

Opinion

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

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Hills council 4 stand out for regular terms

TAKE HEED, Farmington Hills voters: Voting isn't a privilege in a representative democracy like ours, it's a responsibility.

In the race to fill four regular terms on the city council next Tuesday, we endorse incumbents Alde Vagnozzi and Phillip Arnold and challengers Lawrence Lichtman and Jonathan Grant.

A former school board member, library trustee and 25-year council watcher, Vagnozzi exemplifies community service at its best. He's caring, thoughtful, witty and tuned into the needs of folks of all ages — though sometimes longwinded.

An ardent defender of civil liberties, Vagnozzi listens to what his constituents say, then votes his conscience — the entire city's best interests always uppermost in his mind.

In two years as a councilman, this spirited 64-year-old has fulfilled many campaign promises, particularly in the areas of land use, road improvements and human services.

Wishy-washy he's not. Nor does he bow to political pressure. Small in stature, he stands tall in consistently slicing through the chaff to get at the heart of an issue.

ARNOLD, 50, was named to the council in December to fill a vacancy. Though overshadowed at times by his more aggressive counterparts, he's nobody's fool.

Clearheaded and insightful, the 16-year resident is a voice of reason in a chamber where politicking often reigns.

A former planning commission chairman, he's deeply knowledgeable in the key areas of planning and zoning. The city's study committee on toxic and hazardous materials was his idea.

Arnold is particularly adept in municipal budgeting, a trait that can't be stressed enough with the city budget up to \$26 million.

Lichtman is a planning commissioner and former zoning board of appeals member. The 31-year-old attorney is one of the most qualified candidates in years — and it's not because he's the son of a popular former councilman.

Cool and collected, no matter how rough the waters, Lichtman would be a guiding force as the council works to rebuild its shaken credibility. He's not a grandstander. Merit and reason are his bywords.

What's most appealing is his knack for casting a fresh perspective on a tired debate. He brings a keen understanding of land use, the city's evolution and neighborhood needs.

GRANT'S DESIRE to serve on the city council stems more from a love for the community than a thirst for political power. His integrity is untarnished.

At 38, his community service record is one of the most varied of any candidate. His leadership imprint is on the chamber of commerce, the Founders Festival, the library and the community center.

He's a terrific ambassador for the city. His low-key but productive style is refreshing. And

Our choices

- **FARMINGTON HILLS**
 - regular council term (4 seats): Vagnozzi, Arnold, Lichtman, Grant.
 - special council term (1 seat): Sowerby.
- **FARMINGTON**
 - regular council term (3 seats): pick from Richardson, Tupper, Campbell, McShane.
- **FARMINGTON COMMUNITY LIBRARY**
 - \$14.5-million bond issue: yes.
 - 1.5-mill operating levy: yes.
- **SCHOOL FINANCE PROPOSALS**
 - Proposal A: yes.
 - Proposal B: no.

he lives in a quadrant of the city where only one council member lives.

His 1½-year tenure on the planning commission wasn't very notable. But in fairness to Grant, an illness that landed him in the hospital sapped his otherwise infectious energy and enthusiasm.

We're also impressed with council watcher Albert Rosen. His platform, "Ethics in Government," is a tonic to our ears in the wake of some of the shenanigans that have rocked city hall in recent years.

If elected, we're certain this 68-year-old Detroit educator would set a performance standard worth emulating. Not as well-versed on as many issues as some of his nine opponents, he's nonetheless a quick learner and a perceptive thinker.

Marks shook our trust

HIS 23 years of civic achievements — homeowner council founder, charter commissioner, housing commissioner, planning commissioner, community center leader/fund-raiser, city councilman — can't be minimized.

But we can't support the re-election bid of Farmington Hills city councilman Ben Marks.

While mayor in 1987, Marks bounced a \$17,000 check for a sewer tap-in fee he owed and left it unpaid for 1½ years.

He wrote the check in anticipation of mortgage financing for his new office building, in the shadow of the city hall.

