

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor (477-5450)

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Coldhearted State recants pledge of berm

"If I could've without hurting somebody, I would've blown the damn expressway out there. That's how desperate I was."

— Bob Schulkins, Howard Road resident

FOR COMMUTERS, the widening of I-696 through Farmington Hills meant some relief from rush-hour gridlock. For Howard Road residents, it meant noise that's "absolutely unbelievable."

The natural beauty road closely parallels the eight-lane freeway to the south, just east of I-696. And the freeway noise is worse than ever, says Bob Schulkins, a long-time resident.

"It just ricochets off that center wall and blows toward us."

Despite pleas from residents, the state abruptly dropped its two-year-old plan to install an earth berm to buffer Howard Road. The reason: higher-than-expected costs associated largely with a wetlands along the freeway shoulder.

The wetlands prompted the Michigan Department of Transportation to boost its cost estimate for a 1,000-foot-long earth berm from \$45,000 to triple that.

We appreciate the highway department's spending restraint. But what about quality of life for neighbors along one of the 28-mile-long freeway's busiest stretches?

As councilman Aldo Vagnozzi bluntly put it, "I've been out there and have heard the noise. And very frankly, I wouldn't want to live there at the present time."

THE STATE spared no expense for abating noise through Southfield.

Heck, Farmington Hills is home to I-275 and M-102 in addition to I-696. Doesn't it bear a disproportionate freeway burden? Shouldn't that have some bearing on freeing up extra noise abatement financing?

Farmington Hills city leaders must prevail on state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, and state Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, to

We appreciate the highway department's spending restraint. But what about quality of life for neighbors along one of the 28-mile-long freeway's busiest stretches? As councilman Aldo Vagnozzi bluntly put it, 'I've been out there and have heard the noise. And very frankly, I wouldn't want to live there at the present time.'

convince MDOT to fulfill its pledge of noise abatement for Howard Road residents.

MDOT's cavalier attitude toward that pledge is yet another example of why people lose faith in the bureaucracy of state government. MDOT should be held accountable for the wide disparity in cost estimates for the berm.

One reason Farmington Hills supported the freeway widening and agreed to pay \$600,000 of the cost was because of MDOT's \$1 million budget for adequate buffers for bordering neighborhoods in Farmington Hills.

BUT NOW that a spanking new highway is in place, the state seems to be saying to Farmington Hills, "Get lost."

We agree with city manager Bill Costick: Farmington Hills must insist on the originally planned berm. If the wetlands prevent the original route, the berm could be angled away from them, south toward Howard.

Only as a last resort should the city even consider sharing with the federal and state governments the \$600,000 cost for a sealed-down berm.

Meanwhile, an improved security fence along the Howard Road side of the freeway — MDOT's idea of a good-lait gesture — is scarcely enough.

Homelessness Wayne, Oakland seek solutions

IN THE LAST decade, the plight of homeless people living on the streets of America's major cities has progressed from a nearly ignored social phenomenon, to the latest hot cause in the celebrity community, to a real problem begging for genuine solutions.

And while much space has been devoted to "the homeless" on the front pages of big city newspapers and in network television newscasts, the fact has been sorely missed.

This is not just a big city problem. Homelessness tends to be more visible in America's inner cities, but there are homeless people in the suburbs, too.

How about the single mother with no job who receives only sporadic child support from her former husband? Or the family that was barely making ends meet before they were burned out of their modest, unimproved suburban home?

These people are more difficult to track, according to experts. Call them the hidden homeless. Rather than taking to the streets or seeking public assistance, they often find temporary shelter from a series of relatives and friends.

WITH THAT IN MIND, we commend officials in Oakland and Wayne counties who have not only recognized the existence of the hidden homeless, but have taken constructive steps in recent weeks to provide needed shelter and services.

Wayne County will renovate the second floor of a building on the grounds of the former county hospital site in Westland into a shelter for people who are temporarily homeless.

The facility, believed by county officials to be the first suburban shelter of its kind in the United States, will be staffed by a private community services agency.

It will provide beds and temporary living space for 80 people who may stay up to 30 days. Job, family and drug counseling will be available at the shelter, which is expected to open in the fall. The shelter will provide more than just bed space. It will provide job, family and drug counseling, if necessary.

