

School redistricting: a very sensitive task

NO MATTER which attendance boundary plan they pick to accommodate the new west-side elementary, Farmington school trustees are sure to incur someone's wrath.

Trustee Jack Cotton is right: "The time for posturing is over. We're not going to please everybody. We need to circle the wagons and take the arrows as they come in."

Whenever rising enrollment causes crowding in a school district, the battle cry tends to be, "Redistrict!" Move some students from crowded schools to less-crowded ones, or to a new school, to help even out enrollments.

The rub lies in busing children away from the school in their neighborhood to balance enrollment districtwide.

It's a practice that can strain friendships, break up neighborhoods, threaten property values, cause long bus rides and disrupt learning patterns during a youngster's most impressionable years.

RAPID GROWTH In western Farmington Hills has burdened enrollment at six of Farmington Public Schools' 11 elementary. Elementary enrollment will continue to rise into the 1990s.

Whichever study committee plan is chosen as a framework for new elementary attendance areas, some schools will continue at capacity. So



Bob Sklar

But no attendance boundary is guaranteed — ever.

portables and additions seem certain.

As they sort through the five plans, I urge trustees to keep three themes in mind: shorter bus rides, a neighborhood school concept and future west-side growth.

Many of my fellow parents say they bought their homes because of the elementary school in their neighborhood. But no attendance boundary is guaranteed — ever. People move, families age, populations shift, schools close.

Frankly, kids often are more adaptive than adults give them credit for.

STILL, BECAUSE constant transfers can have a psychological effect on young children, trustees should

think twice about moving kids already moved unless there's a compelling reason.

Besides, the sense of community our elementaries help foster should be nurtured, not threatened.

Beyond evening out school enrollments, trustees have an obligation to provide equitable class sizes and learning tools throughout the district. Just because it's new, Hillside Elementary School shouldn't hold an edge on quality.

Cost can't be ignored, but a student population that's more evenly distributed should help open the door to offering the same classes and facilities at each elementary.

NO CHILD should have to eat lunch in a hallway. And each elementary should have similar science, music, art and computer programs. As board watcher Richard DeVries put it, "Each elementary school should have the same relative resources."

Amid the concern over redistricting, remember: People give a school its character.

Jagged lines on attendance boundary maps neither provide substance to a school nor ultimately shape its destiny. But motivated students, innovative teachers, trusted administrators and caring parents do.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

points of view

More letters to the editor . . .

Parking lot real danger

To the editor:

Recent coverage of the Kendallwood Shopping Center was justified by the many improvements made in lighting, store appearance, landscaping and parking. Customers as well as merchants benefit.

But motorists should be aware of a potential accident condition. In the center of the parking lot is an intersection of north-south and east-west lanes carrying traffic from public roads around the lot.

Drivers must stop at the intersection, which bears red signs — Stop 4-Way Stop. But there are only three signs!

WESTBOUND VEHICLES proceed through the intersection, drivers unaware that three other signs said that they would stop.

In November, after a near-accident caused by this confusing direction, I notified the managers of the two largest stores in the center that street signs in the lot could, and would, cause accidents.

Both men indicated concern and said that they would notify the landlord at once. That was six weeks ago. Nothing has been done.

Because the problem is on private property, the Farmington Hills police can do nothing to assist. I am told.

Question: with all the driving hazards out there — heavy traffic, poor weather, human error, etc. — why do we have to contend with another, which is man-made?

Lawrence Niblett,
Farmington Hills

Mayor humbly steps aside

To the editor:

In January 1989, I stood in front of the city council and staff to accept the challenge of being mayor of Farmington Hills. Little did I know the challenge would be so great nor did I realize that I have to so humbly accept public criticism. But it was all for the better.

I enjoyed being mayor for 1989

primarily because of all the fine people involved in our community. I am amazed at the commitment by so many to serve Farmington Hills. The people who served on the Year 2000 Task Force, the people on the boards and commissions, and, of course, the outstanding city administrative staff.

