

# Opinion

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

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## Hills agenda

### Quality-of-life concerns top it

**S**WORN IN and seated Monday, the newest members of the Farmington Hills City Council can rest assured their honeymoon with the voters won't last long.

An agenda full of quality-of-life issues awaits. Informed, caring and persistent, the ordinary folks who call Farmington Hills home can sniff out charades like bloodhounds.

So as they enter the 1990s, a decade of great challenge and promise, city council members should make it their business to listen, heed and act — keeping the entire city's best interest paramount in discussions.

From our vantage point as impartial observers, the council agenda for the '90s should include:

- **Ethics** — Once it's fine-tuned by the public, the proposed municipal code of ethics for all elected and appointed officials should be adopted and respected. Public vigilance will help assure it's adhered to.

- **Flooding** — The \$18-million-plus storm drainage improvement plan must remain in the spotlight until it's fully tested and holding back floodwaters. The fear of raw sewage in basements when there's a downpour can't be tolerated.

- **Drugs** — The council must move to the forefront in the substance abuse war. Drugs are the spur behind too many robberies and the death knell for too many young lives. The council must play a more aggressive role in coordinating the groups committed to eradicating this community scourge. It can start by inviting police Chief William Dwyer to update them on law enforcement battles.

- **Parks** — The groundwork should be laid now to seek renewal of the productive half-mile park for parkland development that expires in 1991. Giving as many residents as possible reason to visit Heritage and Pioneer parks — and documenting that a south-end park is in the works — will be pivotal to winning renewal.

- **Sidewalks** — The city's commitment to adding sidewalks along major roads must never

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waver. Walks are vital to assuring safe, efficient foot traffic in a city where roads are tantamount to Russian roulette for walkers, joggers, strollers and kids on bikes.

- **Roads** — The council will play a key role in the search for options to pay for the planned multi-million-dollar improvements to the 12 Mile and Haggerty corridors, both major regional arteries.

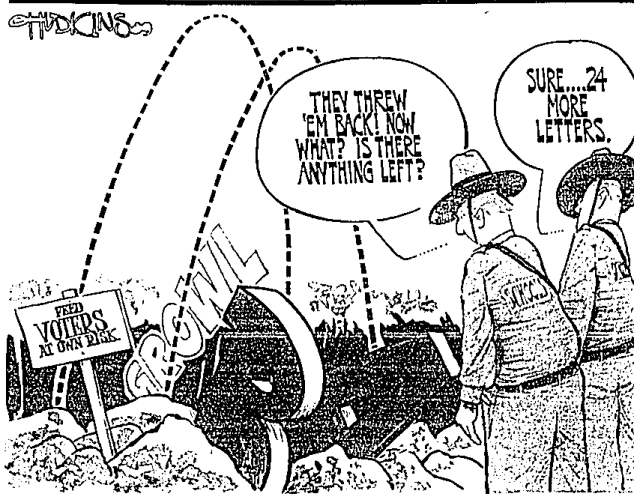
- **Neighborhoods** — With the city 85 percent developed and redevelopment moving closer to center stage, the council must reinforce its commitment to preventing commercial encroachment in our neighborhoods.

- **Toxicity** — To be meaningful, the ad hoc committee on toxic and hazardous materials' report on the state of toxicity in the city must address public fears.

- **Underage drinking** — The Farmington Hills Police Department is on the right track in cracking down not only on liquor licensees who sell alcohol to minors but also minors who use false identification to buy alcohol. The council must move closer to the front lines by giving the police department whatever support it needs in its quest for stiffer state-imposed penalties.

- **Solid waste** — Developing workable solid waste disposal and curbside recycling plans can't be stressed enough. Rising costs prohibit continued dependence on landfills.

- **Year 2000** — When unveiled in January, the Year 2000 Plan will identify the quality of life that residents desire into the 21st century. Whether the blueprint becomes just another dusty bureaucratic study rests squarely with the council and the excitement it exudes. City Manager William Costick deserves a public salute as the catalyst behind the 150 volunteers dedicated to shaping the potentially insightful plan.



## 2 ousted councilmen deserve appointment

LOOKING BACK on Election Day:

- They lost their city council seats but the dedication they brought to the council table won't easily be forgotten.

Phil Arnold, appointed in December to fill a vacancy on the Farmington Hills City Council, and Arnie Campbell, a four-year incumbent on the Farmington City Council, were edged out as they tried to retain their seats last week.

