

# Opinion

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

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## Toxicity

### It's a very legitimate concern

**I**T PERMEATES our lives.

The threat of toxicity is everywhere — paints, syringes, labs, cleaning agents, pool chemicals, even liquid erasers.

Toxic or hazardous materials span every land use: industrial, commercial, residential, office, industrial-research-office (IRO).

But in Farmington Hills, councilman Philip Arnold is right: Few staffers, planners or council members possess the expertise to scrutinize existing or proposed uses of such materials.

So we acknowledge the need for the city's newly named study committee on toxic or hazardous materials.

Committee members bring strong technical or environmental backgrounds. But we're not sure they got the direction they expected at a joint city council/planning commission meeting on Sept. 7.

**COUNCILMAN ARNOLD**, who recommended forming the committee, provided more direction in his proposal than city leaders did in a two-hour discussion.

Arnold sees the committee deciding if existing city controls are tough enough in regulating permitted toxic or hazardous materials.

He also sees it recommending protective shields: usage limits or bans, regulatory standards, location restrictions, warehousing prohibitions, code or ordinance revisions.

Transport and storage of toxic or hazardous materials will be key study points — for obvious reasons.

We also urge disclosure requirements to make all toxic or hazardous materials in use locally part of the public record. Stiff fines should accompany noncompliance.

True, the city, even working with federal or state agencies, can't regulate every such material. Still, its agenda should include educating the public on the complexities of toxicity — not summarily dismissing their fears.

WHEN AN IRO district is proposed near a residential area, the planning commission re-

*The city council seems as confused at times as many of the residents.*

views the proposal, holds a public hearing and imposes special conditions to keep out toxic chemicals or waste.

But who's going to monitor activity afterward? The city staff isn't equipped to.

So "we're going to accept what developers tell us," as planning commissioner Paul Blizman put it in one of the most insightful comments of the Sept. 7 joint meeting.

Vague permitted uses in IRO zones is a key reason why residents fear pharmaceuticals, genetic engineering and experimental product development creeping in after initial approvals for something quite different. Toxic waste disposal is another chief concern.

It's not a paranoia, as councilman Ben Marks believes, but a legitimate fear of the unknown. The burden to all that fear falls squarely on the study committee. The city council seems as confused at times as many of the residents.

**QUALITY OF life** is a top priority for every Farmington Hills resident. Fears about environmental danger is a major roadblock to achieving the highest quality possible.

Enforcing toxic chemical and waste controls is essential to penetrating that barrier, in our view. Increased fire department inspections would be one way to keep closer tabs of changes in operation, chemical use and waste disposal. Building inspections are now done every 18 to 24 months.

We'd suggest a hazardous materials specialist be added to the fire marshal's division to oversee inspections and assist in firefighter training.

"Don't Worry, Be Happy" can't be the tune of choice when fears of toxic fumes, toxic chemicals and toxic wastes — whether real or imagined — command center stage.

## On the road

### Traffic solutions are up to us

**O**AKLAND COUNTY TRAFFIC isn't the worst.

Other suburbs surrounding major cities have it as bad or worse — ask motorists in and around Washington D.C., Boston or New York City — despite good mass transit systems. And, of course, L.A. is world famous for its freeway parking lots.

But that doesn't mean we should accept the slow going as inevitable, or that we should stand by and watch gridlock grow.

There are steps being taken to attack what is estimated as a \$940 million problem.

● The Oakland County Road Commission spent \$15.5 million on roads last year, \$8 million of it on new construction.

● The road commission has asked communities to prioritize road needs. The commission picks its projects from this list.

● The road commission attempted to get added funds through a countywide vehicle registration fee that voters shot down last November.

● The commission has improved cross-town travel with major renovations of Long Lake and Big Beaver roads.

● And federal and state funds are building the biggie, I-696, scheduled to open this fall. The freeway is expected to give the area a major boost in handling east-west, cross-county traffic.

**BUT MORE** solutions are needed. And they can come from many levels — the federal, state, county, community and individual.

More federal road funds must find their way to Oakland County. Republican U.S. Rep. William Broxmeyer, whose district includes a lot of clogged Oakland County roads, said during his campaign last fall that big bucks were on the way. We haven't seen them.

Sen. Carl Levin's latest press release boasts of a bill containing \$15 million in federal loans for land acquisition for the M-59 project, designed to improve access and widen and repave the 60-mile stretch through Livingston, Macomb and Oakland counties.

But the bill, though well-intentioned, still has the network of red tape and human compromise to go through — the Senate Appropriations Committee and both houses of Congress. Ho hum.

As for Lansing, it hasn't done the job that it needs to do: Legislate to have developers pay up

## trapped in TRAFFIC

for the roads their projects further strain.

And the Legislature has failed to permit going to the voters on a county fuel tax for road improvements — a true user fee — that many think would be more palatable than the unsuccessful vehicle registration fee.

**ON THE COUNTY** level, the separation of powers between the county executive and the road commission works against the leadership and coordination necessary to get more road money and to get communities' support.

Lack of a road commission master plan casts a shadow on the process.

Many communities take the NIMBY ("not-in-my-back-yard") attitude and are unwilling to sit down and look at a countywide traffic solution for fear that the solution might go through their borders.

As individuals, enough of us aren't carpooling or taking the limited mass transit available. And we've gone full-throttle back to those big cars, which take up more room on the road.

But mostly, we aren't holding our elected officials accountable for our being trapped in traffic.

We must require:

- Developer impact fees.
- Cooperation, if not consolidation of the road commission with the rest of county government.
- Local city commissioners, township boards and village councils to sit down with other communities and consider the bigger transportation picture.
- Press for innovative solutions.
- Vote added money when a fair proposal is laid before us.

