

# Opinion

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

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## Sidewalks

### Snow removal: pressing issue

SOME FARMINGTON Road residents are still thinking snow.

They're wondering how they're going to clear the white stuff from the sidewalks planned for in front of their houses — a very legitimate concern, as we see it.

Confusion arose about snow removal when the Farmington Hills City Council last week approved the project plan for new sidewalks along Farmington Road, between 12 and 13 Mile.

As we wrote last fall, we appreciate the apprehension longtime Farmington Road residents feel toward plans to build sidewalks along the two-lane residential stretch.

Some homeowners across whose front yards walkways will pass fear the worst — falling property values, more vandalism, less privacy.

But based on experiences in other parts of Farmington Hills, we stand by the city's long-standing policy that calls for sidewalks along major roads.

Safety indeed is as much a reason to add walkways as utility, especially along a main artery in one of the city's most densely populated areas. Gravel shoulders are no substitutes for sidewalks.

WITH THE city making a concerted pitch to apply the policy, former councilman Paul Sowerby hit the bull's-eye in urging the council to "address the issue of maintenance. That's responsible government."

Under the city code, the city maintains the structural integrity of the sidewalks it adds along major roads. In short, that means the city repairs heaving, spalling and cracks. Homeowners must clear the snow or face a possible \$500 fine per day.

Because sidewalks on major roads bear more foot traffic and serve more people than those inside subdivisions, we think the city should provide snow removal on major roads in residential areas and at least share the cost.

That seems only fair. Unlike in commercial areas, homeowners can't pass the cost to consumers or absorb it as a cost of doing business.

While we applaud council members for directing the city manager to study the snow removal issue, we urge them to follow up and adopt a fairer winter maintenance policy.

WHAT'S THE cost to buy a couple of tractors equipped with brushes and hire seasonal help? Who's responsible for snow removal when residents are out of town? Who's responsible for clearing crosswalks not within a home's frontage?

These are just some of the key questions begging for answers.

We trust City Manager Bill Costick provides the answers by fall. Let's not kid ourselves. vast stretches of new sidewalk not only along Farmington Road but also other major residential roads aren't likely to be accessible next winter.

How many residents, especially retirees, will have the elbow power or extra cash to clear a 120-foot by 5-foot walk?

Residents inside subs well know the rage that rises — even though they realize there's no alternative — when the plow drives by and fills their newly cleared driveway apron with 1-2 feet of snow. Imagine the chore at hand when a walk on a major road bears the brunt of that plow?

Drainage is a real concern. Laying a slab of concrete — without concern for privacy or property rights — typically isn't the city's style.

But in the case of Farmington Road, we wonder. Surprisingly, many residents didn't seem to be aware of the project plan until the night the council voted on it.

If city leaders expect Farmington Road residents to have a sense of respect for the planned sidewalks, they'd better wise up and assure that engineering plans reflect homeowner design wishes where practical.

It's not that we're against the sidewalks. We're just asking that the city be fair to the residents who will be living with them.

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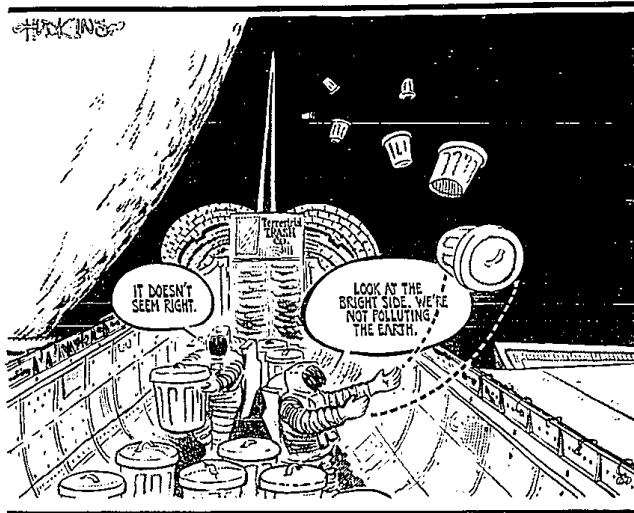
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## We mustn't underplay educational challenge

"It is only the ignorant who despise education," — Publilius Syrus

HOW IRONIC that America's best-known school teacher, Christa McAuliffe, died aboard the space shuttle Challenger.

For challenge is the essence of teaching — challenging tomorrow's adults to reach for the stars today in their quest for knowledge.

Our nation has 23 million illiterates. The problem isn't that we don't know, nor is it being ignored. But as Farmington Superintendent Mike Flanagan put it: "To have any in a country with this kind of wealth is absolutely intolerable."

Within this backdrop, I wasn't surprised to see nine candidates enter the race for two opening seats on the Farmington school board.

Serving on the school board isn't the prestige position some think it is. You're just as apt to catch brickbats as plaudits. And the pay isn't anything to bank on — typically less than \$900 a year.

But it's a key job, one of the most vital in our community.



Bob Sklar

Farmington Public Schools boasts 11,000 students, 1,900 employees, 30 buildings and an \$89 million budget. So all taxpayers — not just parents — should have a vested interest in the district's well being.

UPWARDS OF 75 percent of the taxpayers don't have children in Farmington schools. But public education is an American birthright. The public is obligated to provide it.

Frankly, I'm amazed that taxpayers without kids in the schools don't, as a general rule, become more involved in the education of today's younger generation during their most impressionable years.

Take it from Flanagan: "During the Kennedy years, we were in the space race. Some people see us in the high-definition television race right now. I think those are small po-

lates next to the real race that we're in — and that's the brain race."

Heck, I can't think of a more crucial mission than educating our kids.