Both fell victim to a numbers' game, finishing one rung lower in the voting than the number of seats up for grabs.

Overshadowed at times by their more outspoken counterparts, both always did their homework, digested public feedback and worked hard to represent all of their constituents. Their integrity was untarnished.

I hope the two stay active in the community because these former planning commissioners still have much to offer.

I'd suggest to the respective mayors that Arnold be named to the Farmington Hills Planning Commission and Campbell to the Farmington Zoning Board of Appeals. Both key boards have vacancies.

- Hills councilman Aldo Vagnozzi



**Bob Sklar**

showed just how productive grassroots campaigning can be.

He visited more than 3,500 homes in all 27 voting precincts in his reelection bid — and he took first by 700-plus votes.

- **Trouncing incumbent** Paul Sowerby by a 2-1 margin in the race for a special two-year council term in the Hills, Nancy Bates got a true community mandate. Her aggressive campaign paid off.

Bates, by the way, is no stranger to campaigning. She worked on the campaigns that led retired state Rep. Sandy Brotherton and current state Rep. Jan Delan to victory.

Sowerby, former zoning board of appeals chair, served the city well during his short stint as a councilman. His rabble-rousing style apparently doomed his election bid, but he asked a lot of blunt questions that needed to be asked.

- **Kudos to George Sarkisian and Bettye Stines**, who finished sixth and seventh, respectively, in the Hills council race. With limited name recognition, both garnered more than 2,500 votes out of more than 16,900 ballots cast.

They weren't flashy campaigners but they came across as sincere, caring and beholden to no special interests.

- **Four years ago**, Farmington City Council never had a woman member. Shirley Richardson, then a planning commissioner, was appointed to fill a vacancy in 1986.

This year, she not only got the most votes in her first election, but she was joined in the winners' circle by zoning board of appeals vice chair JoAnne McShane. Times are a-changin' where the "ole boys' club" once reigned — there's no mistake about that.

- **The unsung heroes of Election Day** were Farmington Hills city clerk Kathy Dorman, Farmington city clerk Jo Bushey and their hard-working staffs. Despite very high voter turnouts, vote-counting came off without a hitch — and quickly.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

## Education

### A lot of work must be done

**M**ICHIGAN VOTERS have opted for no new taxes in rejecting both Proposals A and B on Nov. 7.

Voters statewide overwhelmingly defeated both state tax increases. Oakland County voters rejected Proposal A by a 4-1 margin and Proposal B nearly 9-1.

In Wayne County, Proposal A lost 3-2; Proposal B was rejected 4-1. In Wayne County, local school district endorsements apparently made no difference.

Proposal A would have increased the state sales tax from 4 cents to 4½ cents. Proposal B, a 2 cent state sales tax increase, would also have cut local property taxes for some.

Despite the defeat of Proposals A and B, the need to make good schools excellent remains — with or without new money.

We have a lot of work to do before public schools are graduating a higher proportion of students ready for the challenges of citizenship and competing in a world economy.

Education isn't something you can vote on every few years and then walk away.

**SITTING** in the state Legislature are proposals to allow "schools of choice," which would allow parents to select any school in the district for their youngsters to attend. The bills under discussion so far will take time to implement in any district that chooses the program. Lawmakers should get busy and pass something.

"GAIN," an acronym for Governor's Achievement Incentives, would set up a system of competitive grants for schools. The purpose is to induce them to improve through innovation. That program needs to be enacted, with or without the governor's name on it, and made a reality.

There is widespread agreement that the state should require local school buildings to adopt an annual improvement plan and report on it to the public. That will require a lot of work, and the work needs to start. Parents need to keep on top of every local situation, not with the notion of hassling and second-guessing the administration but with the attitude of being supportive.

**Schools aren't something we can vote on at the state level once every four or six years. We need to pay attention to them every week.**

It's common knowledge, backed by lots of research, that there's a direct link between a child's academic success and the interest of the parents.

One way or another, there was bound to be "a computer in every classroom" in the state. Finding money to buy computers isn't the hard part. The hard part will be training teachers to use them and instilling in kids and parents the feeling there's nothing to be afraid of; the computer is a tool and your friend.

**IN OUR READERSHIP** area, most but not all K-12 school districts are able to survive financially. Not so in other areas of Michigan, where tiny districts are running out of resources, where the farm economy is sour, where old plants have shut down.

