

Opinion

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

Authority

Give traffic panel some teeth

NO MATTER what it's called — a commission or a committee — Farmington's planned traffic advisory board ought to have some decision-making authority.

Otherwise, it'll be perceived as a mere sounding board, as Old Village Association (OVA) president Kenneth Chiara aptly put it.

City manager Robert Deadman is in the process of preparing a proposed framework for a traffic advisory board that would answer to the Farmington City Council.

We have no problem with giving the city council ultimate say in critical or sweeping decisions. Such decisions — when liability, safety or cost are at issue — rightly rest with elected officials.

But we're leery of a traffic board that's considered strictly advisory. That leaves little room for informed initiative.

We don't see a traffic advisory board undermining the city administration or public safety department.

We see such a board reinforcing, challenging and advising the city council, Downtown Development Authority, public safety department, city administration and residents at large — from a traffic perspective.

We see it anticipating traffic problems, not just fielding traffic complaints. Traffic itself isn't bad. It's vital for downtown merchants. But it's bad when danger or tieups take over.

CHIARA'S GRIP. The OVA, represents historic district homeowners who, in December 1987, complained to the city council that speeding, noise and cut-through traffic were their biggest quality-of-life threats.

After a professional study, the city pursued two of the OVA's six recommendations: a traffic light at Shiawassee and Farmington Road and a speed limit study on Grand River.

Its other recommendations — limiting through traffic on Shiawassee, barring through traffic on side streets, limiting parking on Grand River — are fodder for more definitive study.

Volunteers

They deserve thanks, respect

IF YOU SAY you have no time for volunteerism because you work, the 49 percent of the 1.6 million metropolitan area people who perform an average 4.2 hours a week of volunteerism prove you wrong.

That's a good indication that the "me" generation is turning into the "we" generation. It says that volunteerism has taken on well-deserved respectability, banishing the thinking that volunteers were those who couldn't find paid work or had nothing better to do.

A committee message to volunteers explains the feeling:

"Everyone wins in volunteerism: the individual, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, our

community and the nation. Through giving of themselves for others, volunteers broaden their lives and add a sense of well-being and accomplishment to family friends and co-workers."

Indeed, when the first kickoff recognition breakfast was held, 90 people attended. This year more than 900 people are expected at the Monday, April 10, event.

The breakfast opens National Volunteer Week, April 9-15, here in Michigan. It's also a good time to re-evaluate your commitment to the community. After all, 4.2 hours is just one night of TV.

That's a small price for a big win.

New ballpark

Taxpayers should not pay

A LOT HAS happened since we examined the plight of Tiger Stadium this time last year.

Back then, we knew there was the possibility a new Tiger Stadium would someday replace the old. Now, we have some vision of what a new stadium would look like.

As far as the plans for a new, open air park go, we're impressed. We have a strong preference for natural turf and fresh air.

But there are bigger issues at stake.

First off, we reiterate our belief that a new Tiger Stadium, whenever built, should be easily accessible for city dwellers as well as suburbanites. We've said this before and it bears repeating.

Tiger Stadium remains one of a dwindling number of places where city and suburban dwellers can routinely gather to pull for a common cause. That's not true with all our area's sports teams. While we don't believe the Detroit Pistons display a "plantation mentality," we do know the Auburn Hills Palace is a far drive — even from suburban Livonia.

Second, we strongly prefer a privately built and operated stadium to one using public financing. Even though a baseball stadium would receive far more use than the debt-plagued Pontiac Silverdome, we don't believe it's in the public's interest to help subsidize professional sports teams. Regardless of the good will they generate, professional sports teams are businesses. The city, indeed our region as a whole, could put the stadium money to better use.

That said, there's an issue that gnaws at us. It's this — professional sports is increasingly becoming the province of the very rich. In some

But we're leery of a traffic board that's considered strictly advisory. That leaves little room for informed initiative.

We're glad councilman William Hartsock, who had argued that engineering consultants can supply whatever answers the city doesn't have in shaping traffic control strategy, now sees a traffic advisory board as "a helpful tool."

We agree with him that the key to such a board's success is balanced membership. Representation should include a public safety officer, a school safety official, a traffic engineer and residents.

Insofar as we're advocating a board with some decision-making authority, we also think a city council member, beholden directly to the voters, should be a member.

WITH MORE traffic southbound on Drake since it was paved north of 11 Mile, with the widening of Orchard Lake Road north of Grand River in the works, with State Street residents complaining about cut-through speeders, with EPA improvements continuing and with Grand River's bypasses a mystery to most, we see no shortage of work for the board.

Its charges might include making temporary traffic-pattern adjustments to either test their impact or compensate for road work.

Touching on a peripheral benefit, the city manager sees a traffic advisory board helping educate the public about traffic control devices, regulations or restrictions.

In our view, the annual cost for such a board — \$3,000 to \$10,000 for traffic engineering services — is incidental if traffic conditions and peace of mind can be measurably improved throughout the city.

TIMING

The Annual Spring Eclipse



aka opening day

Send formal reprimand as preventive measure

NO, MAYOR SEVER. An oral apology isn't enough.

