

Opinion

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Code of ethics Loopholes mar a strong start

IT'S THE most important public document after the city charter.

We've long felt a municipal code of ethics — bolstered by reasonable ways to investigate complaints, publicize indiscretions and discipline violators — gives city officials a clear-cut set of standards to work by.

But Farmington Hills' newly adopted code of ethics, though generally well done, comes up short. Mayor-elect Jean Fox summed it up best: "It's a good step" but "it's not tied up with a pink ribbon."

True, a code of ethics is simply a blueprint for behavior. As Mayor Terry Sever aptly put it, "It comes down to how you were born and bred — and what you think is right."

Still, public trust is the lifeblood for public servants. They earn that trust through the quality of their integrity and conduct. Their intent must be to avoid even the appearance of misusing that trust.

SO THE rest of the city council should heed Fox's call for an advisory panel to "continue the process" and fill in the code's missing links: lack of a campaign financing provision and a financial disclosure form.

Given the influx of political maneuvering and developer influence in recent city elections, no one denies the need for either link.

The very fact the city council hotly debated whether to exempt campaign contributions from the code underscores the need for an independent perspective.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi is right: The exemption should be lifted.

Sure such contributions are governed by state law, but only insofar as reporting them. Voters have ultimate say, but they're dependent on candidates filling campaign finance reports before election day.

WE AGREE with councilman Ben Marks that "a person without enough courage to vote his convictions absolutely does not belong up here."

'It comes down to how you were born and bred — and what you think is right.'

— Mayor Terry Sever

But that's no reason not to make it crystal clear that the people of Farmington Hills won't tolerate a public official who buckles to dangling greenbacks or who ignores the pre-election campaign finance reporting deadline.

The code also should offer guidelines for raising and spending campaign money, limiting campaign spending and recruiting city employees to work on campaigns.

Granted, the code calls for full disclosure of financial interests to prevent a conflict. But lack of a suitable form to report such interests is glaring.

COMMON SENSE dictates that the initial drafting of a campaign financing provision and a financial disclosure form belongs in the hands of voters, not council members, who must ultimately abide by them!

We appreciate councilman Larry Lichtman not wanting to "abdicate authority" on two "important issues." But lack of resident participation early on marred the original drafting of the code.

The same mistake shouldn't be repeated.

Councilman Jon Grant raised a salient point in observing that without the campaign contribution exemption, incumbents who accept contributions in a re-election bid violate the "no gratuities" provision.

That's why a campaign financing provision not in need, but also why the code was incomplete when adopted.

The prematurely adopted code will have more credence if the public is intimately involved in closing the loopholes.

Gift of giving Holidays: a chance to share

ALL OF US SEE those gut-wrenching ads around this time of the year.

They're pictures of weathered, exhausted men and women — sometimes with children — standing in food lines, sitting at long tables, seemingly numb to their circumstances. The ads tell us these people need help.

We're a good people, basically. We send money. We drop off non-perishable food at area collection centers. We try to do our part. But sometimes, some of us wonder if it's enough.

Forget about Santa getting the heave-ho-ho out of some area schools. Never mind that it seems criminal to force Salvation Army workers to stand outside malls, in sub-zero temperatures, because some nitwit said their bells are too loud (and are a disturbance in the malls. That's politics — don't let those isolated acts stain the spirit of the holidays).

If anything, the holidays we celebrate, enjoy and share symbolize a very human need to let the best in us surface, even if just for a moment, and extend a kindness to someone else.

MANY PLACES around town could really take advantage of that moment of kindness.

- Offer your time. Several places in Wayne and Oakland counties are serving meals Christmas Day, according to the United Community Services Center for Volunteerism. They include the Hunger Action Coalition, 952-0348; The Gleaners Community Food Bank, 923-3535; The Capuchin Community Center, 579-1330; Focus: Hope, 883-7440; Mother Waddies Perpetual Mission, 491-9452; The Salvation Army, 532-1500; Hare Krishna (they're offering a vegetarian meal), 824-7410; and the Pontiac Rescue Mission, 334-2187.

- While many area food drives already have delivered baskets, Focus: Hope still needs people through tomorrow, until 6 p.m., to help sort, pack and deliver boxes of food head to their resource center, 1355 Oakman in Detroit.

- Extend a hand, or, actually, an arm. "This is a hard time of the year" for blood donations, an American Red Cross worker said. Main donor centers are in Livonia and Bloomfield Hills; check our listings for local blood drives in malls, schools and other community centers.

- If you're squeamish about giving blood, do the next best thing: volunteer to work in a donor center or help transport blood products to area hospitals. Call Mike Corbin, director of volunteer services for the American Red Cross, 494-2866. Corbin said the Red Cross also needs volunteers for disaster relief workers, hospitals and nursing

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homes, school health programs, food service projects and youth services programs. "Our youth services program is the most extensive in the country," Corbin said.

- Offer some comfort. The Haven helps victims of physical and sexual abuse, often by getting those victims out of the environment where they're getting hurt. They need everything from baby diapers and laundry detergent to cookies and children's videos. Haven's address, while not a state secret, is kept quiet so victims can have some security and privacy. But you can call them: 334-1284.

- Check your list twice. It's hard to find a community that isn't collecting food for baskets. That's half the battle. The other half is getting those baskets to their destinations — senior citizen homes, the homebound — you know who they are. We've been reporting on these efforts for weeks now. A little help loading a truck or delivering a meal means a lot to the people who organize these campaigns, not to mention the people receiving the baskets.

- Do hard duty, where a kind word really can make a difference. The hospice services connected with St. Mary Hospital in Livonia and the Southeast Michigan Hospice in Southfield do their best to provide for terminally ill people.