In mid-1988, Marks paid the fee, with full interest and penalties — after it came to public light and after he secured the elusive mortgage financing.

Marks apologized for putting city manager William Costick, who kept the nonpayment as a receivable instead of putting it on the tax rolls, in a compromising position.

But even while apologizing for seeking a favor no ordinary citizen could seek, he tried to defuse the magnitude of his action by calling it a business deal.

As we see it, Marks shook the public trust with such force, the city is still feeling the aftershocks in the form of heated debates about a proposed code of ethics.

Sowerby tops for special term

A FENCE-SITTER he's not. And he sticks to his beliefs unless compelling new information arises.

Paul Sowerby, 46, named to a vacancy in March, deserves to be elected to the Farmington Hills City Council next Tuesday to complete the last two years of former councilman Joe Alkateeb's four-year term.

The former zoning board of appeals and parks and recreation commission member has proven to be a public servant committed to the entire city's best interests.

As a councilman, the 16-year resident has striven to protect the public's right to know and to weigh all sides of complicated issues.

He hasn't shied from being in the minority on a city council vote. Nor has he feared challenging the mayor, city attorney or city manager.

Sowerby hasn't endeared himself to some fellow council members or some special interest groups. But that's politics.

He's a maverick of sorts, a rabble-rouser at times — but we find no fault with that. He's elected to be a stickler when taxpayer money or government integrity is at stake.

Honest, blunt, accountable and incisive, Sowerby brings a different perspective to the council table. His background as an attorney provides a useful checkpoint.

We don't always agree with him, but we know exactly where he stands — and why. He harbors no hidden agenda.

beverage containers from its football stands, MSU did the same.

The difference was: U-M carried it through. Even before the first football game, MSU reneged. They said their fans complained because this meant they couldn't bring their own coffee into Spartan Stadium.

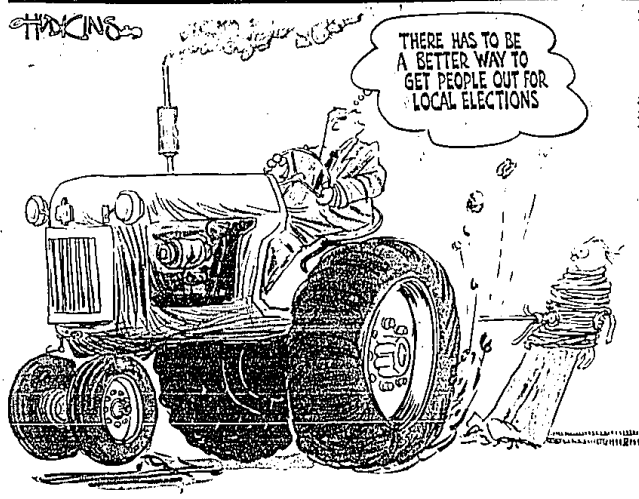
Coffee?

● The other opportunity was to give students the option of asking for a roommate who didn't drink on their dormitory housing form.

MSU remains the only public university in all of Michigan that has refused to allow students this choice.

Michigan State is prone to more campus problems on the mere basis of size.

But students see through the lip service it is paying to controlling liquor on campus, when university officials fail to change their own alcohol policies.



Soronen's imprint — not flashy but lasting

ILL MISS Jody Soronen on the Farmington Hills City Council.

The veteran councilwoman, not seeking re-election after 12 years, wasn't one of the more aggressive or trail-blazing members. She was almost too nice.

Still, as a city proclamation declared, Soronen "made a decided difference in the well being, planning and reputation of Farmington Hills."

She truly cared about what people had to say. And she truly appreciated folks taking the time to attend a city council meeting.

She was too conservative at times for my liking — for example, her opposition to allowing home day care inside subdivisions. But I always respected the thought she put into her decisions.

Soronen was a team player who understood the art of compromise. But she saw through grandstanding from the council bench.

She's Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce executive director, but she knew when to abstain from a council vote to avoid a conflict of interest.

