

Feud over fence turns ugly at council meeting

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Discussion over a neighborhood fence at a Farmington City Council meeting Monday became ugly, erupting into verbal sparring and threats of litigation. Police were put on stand-by.

As discussion heated up, the council unanimously voted to deny a variance that would have allowed Ron and Carol Steinbrenner to put a 6-foot fence between them and their neighbors on Prospect Street. Karl and Karen Blomquist, by law, the Steinbrenners can install a 4-foot fence.

A man, who identified himself only as Carol Steinbrenner's father, got upset during the discussion and approached Karl Blom-

quist, who was speaking at the front of the council chamber. The man told the city council he would involve them in planned litigation and made verbal threats against Blomquist as the Steinbrenner family left the meeting.

An officer was placed on stand-by in the rear of the council chamber, but was not needed. Police are investigating the Monday night incident to determine whether any charges will be filed.

Carol Steinbrenner said she was seeking the extra high fence to alleviate a dispute between the neighbors that has been going on for the past several months.

"The problems have not subsided," she said. "We would like a fence for our own protection."

Karl Blomquist said the fence could "pose a security problem for my wife and daughter in my absence. This fence would cause a dark alley."

THERE'S ALSO a question about where the property line runs between the two neighbors.

Police have responded to various complaints from the Blomquists over the years, but only a July 10 fireworks complaint ended with a ticket being issued to the Steinbrenners. No criminal problems have been logged, said deputy public safety director Gary Goss.

Police have acted as mediators between the neighbors, which apparently has not

worked to date. "We've done all we can to try to resolve the problem," said Goss, one of the officials who dealt directly with the neighbors.

Public safety director Frank Lauhoff told the council Monday: "It's a neighborhood dispute problem. We try to keep the peace. It's really something beyond the public safety department."

"I've never had one of these before," said veteran councilman and Mayor Richard Tupper, who said he didn't think it was the council's place to get involved with such a neighborhood dispute.

"Granting of a variance is done because because of a hardship," Tupper said. "I personally don't see a hardship here. I see a civ-

il case. If every two neighbors came in here that had an argument, we'd have them (fences) all over town." That's not our purpose."

CITY ATTORNEY John Donohue advised the council that fence variance guidelines "are based on land use and things peculiar to the land — not to the occupants of the land." He suggested the neighbors use other options, such as shrubbery or trees, which don't require permits.

A neighbor of the two families said she did not object to the fence, if it was what they both wanted. "I would like to see a getting along rather than a separation," she said. "Putting up fences doesn't solve anything."

State to take new approach with reading tests

By Sharon Dargay
and Casey Hans
staff writer

Michigan is changing how it evaluates youngsters' reading skills, emphasizing more comprehension and less isolated grammar skills.

Farmington school officials say the district is ready, having prepared staff and students for the change during the past three years. But changes to the reading portion of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests will mean a change in how the numbers are interpreted. This year's MEAP scores

cannot be compared with those of years past, officials said.

"We have to look at it as a new starting point," said Carolyn Mahalek, reading/testing coordinator for the Farmington district.

Because the whole definition of reading has changed, the whole test is radically different than in the past.

"We're as ready as we can be."

The new reading curriculum is "a much more comprehensive way to teach reading," school board president Helen Prutow said. "It's a big improvement, but it will take time to see any results."

She asked parents and the public to "be patient."

THIS YEAR'S state-mandated MEAP tests offer fourth, seventh and 10th graders longer and more challenging tests in reading. The same students took math tests similar to previous years.

Students in grades five, eight and

11 took the science portion of the test — another change to this year's MEAP.

Farmington students took the MEAP tests in early October, results will likely be out later this fall and definitely by January when statewide results are announced. Results will be shared with parents at January parent/teacher conferences, Mahalek said.

The district prepared for the changes by revamping the district's reading program and changing the definition of reading.

A districtwide School/Community Forum meeting will focus on "Changes in the MEAP" 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 9, in the Farmington High School auditorium.

The presentation, which will focus on not only reading but other changes planned by the state, will be followed by a question-and-answer session. Mahalek and math/computer coordinator Richard Strauss and

science coordinator Kathy McAdams will lead the discussion.

BECAUSE OF the total change, a portion of the old test was also given to students this fall for comparison purposes. The old test had 17 reading paragraph selections.

The new test has only two, more lengthy selections, Mahalek said. One is a narrative taken from a story book; the other is an information selection, such as a chapter from a textbook.

"The information that it's yielding is far more descriptive in nature," Mahalek said. "It's in a broader spectrum. They're trying to evaluate the process. They're not testing content areas."



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The new test will take into account how much students know about a topic before reading a passage, how they view themselves as readers and how much they know about reading strategy.

THE MEAP changes mean the tests are taking longer to administer. Instead of one or 1½ days, the tests are now taking four to six days including make-up tests.

Criticism was aimed at the MEAP

program by some Farmington school board members last year, who were concerned students were not taking the testing seriously.

The district has tried to address that by working with students, teachers and counselors, Mahalek said. "By and large, it's met with a serious air," she said.

In addition to changes in future math testing, MEAP state officials also plan new tests on social studies, writing and employability skills.

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Council hopeful Bates on police protection

Farmington Hills City Council candidate Nancy Bates' response to a question about police protection in an Oct. 12 questionnaire was incomplete.

Here is her full response to the question: Should the city continue to add new police officers to its sworn force of 95 to further approach the desired ratio of 1.7 officers per 1,000 residents (city's current ratio is 1.3)? One needs to look beyond an arbitrary figure to the community's perception in regard to safety. Is there

clarification

timely response? Can they walk the streets safely? Each year, this needs to be re-evaluated as the population grows and the labor force develops and requires services. The survey indicated a 7.84 (out of 10) satisfaction with our police department. I believe we have an excellent police department with superior leadership.

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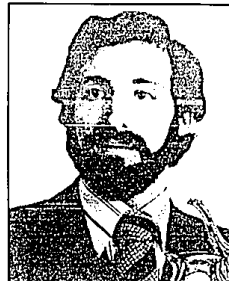
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