

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

O&E Monday, March 19, 1990

Banner signs

Regulate but don't bar them

IN OUR quest to rid the cityscape of unsightly banner signs, let's not trample the American tenet of free enterprise.

At the risk of sounding (heaven forbid) pro-business, we applaud the Farmington Hills City Council members who voted to deny an ordinance amendment barring banner signs in any zoning district.

We have no problem regulating such signs. Mayor Jean Fox is right: "We're beginning to get pretty tacky in a lot of neighborhoods."

But as we see it, the proposed amendment smacks of creeping overregulation. To say it needs reworking — read that to mean permitting limited use of such signs — is an understatement.

It's easy to say, as Fox did, that she'd "never want to flaunt my advertising in the face of community standards."

But the proposal, frankly, is too restrictive in one of the nation's most fiercely competitive regional marketplaces, particularly for small businesses. Barring banner use locally while it's permitted in surrounding communities puts Farmington Hills merchants at a decided disadvantage.

AS PROPOSED by the planning commission, the amendment would bar use of any sign made of fabric or paper or any other non-rigid material that's not within an enclosed framework, excluding flags or government insignia.

Farmington Hills-based Aco Hardware offers a practical solution: treat banners as temporary signs and permit them for specific time periods by city permit only.

"This method of temporary permit usage we think would be more practical than having to go through the zoning board of appeals process, which would be very cumbersome and time-consuming both on the city's part and the applicant's part for a relatively minor item," said vice president David Gronbach.

Well put, Mr. Gronbach. General restrictions on size and location of banners also should be addressed.

The proposal's most outspoken critic, council-

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man Ben Marks, hit the bull's-eye in saying it doesn't "provide an atmosphere and a climate of good and fair business philosophies."

WE URGE limiting city concern to the most flagrant uses of banner signs — to controlling excessive use.

Councilman Jon Grant, a small businessman himself, pointed out that banners can play a key role at grand openings, major promotions and seasonal events.

The city would be wise to take up Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce executive director Jody Sorenson's offer to help draft a "more reasonable approach."

Support and cooperation from the chamber would mark a significant stride toward winning compliance from business owners — make no mistake about that. "Anti business" is one label the city doesn't need.

Limiting use of banner signs, coupled with stricter enforcement of existing sign regulations, should stem the incipient blight Mayor Fox fears without banning an effective advertising tool for some businesses.

Where was the public at city study session?

APATHY IS back in vogue.

With every weapon in their verbal arsenal, angry residents in February successfully cajoled the Farmington Hills City Council to cower to their demand to scrap a financial study committee in favor of public deliberations by the full city council.

So, naturally, I stopped in my tracks Tuesday night — the first of many "council of the whole" discussions on major financial issues — when I found the council chambers so empty that council members' voices echoed off the walls.

Those angry residents who just last month appeared so concerned and pledged to see democracy function properly were no where to be found.

"Where are all the complainers?" I blurted to the city council. They giggled at my surprise when I realized apathy was back in vogue.

PERHAPS IT was my mistake to assume I had to rush to council chambers Tuesday night to assure myself a seat amid a public interest in how their tax money would be spent on what would amount to an estimated \$30 million in major community needs: a larger main library, more park land, renewal of the five-



Joanne Maliszewski

year-old parks and recreation tax, and a community and senior adult activities center.

But I have to assume that the public, particularly that group of angry residents, is disinterested, despite their rousing interest last month.

Of course, the city council could have prompted interest and involvement by cablecasting the two-hour study session. The council had no problem cablecasting the angry February meetings as a means of offsetting the media's reporting of the beleaguered three-member committee.

The residents had every right to say what they did. They had every right to demand public deliberations in place of three, lone members studying issues privately, no matter how convenient for the council.

Yet residents' words, however noble, are the same old rhetoric unless residents are there to witness

the public deliberations they so ardently demanded.

THOSE RESIDENTS would be well served to question themselves on whether they really believed what they were saying or were simply providing their own brand of political double talk to sabotage the three-member committee.

Generally, it is the city council that is faced with maintaining its credibility with constituents. The tables are now turned. It is the public, or at least that group of angry residents, who are now without credibility.

At the next great crisis in Farmington Hills government, I will find it more difficult to fault the city council if they take their constituents' concerns less to heart.

Come on public. You demanded that all seven council members discuss those important financial issues in public. Now they are. If you believed in anything you said in those couple angry weeks in February, stand up and be counted.

It's your community, your money and your choice.

Joanne Maliszewski is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

from our readers

Genocide — remember it

To the editor:

This letter is to urge your readers to write President Bush and U.S. Sen. Dole, R-Kan., as well as the lawmakers in the U.S. Congress, to ask them to support the resolution (S.J. Res. 212) introduced by Dole designating April 24 as "National Day of Remembrance of the 75th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923."

The slaughter of Christian Armenians in Soviet Azerbaijan, which is shocking the world in the news today, does not come as such a shock to people of Armenian ancestry. The

fact that the genocide of Armenians has never been officially recognized by the United States is probably the reason for this.

In the late 19th century and to a greater extent in 1915, there were, perpetrated by the Turkish government and executed by Moslem Fundamentalists, genocides of Armenians. The 1915 genocide took a toll of 1.5 million Armenians in Turkey.

An article appearing in the summer 1989 Yale University Journal of International Law, "Genocide as a problem of national and international law; the World War I Armenian case and its contemporary legal ramifications," by Dr. Houben Adalian, explains "... when a country (like Moslem Turkey) goes unrecognized for the act of committing genocide (as to the Christian Armenians), it is likely to happen again." It is

happening again. The Azeris in Azerbaijan are Turks.

In 1988, as a campaign promise, President Bush wrote, "The Bush administration will never allow political pressures to prevent our denunciation of crimes against humanity. The United States must acknowledge the attempted genocide of the Armenian people in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, based on the testimony of survivors, scholars and indeed our own representatives at the time. If we are to ensure that such horrors are not repeated."

Despite his campaign promises, President Bush is now not so supportive of S.J. Res. 212.

Recognition of the 1915 genocide of Armenians by the U.S. can help protect the future.

Joseph and Julienne Hovanesian, Farmington Hills

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