- Think ahead. Volunteer Connect is a brand-new service (it just came on-line Nov. 17) of the United Community Services. It's a computer network that matches volunteers with more than 9,000 positions in 870 different areas through 125 different agencies, according to Janice Cross, skills bank coordinator. After completing an application that asks where and how you want to donate your time, volunteers receive the names of three agencies that match their desires and would welcome their help. This center pre-dates George Bush — it's been in the "thousand points of light" business since 1986 — and serves as a volunteer clearing house for Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties. For further information, call Cross, 226-9430.



DRASTIC TIMES REQUIRE DRASTIC MEASURES.

A ray of hope emerges in battle against drugs

DID YOU know that the National Commission on Drug-Free Schools was in Detroit and our suburbs last week to find out what needs to be done here and in the nation?

Most likely you didn't. According to a commission spokesperson, the Detroit media gave less coverage to the event than either of the two other cities where the commission has convened: Portland, Ore., and Boston.

"Seven television stations covered the Portland visit and the daily paper ran a story with photographs every day we were there," said Anora Dorsey, a member of the commission's staff.

Here, TV stations 4 and 50 gave some coverage. There was some radio. But where was the print media?

"I FOUND that extremely interesting. Are we so jaded by the drug scene?" wondered West Bloomfield schools' Superintendent Seymour Gretchko, one of those asked to participate because of expertise, interest or exemplary drug/alcohol abuse programs.

For Gretchko and other participants, the commission's visit opened up a glimmer of hope that our nation could win what is shaping up as its longest, toughest war.



Judith Doner Berne

The commission took back to Washington information collected from visits to a Detroit middle school and a Southfield high school, a public hearing, talks with troubled teenagers and their parents and an all-day conference of concerned citizens.

Two major pieces of information stood out for the commission to report and make recommendations to Congress and the president on:

- No one group can do it alone. Every single system that touches the lives of children must play its part — schools, police, courts, business, parents, clergy, social services, medicine — and each must know the nature of addiction.

- Programs must fit the community. Helping a student with attentive parents is a whole different ballgame than helping a student whose parents may be indifferent or be addicts themselves.

ONE GROUP, asked to come up

with recommendations for overcoming community resistance, was so invigorated by its interaction that it will meet again at the suggestion of Lewis Colson, a former Detroit police officer and now a consultant on chemical abuse to the Detroit Public Schools. Dan Hogan, former Southfield High School principal, offered to host the next meeting in Southfield.

Colson recognized the importance of keeping together this rare coalition of city and suburban Detroiters who face a common problem. "Why wait for the commission's report?" he said. In the meantime, we can be getting somewhere.

The commission will go on to Miami, San Diego, Calif., Salt Lake City, Utah, and Omaha, Neb., during the next three months. Then it will draw up its report.

It's doubtful they'll find individuals any more committed to dealing with the problem than in Detroit and our suburbs. And it's a clear question why a community so full of the bad news about drugs and alcohol doesn't also get to read about this glimmer of hope.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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.

Malls — not best answer

To the editor:

I read with much interest your article about the proposed Auburn Hills Mall (Dec. 7). My husband and I also oppose this project for many of the reasons already given.

There are already 13 major malls and numerous strip malls that abound within a 40-mile radius of this project and another mall seems like overkill.

Your article compared two other similar projects, one in Washington and another in Philadelphia to this project. The difference between those malls were redevelopment of previously used land (one a former race track and the other a former pasture).

The Auburn Hills Mall would be built on natural wetlands and in an area that is already suffering growing pains. Of course, development would not stop there either. Once a mall is built, it seems to attract more stores, malls, traffic, etc.

Another point I would like to make is that so-called "discount malls" are rather overrated.

This summer, my husband and I visited North and South Carolina where "discount malls" abound. Many of them were discount outlet centers such as Burlington, Corning, American Tourister, etc., all boast-

ing of discounted prices. However, I found that the prices of these articles were not much better than they are in Michigan.

While my husband and I do not live in the Pontiac-Auburn Hills area, we do live in an area that is also undergoing growing pains as well. Farmington, Walled Lake, Commerce Township and the whole northwest suburban area are undergoing rapid development with no end in sight.

All these communities would probably agree that development is occurring more rapidly than the cities and roads can handle. Not only has development put a strain on our roads and highways, but it has also made its mark on the once beautiful rolling hills and woods that once abounded in this area.

While there may be some benefits that would come from this type of project, I believe Oakland County will have to bear the brunt or more congestion, overdevelopment and the destruction of more of our environment.

Frankly, it's time that more thought be given to redevelopment of some of the older and rundown areas in the county rather than building another shopping mall.

This would not only serve to beautify older areas but perhaps bring more business to these areas without further congestion of roads and destruction of the environment.

Louise Rudolick,
Farmington Hills

Santa earns her thanks

To the editor:

As a member of a federated garden club, I wish to thank Santa for his special gifts to children who come to visit him at 12 Oaks Mall in Novi.

The real trees he shares with them for planting are a lasting gift. It is one that will help beautify our state and make children aware of the joys of gardening.

Gretchen Pugsley,
Hill and Dale Garden Club,
Farmington Hills

Dinner not up to snuff

To the editor:

The Thanksgiving dinner at Mercy Center for senior citizens was lousy. The turkey roll slice was placed on top of turkey stuffing (bread dressing), covered with a light brown gravy. The mashed potatoes also had gravy. A teaspoon of cranberry sauce. It barely dirtied the plate.

A few canned string beans with a small amount of whole carrots (the last of the season). Pumpkin pie with a smidgen of whipped cream. The best thing on the menu was the carton of milk.

Mrs. H. Motriluk,
Farmington Hills

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