his public works department. Sadly, the Legislature hasn't seen fit to write enabling legislation. But Murphy should continue the effort.

The purpose here is not to build political empires, or to win political battles. The objective is to produce a more efficient way to accomplish goals and to serve the public.

NEIGHBORING Wayne County, plagued for decades by cronyism and petty politics, had better luck. Using a law written only for Wayne County, its voters adopted a home rule charter under which the executive was able to absorb not only the drain commissioner but the arrogant road commission. A home rule charter allows the administrative structure to be revised to suit local needs.

Wayne's problems aren't over, the executive and sheriff are embroiled in a long-running dispute over control of the county jail, but in four short years it has developed the most streamlined county administration in the state.

Murphy has made it a goal of seeking a home rule charter for Oakland during his four-year term. He should find lots of support from people seeking clean, simplified administration with clean, simplified lines of authority.



Hills residential zoning: It's worth safeguarding

I'LL NEVER say never.

But only under rare circumstances would I support changing residential-zoned land to office or commercial use in Farmington Hills. The city of 68,000 has achieved its long-desired goal of a non-residential tax base of 35-40 percent. That should help keep homeowner taxes down. There's no longer a need to further extend that tax base.

Farmington Hills is a prestige business address. But its character is unmistakably residential.

In the last few weeks, the planning commission has recommended denying three major requests to rezone land planned as residential. The city council upheld denial on the two requests it so far has heard.

Despite strong pitches from rezoning proponents, Farmington Hills leaders rightly have stuck to their guns in affirming the city's newly revised master land use plan.

WITH OPEN land dwindling and more developers eyeing expansion or redevelopment, maintaining the integrity of our neighborhoods becomes vital.

Our leaders can't waiver in guarding remaining undeveloped land that's zoned residential. They must ask: "Is there compelling need to deviate from the master plan?"



Bob Sklar

Most residents who live near land targeted for rezoning aren't bashful about recounting their fears.

More traffic. Excessive noise. Lights and buildings infringing on privacy. Drainage concerns. Wetlands intrusion. Insufficient berms. Dropping property values.

A MAJOR fear is the domino effect — picking off residential parcels one by one as business zones stretch.

Sometimes the forces of prosperity and growth can't help but dilute a neighborhood's lures.

Near where I live, homes on the southeast corner of 14 Mile and Farmington Road are yielding to a 20,000-square-foot office building.

In combination with offices on the southwest corner and Sibley Plaza in West Bloomfield on the northeast corner, the new building will further congest traffic at an inter-

section that backs up often already.

Commercial development on the north side in West Bloomfield apparently made office use more palatable near Farmington Road on the Farmington Hills side. The best I can hope for are intersection improvements at 14 Mile and Farmington Road.

RESIDENTS in Woodcreek Farms, feeling the pinch of court-mandated office development along Northwestern Highway since their subdivision became part of Farmington Hills 16 years ago, are "ready to go to war if that's what's required" to stymie further non-residential encroachment.

A resident of Forestbrook Hills, near 12 Mile and Inland, passionately told the city council last week: "Residential areas have made Farmington Hills a desirable community. Now these areas are fragile and in danger of being overwhelmed by commercial development."

In my view rezoning should be allowed only when it's clear land isn't suitable for residential development, when there's dedicated woodland buffering homes and when it's proven that rezoning would best serve the public good.

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.

We must limit day care sites

To the editor:
If the subject were less serious, it would simply be amusing to observe the mental gymnastics of the Observer editorial staff as they have tried to fashion a plausible stance on day care in residential neighborhoods.

Over two years ago, their position was that such a service was not a business. Then, when challenged, they agreed it was a business but a necessary one. Now, again, it is a business but "not in the traditional sense."

I believe that if it looks like a business, sounds like a business and acts like a business, then it's a business. In fact, during the past year and a half, the Observer also saw the expanded day care service as a business that should be limited. There was editorial support for a maximum of six children in a neighborhood facility and resistance to state intervention and control.

For many homeowners, six is reasonable and tolerable. 12 too many and fraught with possible problems. The larger centers will require additional employees. Streets may be clogged with parked cars. Traffic will increase. Subdivisions will be altered and not for the better.

Mayor Coleman Young has vetoed a bill that would have allowed 12

children in day care centers within Detroit neighborhoods but said that he would approve one allowing six. In this instance, he was right and also wise to listen to the many homeowners who protested this attempted redefinition of their neighborhoods by outsiders.

Lawrence Niblett,
Farmington Hills

City resident discouraged

To the editor:
Hurray for Nancy Nowell.

I do not know you, Nancy, but you certainly get my vote. You were wondering how many others in the community (Readers' forum, Feb. 23) are disappointed with downtown Farmington; well, count me in.

The A&P has recently been remodeled and it is finally clean enough to shop in — and now there isn't anywhere to park near it.

And what about all those enormous housing projects going up on every vacant lot? Ironically, next to your letter was one about "Trees are no menace." What is a tree? At the rate they are being chopped down for "the beautification of Farmington," there won't be enough left to make a box of toothpicks.

Joyce Weigel,
Farmington

Let's solve road crisis

To the editor:
Another week of tragedy on 14 Mile Road. At least three accidents, including the death of a 10-year-old West Bloomfield child. For those who know, this situation is not unusual.

The stretch of 14 Mile Road, between Orchard Lake Road and Haggerty, has been a dangerous, accident-prone roadway that is a disgrace of local politics and inaction.

Anyone who reviews the accident records along this road comes away with serious questions. Why has so little been done to correct known traffic control problems and deficient road conditions?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that 14 Mile is the border between Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield. Neither community seems to want to take responsibility for the tragic conditions that exist.

Is the county responsible? Phone calls to the three governmental bodies result in a classic "passing the buck" series of responses.

Which elected official will come forward to bring together the needed bureaucracies? How many more children will have to be sacrificed before action is taken? We can do better than this!

Michael Rolnick,
Farmington Hills

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Rich Perlberg assistant managing editor
Dick Iaham general manager
Richard Brady director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Agnien president



Daniel Murphy
county executive