"We're really not in a crisis situation yet in Oakland County, but we're on the leading edge of one," says Traffic Improvement Association director Bruce Madsen.

Money, accountability, leadership, cooperation — M.A.I.C. not NIMBY — is needed. Or we'll be trapped in traffic forever.

THINKING



## Drug Free T-shirt Day: worthy symbolic effort

A PANACEA it's not.

But if it helps save even one young person from the deadly claws of drug abuse, it'll be \$30,000 well spent.

So I can't knock Drug Free T-shirt Day on Friday, Oct. 6, in the Farmington school district.

On that day, 12,000 students, faculty and staff will receive a T-shirt, courtesy of Farmington Families In Action (FFIA), with the message: "Say Yes to Life (thumbs up), Say No To Drugs (thumbs down)."

If nothing else, media coverage will turn the spotlight on the need to teach kids about the danger before they're hooked on drugs.

Still, I'm leery about spending \$30,000 to outfit an entire school district with T-shirts for just one day.

So I trust Farmington, Farmington Hills and Farmington Public Schools, which together donated nearly \$21,000, will show leadership in calling for other events where the T-shirts boast top billing.

I ALSO hope local businesses heed FFIA's suggestion and give discounts to kids wearing the T-shirts throughout October, National Substance Abuse Awareness Month.

A discount will give incentive to wear the T-shirts. In turn, kids who wear the T-shirts will represent



Bob Sklar

walking billboards for the drug-fighting battle — the best form of peer pressure.

Meanwhile, I'm concerned that what started out as a community fund-raiser ended up with the cities and schools donating two-thirds of the needed cash. Farmington Hills alone chipped in \$15,000 from proceeds, representing cash or property, seized in drug raids by Farmington Hills police.

Parent groups, the teachers union and some civic groups also have contributed. But strangely, few businesses have lent a hand. The fund-raiser, coming amid President George Bush's anti-drug plea on national television, seemed a natural for corporate support.

At this point, with \$28,000 pledged, I guess it doesn't matter how the money was raised. The kids of our community stand to benefit. That's most important.

**DRUG FREE T-shirt Day** is only one part of Substance Abuse Awareness Month. Michigan drug czar Don Reigis will kick off the month at a community breakfast Wednesday, Oct. 4.

Folks from the Maple Grove Alcoholism Chemical Dependency Treatment Center in West Bloomfield will discuss diseases, family, teens and intervention as part of a four-week series called "Are You Concerned?" at Harrison High.

Frank discussions with sports celebrities are planned for the three senior highs.

Given the key role they play in kicking off the month, I hope Farmington school officials are planning special classroom and assembly programs to accompany T-shirt day.

To do otherwise would be shirking their responsibility as educators. You can bet the lures of crack, booze and pot won't go away without a rugged fight.

T-shirt day isn't going to cure the drug problem.

But FFIA president Betty Nicolay was right on in saying it'll "unite our community" and "let kids know we support them in a drug-free life."

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

## Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies 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.

### Changes are very alarming

To the editor:

As a close neighbor and resident of the Forest Park subdivision, I am very much alarmed and concerned about changes taking place at Boys Republic.

I do not want a jail in our peaceful neighborhood. I believe the time has come to relocate Boys Republic.

Hans J. Kaiser,  
Farmington Hills

### Reporting falls short

To the editor:

Thank you for the Aug. 31 commentary by Judith Doner Berne on the negotiations, salaries and need for (i.e., lack of) accountability associated with several local school districts.

Her brief summary included objective analysis as well as hard news facts.

It is most regrettable that your reporters cannot (or will not) take the time or demonstrate the skills necessary to put hard facts in their reporting. They do not seem to realize that a few self-serving, made-for-the-media quotes by those employees who

did (or are doing) the negotiations will bring any insight, perspective, understanding or relevant facts to the readers.

Would somebody please tell the taxpayers:

● What is a 6-percent raise for two consecutive years going to cost?

● What improvements in school-wide and individual employee performance will the taxpayers see as a result of the added cost?

● How will the new wages/salaries of teachers, bus drivers, administrators and other employee groups in Farmington, Livonia, etc. rank with the same groups in other school districts in the area?

● What will be the new monthly average and medium costs for each of the employee groups — including fringe benefits — i.e., annual salary plus fringe divided by nine months?

● How will the new monthly average salary plus fringe compare with the same average for the taxpayers in the various districts?

● What is the correlation between dropout rates and teacher/administrator labor costs over the last five years?

● What is the total operating cost per full-time student in the public vs. private schools over the past five years?

● What is the ratio of the total cost for classroom teachers vs. non-classroom personnel over the last five years?

● What is the correlation be-

tween successful completion of one year of college or full-time employment of high school graduates and the salary levels over the last five years?

John Miller,  
Farmington Hills

### Sen. Faxon off the mark

To the editor:

To: Sen. Jack Faxon, State Capitol, Lansing.

Re: Attempts to dissolve the Clarenceville School District, which is 152 years old.

Today, I feel compelled to write you regarding the Clarenceville School District. It doesn't seem quite fair that someone can move into a district and immediately try to dissolve it, when she hasn't even had her children attend our schools.

It appears to me that someone has an ulterior motive for doing this and you are playing along with the game. Why should you, as a senator, take our tax dollars to pay off building funds on a district that is functioning properly?

As a taxpayer and a member of the Clarenceville School District, I wish to state that I want my son to attend a smaller school. I feel that you should attend to school districts that are in need of help.

Barbara Roberts,  
Livonia

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