The county will receive \$350,000 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to establish the center. An additional \$235,000 is being obtained from area communities. Livonia, Plymouth Township, Westland, Redford Township, Canton Township, Garden City and Plymouth have all pledged block grant money to the shelter.

Officials will assist about 500 people per year. However, county officials acknowledge the total number of homeless in the county could be five to eight times that number.

In Oakland County, the Pontiac Area Transitional Housing Coalition is planning an 18-unit facility to house women and children, also scheduled to open this fall.

We commend officials in Oakland and Wayne Counties who have not only recognized the existence of the hidden homeless, but have taken constructive steps in recent weeks to provide needed shelter and services.

Area churches are also providing temporary shelter on a rotating basis through the South Oakland Shelter (SOS) program. The SOS program, in existence since 1984, uses volunteers to staff its temporary shelters for a week at a time. The volunteers fix meals and perform other tasks for clients.

Between September 1988 and May 1989, SOS provided food and shelter for 414 people, according to manager Lillian Schneble.

"We live in one of the most affluent communities of the county," said the Rev. Robert Ward of First United Methodist Church in Birmingham. "We have the resources" to deal with this problem.

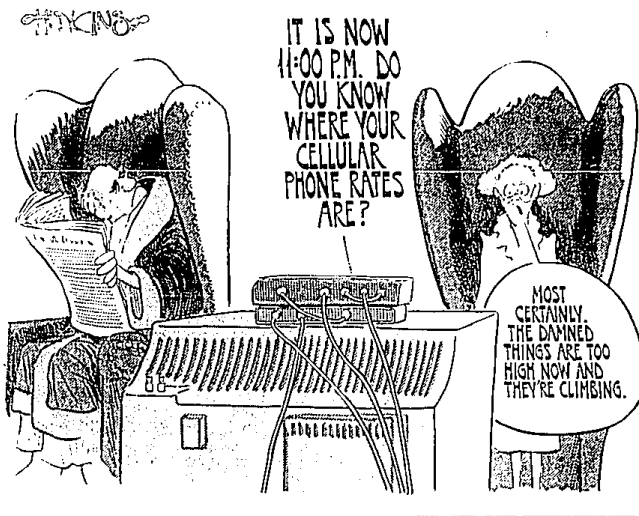
Two Birmingham churches, First Baptist and First Presbyterian, hope to join the effort this month. The churches will host the shelter March 25 to April 1 provided they can obtain a special land-uses permit from the Birmingham City Commission.

THESE EFFORTS, however encouraging, represent only a beginning. Even Wayne County officials, on the day they announced their shelter, acknowledged that there were as many as 2,500 homeless people in the area at any one time. Reducing and eventually eliminating the problem of homeless people in our suburbs is going to take a concerted effort in both the public and private sectors.

Cooperation between the two entities could go a long way here. The idea that government could provide vouchers to homeless people that would help pay their rent, espoused by federal HUD (Housing and Urban Development) director Jack Kemp, is certainly worth looking into.

Meanwhile, additional efforts will be needed in the mental health community and by people who work in substance abuse prevention to seek out and treat those segments of the homeless population.

Finding ways to deal with homelessness in the suburbs hasn't been easy. Then again, some digging is usually required when you're searching for solutions to hidden problems.



Costick, Faulkners and Rolnick — classy folks

NEWS AND VIEWS:

• The Farmington Hills City Council extended city manager Bill Costick's contract for three years last week — and rightly so.

He has had rocky moments during his six-year tenure in the city's top administrative post.

His ill-fated pitch for an office building in Heritage Park to house the special services department and his involvement in councilman Ben Marks' late sewer hookup payment — both in 1988 — come quickly to mind.

But despite the setbacks, Costick has persevered. He has never wavered in his resolve to keep city services humming without busting the budget.

As councilman Terry Sever put it: "Many times, Mr. Costick got the opportunity to get the short end of the stick as far as getting credit for the work that's done in the city."

A Michigan Municipal League transportation committee member, Oakland County City Managers Association past chairman and Michigan City Management Association president-elect, Costick is widely regarded for his management and professional skills.

He played a key role in securing \$1.35 million in supplemental state shared revenue for Farmington Hills after a mid-decade census showed a significant population increase. Many of the city's road and park improvements and natural resource protections have roots in his hard work.