With two kids in Farmington schools and with my wife an elementary school teacher in another Oakland County District, I speak from firsthand experience.

THIS SPRING'S Farmington school board race won't be shortchanged on issues.

Curriculum, facilities, programming and staff training have popped up already as buzzwords on the stump.

Among the specific issues I'd like to see addressed are equal learning opportunities, student incentives, substance abuse, gifted education, high technology and public trust.

I urge every voter to make sure they register by the May 14 deadline and they vote on June 11.

In the meantime, study up so your vote is informed.

And remember, voting is more than a privilege. It's a responsibility.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

## Political protest

### Privacy issue blurs basic freedom

PROTEST, an essential part of maintaining liberty, is being threatened in our communities. Residents should be deeply disturbed at and resent this dangerous intrusion into our rights of assembly and free speech.

Recently a handful of suburbs have enacted ordinances to curtail picketing in front of specific persons' homes. The guise under which these ordinances are being adopted is to maintain privacy.

In West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township and Birmingham the situation revolves around the ever-controversial abortion issue. Pro-life forces are putting the squeeze on individuals who work at abortion clinics by picketing their homes.

Having someone stand in front of your home and protest has the potential to be annoying, embarrassing and maddening. But these inconveniences we must bear.

Our freedom to protest is too important to fritter away because some would rather restrict the noise in their subdivision to the incessant din of lawnmowers.

After all, nobody ever said that maintaining a free society would be easy. Unfortunately expediency for the sake of mediocrity is too rapidly replacing militancy in the defense of freedom.

While sketching out the parameters of "disturbing the public repose," Edmund Burke put it best: "the firebell at midnight disturbs our sleep,

but it keeps you from being burnt in your bed."

In truth, these ordinances have nothing to do with protecting a person's right to privacy. The street in front of your house is just as public as those in front of township hall and the White House.

For some time, now, suburbanites' right of assembly and protest have been hindered by shopping malls whose management maintains that their enclosed areas are private. Hired security forces prowl the corridors seeking to quash any sign of divergence from the norm.

Malls are replacing the traditional town squares of America, subdivisions are replacing neighborhoods. And at each stage of suburban development, those in charge of the status quo wrest a bit more of freedom away from us.

What those ordinances do is reflect an attitude in our society which says that political protest is somehow vulgar and beneath those who can afford to keep it out of their sight.

The issue over which the protest is taking place is insignificant — today pro-life, tomorrow pro-choice, the next day ecology. The cause matters not, the right to assemble, demonstrate and speak out is foremost.

Using privacy as a scapegoat is not only threatening to the right of protest but to the legitimate right to privacy. If everyone someone inconvenienced by protest raises the issue of privacy, the meaning of privacy will become blurred beyond recognition.

Population of the tri-county area is not increasing, but simply moving out in concentric circles, spurred by the insatiable hunger for "growth," painted as progress, and called inevitable.

By our focus on growth, we are fouling our own nest, when the only hope of our future health is to focus on conservation. Every mile of new "outward bound" highway discourages mass transportation, encourages pollution of air, land and

## Farmington readers' forum

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### Disconnect Connector

To the editor:

During a week in which world attention is so closely focused on the health of the environment, it is sad to find an editorial (April 9), as yours, supporting the proposed Haggerty Connector, which essentially discourages conservation of the resources of our part of the world.

Those who look to the Haggerty Connector to solve rush-hour traffic congestion will find the finished road filled by cars from the development it has spawned — eight instead of two-lane gridlock.

Yes, development is here now, but nothing compared to what the connector will bring. And nothing compared to what will follow when M-275 is extended — the next step in this grand plan. We'll be told that it is needed to "relieve" the congestion on the connector.

Population of the tri-county area is not increasing, but simply moving out in concentric circles, spurred by the insatiable hunger for "growth," painted as progress, and called inevitable.

By our focus on growth, we are fouling our own nest, when the only hope of our future health is to focus on conservation. Every mile of new "outward bound" highway discourages mass transportation, encourages pollution of air, land and

water. (Include wetlands under water.)

Yes we cherish home rule, but with home rulers so short-sighted as to make decisions threatening this future, perhaps we need a big brother like the EPA!

Lorna D. McEwen,  
West Bloomfield

### City message loud and clear

To the editor:

The message that the Farmington Hills City Council sent on March 26 is loud and clear.

To all residents of Farmington Hills, old and new: If you wish to erect something that is against city ordinance, just follow these three easy steps:

● Don't bother seeking permission from City Hall, because they don't enforce the ordinances anyway.

● Erect said structure wherever you want on your property.

● Get city council to amend the ordinance to fit your already existing structure.

This is a tried and true method. Precedence has been set. All of this goes to prove the city of Farmington Hills is better at collecting taxes than at using them to enforce its laws.

Christine Mack,  
Farmington Hills

### Police action desperate act

To the editor:

It is incomprehensible that the Farmington Hills Police Officer's Association would accept a deal with a fund-raising organization that only provided a 15-cent on the dollar payoff.

To sacrifice their integrity, their high-standing reputation in the community, the fiscal respect of the people who pay their salaries, and the loyalty of people who have depended and trusted in their service — well, someone at the highest ranks of this police officer's organization must be pretty desperate.

It is true that the pension plans are dismal for the officers. It is a disgrace to our city council that a fair and truly motivating plan has not been implemented.

But there are other ways to draw civic attention. Telephone harassment, always at dinner or family times, is disruptive and counterproductive to the community at large.

Farmington Hills has a fantastic police organization.

This action, on the part of the POA, does nothing other than destroy what years of honest, hard police work has created.

Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Heeter,  
Farmington Hills

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