Harold Larson should get a written reprimand for hiring a logger to chop down 19 landmark trees two weeks before Farmington Hills' new tree protection ordinance took effect Feb. 13.

Let's not downplay that Larson is a partner in the Farmington Hills law firm of Larson, Harris & Wright, which wrote the tree protection ordinance.

Granted, Larson, whose family owns six wooded acres northeast of 12 Mile and Halsted, didn't back away from the public spotlight in apologizing before the city council last week.

"Had we known that decision would have created the tensions and the difficulties it did, I can tell you very honestly we would not have done it," he said March 27, speaking also on his wife Janet's behalf. Recounting their 24 years as active residents of Farmington Hills, Larson rejected suggestions "we had no regard for what is right or wrong" or "no regard for the welfare of the community."

"We like to feel, in one way or another, we've been a positive influence in this community," he said.

YOUR CIVIC service isn't in question, Mr. Larson. Your judgment is.



Bob Sklar

I agree with you that "it's time this issue be put to rest, that we collectively move on together."

But I don't see how Mayor Sever can feel he's facing "this straight up" without formally sanctioning you.

As the Observer stated March 16, if anyone should have understood the sensitivity of tree cutting after the ordinance was approved Jan. 23, it was you.

You're right. Woodlots do require proper thinning to flourish.

But you should've waited two weeks, then done a tree location survey and sought a tree removal permit.

The city then would have decided whether the targeted trees "were stressed or dying," as you put it.

Harold resident Bernard Ludwig,

who brought the tree cutting to light, says the trees you removed were not decaying.

WHATEVER THE state of your trees' health, I'll buy your argument that short-term profit wasn't your motive. You said you got \$1,100 from the logger and paid \$2,000 for the cleanup — leaving only \$100.

But you acknowledge the land might be sold for cluster housing. In my mind, a pruned woodlot would go a long way toward enticing a developer.

Through the years, your family indeed has contributed "to the quality of life and betterment of this community."

The mayor is satisfied with your explanation and your apology for not waiting until after the tree protection ordinance took effect and applying through the city to remove the landmark trees.

But it doesn't sit well with me, Mr. Larson, when you try to brush off the ill-timed tree cutting by saying you had a right to uphold them.

Yes, you had a legal right to do so. But ethically, you — a man well versed in the law — compromised the public trust. A formal sanction is in order.

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.

Drake not a safe road

In response to the article, "Safety on Drake," March 6.

While I feel safety on the road is important, the way to go about making roads safe is certainly not to install more stop signs or lower the speed limit.

As the article states, studies show many drivers ignore stop signs or roll past, stopping beyond them.

Farmington Hills traffic officers, tracking speeds of violators on Drake, between 11 and 12 Mile, in mid-January, found the average speed in the designated 25 mph zone was 45.2. If these two points alone do not prove that trying to control traffic safety is not going to be accomplished by controlling speed, then I don't know what does.

According to the article, the safety issue is the primary thing to the people who live along Drake and others concerned. It seems to me that in order to have safety, road construction plays an important part.

In my opinion, more attention should have been spent on creating a safe road rather than a long winding road for people to drive down and look at the scenery instead of concentrating on their driving.

As I recall, nowhere was it mentioned during driver education or in the secretary of state's driver education book that we, as drivers, should stop paying attention to our driving

and the road to look at the scenery.

There are some people that have a hard enough time keeping their car between the lines on a straight road; imagine the trouble they'll have trying to drive safely while also trying to enjoy the scenery of a "natural beauty road," which has a "tough configuration and a lot of blind spots."

I feel the design of Drake leaves more than enough to be desired but the project has long since been completed, instead of trying to slow the people down, which will more than likely make them speed later to "make up for lost time," more time should be spent on making licensing laws more strict.

Included in this would be provisions for refresher driving courses, mandatory approximately every two years, extended classroom and driving time for learners, and the informing of drivers that constant attention must be paid while driving, due to changing conditions and unforeseeable situations that may require your instant action to avoid.

In conclusion, I feel more attention should be spent on education and re-education to improve the quality of drivers on the roads in our cities and states. But for the most part, we should improve the quality of our roads and learn from mistakes like Drake, between 11 and 12 Mile, in order to make the safest possible roads for drivers.

R.M. Giannini,
Farmington Hills

Help fight child abuse

To the editor:

Each and everyone of us was put on this planet for a purpose and that is to build, love, and to give to each other and not to destroy, hate, or desert each other.

Instead of telling our children we love them, we hear of how they have been replaced with drugs and beer. This is not the way to tell your child you love him or her.

We must put down our own selfish needs and think about the children. Their lives as children are for a short time. The time they spend with their parents is very important. Their lives cannot be enriched by hatred.

Bring a lot of laughter into their lives. Listen to their dreams. Allow them the chance to grow up in our world the same way we were allowed to.

Put a little less might behind your anger. Take the time to care for your children. Don't abuse them. If you must get angry don't lose your temper by hurting your child.

Take the time to care during April, Child Abuse Prevention Month, which will be observed nationally. You can do your part. Love your children.

Vernon Kieplinski,
Farmington Hills

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