WHILE MAJOR In 1988, Soronen seemed to enjoy every darn minute of the ceremonial job — presiding at council meetings, attending chicken dinners, officiating at weddings, cut-



Bob Sklar

ting ribbons, riding in parades.

Soronen was a quiet leader, who led with style, spirit and a smile — not intimidation.

She ably represented the city on the Michigan Municipal League Board of Directors, the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments Executive Committee and the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority Executive Board.

Accessible and responsive, Soronen was just as comfortable talking government budgets as she was neighborhood problems.

THE CITY proclamation caught the essence of Jody Soronen — "community leadership, dedication to public service, compassion to be fair, the highest degree of integrity."

In farewell remarks Oct. 23, Soronen offered this insightful reflection on her years in office:

"I feel like I've earned a degree. I'm not sure what the degree is in:

patience, smiles, chicken dinners, city government, interrupted dinners, meetings until 3 in the morning. But it has been an education, a very fine one."

In her typically selfless way, Soronen added: "I always have hoped that the citizens have felt they got their money's worth every month when I got my check for \$150."

Don't worry, Jody. They did. As Mayor Terry Sever put it: "No matter what approach you took, no matter what you did, it seemed people never lowered their love for you as a person."

SORONEN CLOSED her farewell remarks by thanking the voters who elected her, the city staff who served under her and the council members she worked alongside.

I want to thank you, Jody, for upholding the public trust to the best of your ability. That's all any voter can ask.

You've earned a moment in the sun.

But when the spotlight dims, I hope you and your husband, Rusty, find time to do some of the things you were forced to put off because obligations to the city had intervened.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Farmington readers' forum

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Kudos to Observer

To the editor:

Congratulations on the Observer's recent award from the National Newspaper Association. It's no surprise to those of us who read the Observer regularly.

Wendy Strip Sittsamer,
executive director,
Downtown Development Authority

Ribbons mark her campaign

As more candidates' yard signs appear in the city of Farmington, I felt it necessary to inform residents where I stand on political yard signs.

For the past 22 years, I have devoted a major part of my life toward beautification and anti-litter programs not only in our community, but the state as well.

Currently, I serve as president of Keep Michigan Beautiful and feel it is most inappropriate for me to use yard signs to retain my seat on the Farmington City Council.

A few months ago, I decided to use green ribbons wrapped around trees as a more subtle symbol of my candidacy.

Much to my surprise, the Farmington Families in Action kicked-off its Substance Abuse Awareness Month by using red ribbons.

So, the red and green ribbons are not an early reminder of the fast-approaching holiday season, but rather a visual message of two very important campaigns in Farmington.

Shirley V. Richardson,
Farmington

Don't tarnish secret ballot

To the editor:

I am absolutely livid at the card I received with my absentee ballot. I understand this is not effective until Feb. 17, 1992, but I am getting my displeasure in early.

How dare the state elections commission take away my right to a secret ballot. It is my right under the Constitution of this country that I do not have to disclose my political party preference or whom I choose to vote for.

This is my given right. No one can tell me what I may or may not vote for.

If the state takes away my right to vote in any election — presidential primary or regular election — I feel I have the right to take the state to court.

Lucille C. Schofer,
Farmington Hills

GOP backs Jon Grant

To the editor:

The Farmington Area Republican Club held a candidates night Oct. 20 in which all 13 candidates for the Farmington Hills City Council were interviewed by club members and interested citizens.

Of the 12 candidates who formally sought our endorsement, only one received the necessary two-thirds affirmative vote: Jon Grant.

Jon Grant impressed the club members by his commitment to sound principles of government and his dedication to community service.

As a former president of the local chamber of commerce, member of the planning commission and chairman of the Founders Festival, Jon Grant is extremely well qualified to serve as a council member.

While the elections are nonpartisan, the Republican Club wishes to maintain the character of our community and the integrity of our government, which have combined to make Farmington Hills a desirable place to work and to live.

In our judgment, Jon Grant will continue that tradition.

Patrick L. Anderson, president,
Farmington Area Republican Club

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