The issue of school district consolidation is destined to come to the forefront in the next few years as it hasn't since the post-World War II school building boom.

Michigan still has 560-some school districts. At least a couple of legislators are saying there should be 250 or fewer. They are, of course, correct. The consolidation job — making districts with larger tax bases and larger markets — needs to proceed. Fearlessly.

Our schools are in no danger of turning into trade schools for human robots, but we must keep in mind the need to prepare kids for jobs. The board chairman of one major auto manufacturer warns us that the last big-city plant may have been built in Detroit unless the schools can teach kids enough language and math skills to run the plant.

Our colleges have problems far more serious than drinking parties, which are bad enough. Michigan's universities still have some of the highest tuitions in the nation. If college is to be affordable to the middle class, our universities need both more state aid and greater efforts on their part to contain costs.

Finally, there are next June's local elections for school boards. Turnouts are typically 10 to 15 percent for a hot election, 3 percent for others. That's a sad commentary on our devotion to democracy.

Schools aren't something we can vote on at the state level once every four or six years. We need to pay attention to them every week.

## Snow removal scam unveiled

To the editor:

I am writing in hopes that my story may help other senior citizens to avoid what appears to be another "senior scam" operation.

In October 1988, brochures were distributed door-to-door in my neighborhood by a young man representing a construction company, submitting plans for snow removal for private residences.

Plan "A" of the seasonal contract provided for snow removal before 9 a.m. on days when the snow accumulation was a minimum of two inches. The contract stated that one-half of the \$130 fee for the season must be paid when the contract was signed with the balance due by Jan. 1, 1989.

I signed the contract and paid the \$65. Another neighbor also signed up for the plan but paid the entire cost in advance. Unfortunately, although we had six snowfalls of two inches or more (according to the National Weather Service), no snow removal service was ever provided by this company.

As a matter of fact, neither my neighbor nor I ever saw any snow removal equipment from this company near our homes during the entire winter.

When I tried repeatedly to reach the company by phone, I made contact only with a taped message. My messages were never returned.

The Better Business Bureau has no information concerning this company. I can't help wondering how many

other gullible people in the Farmington area have been taken in by this apparent scam.

Huby Maagan,  
Farmington

## Look again at abortion

To the editor:

I believe that it would be wise for our state residents, the anti-abortion clan and local prosecutors to review the state of affairs that their dubious accomplishments have helped instigate over the last year.

Financially unstable, drug-using women have been denied, by Michigan voters, the funds and, therefore, the option of aborting a pregnancy that now, in all likelihood, results in the premature birth of a chemically dependent child who suffers intolerable pain. Not to worry, anti-abortionists claim — tell these women not to get pregnant.

One fact should stand undisputed — drug-using women living in poverty can hardly be expected to exercise sound judgment and use contraceptives effectively, as anti-abortionists would like us to believe, while these same women cannot even control the demerol impulse to destroy their bodies and minds with crack.

We are not dealing with clear-thinking women; nevertheless, that does not permit us to self-righteously deny this minority equal protection under the law.

Thus, due to the whims of the majority, we are faced with the crisis of

"crack babies," unwanted children born trembling with the agony of addiction, deformity and massive retardation, most of whom die a slow death.

The anti-abortionists, as well as voters who denied state funds for abortion, can find comfort in the fact that their "moral" crusade bailed a few abortions. Now, these babies are forced to endure prolonged suffering before they die. Congratulations on your victory.

Ironically, the same groups we now see blocking the doors of abortion clinics (while clutching bibles and jars of embryos) are not to be found in inner-city delivery rooms, caring for the deformed products of their cause. Nor do we find the supporters of this law clamoring into adoption agencies, accepting the responsibility they claimed as their own by forcing poor women to give birth to children they simply do not want.

Now, some states, including Michigan, want to press charges against these women for delivering a controlled substance to a minor. Where as crack babies have, until recently, been afforded the care of a hospital environment during their suffering, the threat of prosecution against the mother will now push these births out of hospitals and into the nearest trash dumpster, back alley, or toilet, all of which guarantee anonymity.

I find it absolutely inhumane that, after forcing these women to carry their pregnancies to term, we are now tempted to throw them in jail for doing just that.

R. Iversen,  
Farmington Hills

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