

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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Plan first Grant application premature

IT SEEMS only in Farmington Hills would applying for a state grant to develop parkland spark a political firestorm.

The parks and recreation commission's last-minute pitch to apply for a grant of up to \$750,000 to develop the 26-acre Jack Peltz property for an active park narrowly won city council approval last week.

But as we see it, the application was way premature. Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi is right: It was steamrolled through.

The deadline to apply for a 1990-91 grant was April 1. In past years, applications could be made more than once during the course of a year.

Because it takes up to two years to receive a grant, the parks and rec folks March 20 decided to pursue the narrow window of opportunity this year to avoid a three-year wait by delaying to apply until next year.

Calling for a study often is a politician's way of putting off a tough decision. But in this case, more study is needed — unquestionably.

The reason is the lack of formal land use planning for both the Peltz site, bought last spring, and 45 adjacent acres, owned by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), that the city wants to buy.

THE GRANT application proposes three soccer fields, four volleyball courts and two basketball courts in addition to a picnic shelter and a walking trail.

What was the rush to apply for the grant? Sure there's a need for more soccer fields in the city, but the Peltz-MDOT acreage holds too much potential to commit pieces of it without an overall plan.

We don't recall active use ever being decided as the dominant use. As planning commission chairwoman Joanne Smith put it, "We're not talking about, 'Is soccer good? Is baseball good?'

Of course, it is. We're talking about land use."

Waiting till next year to apply for the grant would've been beneficial, not harmful. It would've given the city time to define proposals, hold hearings and develop a master plan for the full 72 acres, southwest of Farmington Road and I-696.

It also would've let the new ad hoc facilities study committee issue its findings, which could directly affect use of the acreage.

PUBLIC PERCEPTION all along has been that the Peltz and MDOT sites would be combined for parks and recreation use. But a lot of uses can reflect that theme.

Open space, parkland, active recreation, a community activities center and a new mini-library are all possibilities. None of these uses is incompatible with the others.

We're especially concerned about plans to buffer Quaker Valley residents, who live to the south. We'd also like more detail on anticipated passive uses.

Supporting the grant application, Sever says two of every three city voters in 1988 backed Proposal D, which provides money to develop recreational lands. But that's irrelevant. No grant should be sought until the public has a chance to offer up ideas for use of the Peltz property.

The council members who supported applying for the grant now — Nancy Bates, Ben Marks, Larry Lichtman and Sever — argue the application can be withdrawn at any time.

But we don't think the city should send that kind of mixed signal to the state.

Councilman Jon Grant put it best: "It's not good practice to apply for grants when we're not totally sure what we want to do with the property."

Teachers' market is a tough nut to crack

Q: My daughter is graduating with a degree in elementary education this June. It is my understanding that teaching jobs are difficult to find. I hear different stories depending on whom you talk to. Is the situation that bad? Have you any advice on how she can break into the profession?

A: I know a couple of school districts in the suburban area that have more than 4,000 applications on file. Keep in mind, however, many of these aspiring teachers have sent applications to numerous districts throughout the country.

One future teacher I know has 43 applications on file in Michigan school districts.

There also are many teachers on leave because of cutbacks and others who have dropped out for a period of time and now want back in the teaching profession.

IT'S A difficult market to break into at this time, especially in suburban Detroit.

The zero population syndrome of the '60s and '70s resulted in fewer children and therefore fewer teachers. The average family today is about 1.5 children compared to 3-5 when I started teaching.

Another reason is teaching salaries in Michigan, New York and California are the highest in the country.

Therefore, this area tends to draw more applicants based on simple economics. And most candidates, like your daughter, want to teach in the suburbs as opposed to the inner city.

But don't get discouraged. Although it's difficult, it's not impossible to break into teaching.

FIRST, THE more a candidate extends his/her geographic limits, the better chance is available.

For instance, Tempe, Mesa and other suburban Arizona communities are experiencing a population growth and teaching opportunities are more available. Another growing area — Atlanta, Ga. — has teaching opportunities.

A candidate needs to research the areas through the placement office. Eastern Michigan University has a list of teaching opportunities avail-



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able for each state. Other university placement offices have similar information.

Since your daughter's future husband is going to be working in the Detroit area, this eliminates the above option.

SHE SHOULD work toward becoming a substitute in some of the area districts. Focus on one or two school districts as opposed to submitting all over the place. Get the principal and teachers of a couple buildings to know her.

More important is to go beyond substituting. She should volunteer her time for field trips on days she is not working. Offer to help in the media center.

Giving of one's self over and beyond the school day allows key people — principals, teachers and parents — to get to know her as a person.

Remember, principals talk to each other at staff meetings every month.

Remember also that there are certain teachers who are part of what I call the "informal power structure."

That is, their proven competency has resulted in their opinion carrying much weight with the principal and central office. However, this linking process can be overdone.

KNOWING PEOPLE is only the first step. In the final analysis, she must be viewed as a committed and competent candidate, one who will serve children well.

There is an aging population in our school districts at the present time. I know of one high school where a majority of the teachers are over age 50.

It may take more time to break into the system and prove herself to principals, but this is her best route.

Remember, central offices usually paper screen candidates, but generally take recommendations from building principals before making the final decision on new teacher candidates.

Good luck.

Dr. James Doyle is a former assistant superintendent in the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

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The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

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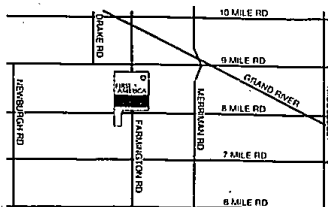
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