Bob Sklar

The Year 2000 planning project, which has yielded a blueprint for the kind of city that residents want by the end of the century, came out of a vision he had in 1988.

Other cities might have flashier city managers. But they'd be hard-pressed to boast of one who is as caring, classy and committed as Bill Costick.

• They've replaced despair with joy for dozens of kids with disabilities.

Over the past 20 years, Donna and James Faulkner of Farmington Hills have fostered 48 children, including some who were blind, deaf or drug addicted, who had cerebral palsy or who were delinquent.

They've adopted five of the kids — all with severe physical or emotional problems.

"Sometimes, we think the Faulkners are too good to be true. We feel truly blessed they have chosen our agency," says Kathie Spratt, foster care director for the St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center in Farmington Hills.

I salute the Faulkners — chosen Foster Parents of the Year by the Michigan Federation for Private

Children and Family Agencies.

I urge Mayor Jean Fox and the Farmington Hills City Council to honor them with a city proclamation. Everyone who calls the city home should share in extending that honor.

• Never one to waver, Janice Rolnick was up-front in announcing last week that she won't seek re-election to the Farmington school board.

"I always said as soon as the graduates, that's it," said the three-term trustee, whose daughter will graduate in June from North Farmington.

I applaud Rolnick for having the vision to know when it's time to step aside in favor of new blood on the school board.

That's not to say she has overstayed her welcome. I've long viewed her as one of the most insightful, enterprising and articulate trustees.

The science curriculum, gifted education, creative learning approaches and district facilities have been among her chief interests.

Rolnick has listened attentively to taxpayers but she hasn't been one to let special-interest groups color her convictions. She has always voted with the students at heart and the entire district in mind.

I especially liked what she said in 1986 about Farmington Public Schools' caliber of education: "My philosophy is not, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' I think everything can be improved."

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

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, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

Thanks much for coverage

To the editor:

On behalf of the Junior Group of the Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit, I would like to thank you for the fine coverage given by Lorraine McClish in our recent fund-raiser, the Goodwill Antiques Show & Sales.

In addition to being an excellent writer, Ms. McClish has always been untiring in her efforts to support any benefit that helps needy people.

In recognition of her efforts on our behalf last year, she was given the first Medall Award ever bestowed by the Goodwill Industries.

We labor all year for our one fund-raising event, the Goodwill Antiques Show & Sales.

The money raised from this show provides training for people with disabilities. This enables them to turn from a state of helplessness to becoming worthwhile, industrious citizens.

Last year, Goodwill placed 388 people in jobs. That means 388 people were removed from the welfare rolls.

We hope you will experience a sense of well-deserved satisfaction to realize the vital part that your help played in this.

Please also extend thanks to Randy Borst for his excellent photographs.

Jerry Weadt, Isabelle Smith, Junior Group of the Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit

Pitching a tax cut plan

To the editor:

We, the undersigned, have started a petition drive to reduce property taxes in Michigan.

Michigan has the third highest property tax rate in the nation. We can afford a property tax cut.

We propose to reduce property taxes in Michigan by approximately \$600 million. That money will go directly into our pockets. We do not intend to shift to another tax or raise any existing tax.

We will accomplish this tax cut by reducing and permanently limiting all school operating millage rates to no more than 30 mills across the

state. Further, we will limit property tax increases due to assessment growth on existing property to no more than the rate of inflation.

We propose to increase state aid to local schools by establishing a \$4,100 minimum per pupil guarantee for every school district in the state. Finally, we intend to limit the total amount of taxes the state can levy in the future without voter approval.

In order to place this question on the November ballot, we need 310,000 signatures by July 4. That's a tough task, and we need support from around the state.

If any of your readers would like to support a petition drive to cut property taxes, and to limit the state's ability to impose higher taxes in the future, while at the same time fairly and equitably funding education in this state, then we encourage them to make contact with us.

To make it easy to receive petitions, we have adopted a slogan and established a special toll-free relief hot line: "Take a bite out of taxes: call 1-800 BITE TAX." Or if they choose, they can write us at Patterson/Anderson Proposal Committee, P.O. Box 1990, Troy, MI 48067.

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