AS A community, we have been blessed with so many wonderful opportunities for the future. We must endeavor to solve today's problems while keeping an eye on the future.

I would personally like to thank the Observer Newspapers and staff for treating me with respect. It was encouraging to know we could freely disagree on issues without holding personal grudges.

Best wishes to our community as we begin a new decade and thank you, Farmington Hills, for giving me the opportunity to serve you as mayor in 1989.

Terry Sever, councilman,
Farmington Hills

Coats go to cold

To the editor:

I would like to thank everyone that assisted with the "coats for the cold" program.

This was the fourth year for the program and again, I was impressed with the generosity of our community. We collected hundreds and hundreds of coats, as well as other articles of clothing.

The response was tremendous, once again proving how much the residents of Michigan care for others. In particular, I would like to commend Birmingham Moving, Danman Hardware, The city of Farmington Hills, Shepherd King Lutheran Church, ABC Warehouse in Troy and the village of Beverly Hills.

The media was also very helpful in publicizing drop locations. These individuals and groups were as vital to our success as was the community at large. Thank you one and all.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful New Year.

Michael J. Bourchard, chair,
Coats for the Cold Drive
Beverly Hills

Center serves cultural needs

To the editor:

I and my wife, Olive, live just seven doors down Raphael Drive from the Farmington-Farmington Hills Community Center.

We built our home here some 37 years ago when Raphael was just a rough cut through an apple orchard, the only so-called street in the new Glen Orchards subdivision. We were the first and only residents in the subdivision.

Our decision to settle in this community was based on what the area had to offer then, but more important, what it promised for the future.

SO WE were especially pleased to see the establishment and subsequent development of the community center. We feel the center executive board members should be commended for the many fine programs made available to the residents of the area. We support them in their efforts to continue in this policy.

We further understand any decline in proceeds from activities in question would mean possible severe financial loss to the center, but even more than that would be the devastating cultural drain on this little geographic corner of humanity.

The fact that the community consists of more than just four families seems to warrant a second look. Hopefully, a solution could be found that is not just acceptable, but even beneficial to all concerned.

Eugene Adams,
Farmington Hills

Programs a 'way of life'

To the editor:

We realize the worthiness of the cultural performances and family programs to the way of life in this community, and the need for public cooperation and understanding.

Our organization supports the efforts of the community center and wishes to see a continuation of these programs.

Elna Heinholt, secretary,
FCA Senior Citizens Housing Corp
Farmington Hills

Will 1990 be year when liquor raids are copied?

I KNOW, I know. You're tired of reading prospectives and retrospectives. But just one more . . .

Will this be the year:

- The lies to get into Birmingham's newest parking structure rival those at the car wash on a sunny winter day?
- Troy voters go to the polls less than five times?
- Westland voters finally get a mayor who serves more than one term?
- Livonia's new Laurel Park complex gets the attention it deserves?
- A competition is held to design a mural to make the sound barriers along I-275 through Canton Township more slightly?
- Restrooms in Hines Park reopen?
- SEMCOG pays more than lip service to reviving our older communities?
- The Garden City Chamber of



Judith Doner Berne

Commerce finally secures a permanent home?

• You don't get a letter saying your cable television subscription price is rising?

• All our suburban police departments follow the Farmingtons and now Birmingham and hold undercover raids of liquor stores and bars in their communities to clamp down on underage drinking?

• The Silverdome collapses — financially?

• West Bloomfield, with the most lakes outside of Minnesota, gets a public beach?

• Another hospital goes the way of Redford Community?

• SMART realizes that people need cross-suburb transportation?

• Rochester Hills decides where to put its library?

• The Rochester City Council and others start cablecasting meetings?

• People blessed with their health stop using handicapped parking spaces?

• Bloomfield Hills rejoins the Birmingham-Bloomfield library system?

• All our suburbs make taking down the Christmas tree less depressing by mimicking Birmingham, Beverly Hills, Lathrup and Troy? Those suburbs gather, then chip discarded Christmas trees. You'll see them come spring — beautifying your local park.

Happy New Year.

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

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