

Community Corner

This week's question:

How are you doing in the hot weather?

We asked this question at the Kowalski Deli in Farmington during a recent warm spell.



"Great. I love the hot weather. Of course, I have air conditioning."
— Cecilia Sanford
Farmington



"Not very well. I'm very tired. It's just too hot and humid."
— Eleanor Kosinski
Southfield



"Terrible... but it's better than the alternative — snow and cold."
— Katy Kelly
Detroit



"Fine. I love it. I'm one of those people who enjoy hot weather."
— Stanylava Krowicky
Farmington Hills



"All right. I love it. This is what I wait for — summertime."
— Sonja Styles
Livonia



"Fine. I like playing outside and going to the lake."
— Andrew Styles
Livonia

Posting a complaint

Drug store owner challenges sign law

By Casey Hans
staff writer

The owner of three Farmington Maple Village drug stores is the first to challenge part of the city's new sign law.

Alvin Wander believes the ordinance, which restricts temporary window signs to 25 percent of total window space, is unfair to smaller merchants who need the signage to promote their businesses. The ordinance was passed last November after much discussion by city council members and planning commissioners.

"We certainly appreciate the need to beautify... but we have to find a way to work together," said Wander, who adds that he must compete against giant drugstore chains who have large advertising budgets. "We don't have the financial mechanism to be able to do that."

"You could argue whether our signs are tasteful. We think they are."

Wander received three written warning notices from the city, and appealed to the council in early July for sign variances at each of his

stores. He owns stores in downtown Farmington, at Grand River and Drake roads, and most recently at a renovated and cleaned-up location at the Uptown Plaza at Grand River and Mooney. Wander also owns stores in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, South Lyon, Westland, Warren and Lincoln Park, where he said he has had no sign problems.

WANDER SENT a letter to Mayor Shirley Richardson last September warning that the new sign ordinance would hurt smaller businesses, especially in a tough economic climate.

The council tabled the July 1 variance request with several councilpeople asking for more information about the Maple Village situation. The council is expected to reconsider it at the Aug. 19 meeting.

Councilman Ralph Yoder called the 25 percent law "too restrictive" and would like to see merchants allowed another 10 percent of their window space for advertising of services to customers.

Wander said he is pleased the council is considering the matter. "We were delighted with the reception we got," he said. "They were willing to listen."

Maple Village's Uptown store manager Arlene Vecsei said the store regularly draws customers with signs which tout low milk and diaper prices. "This helps every body," she added. "It's been a big help in sales."

John Richardson, a veterinarian with a practice in the Uptown area, also appeared before council to speak about the signage problem. Commitmentally he is also the mayor or a husband.

"Businesses can't live with this," Richardson said. "Signs are changed frequently... as a service to the customer."

"Maybe the signs they're looking to see is 'for lease' because that's what they're going to have is a bunch of empty buildings. I was happy to see the council table it."

THE CITY is expected to consider the amount of window space when reviewing the Maple Village request, since some of Wander's stores have much smaller windows than others.

This is not the first time the issue of temporary signs has been debated recently. Last fall, as the council was considering changing the sign



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Al Wander and Arlene Vecsei, owner and manager of the Maple Village Drugs at Uptown Plaza, stand in front of their store and windows, which promote various product specials. The

store is currently in violation of the city's sign law, using 30 percent of its window space to display signs. The city allows only 25 percent. Wander is asking for a variance.

ordinance, a number of local businesspeople protested the move saying the signage was their only effective marketing strategy.

The city of Farmington Hills is also in the midst of considering changes to its sign ordinance, which

will address the temporary sign issue. Farmington Hills attorney John Donohue, who represents both cities, said the Hills City Council is expected to review a staff proposal of 25 percent of window space for temporary signage, plus other changes to

the law, on July 22. In Farmington, the Maple Drugs variance request "is the first time a variance request really goes to the heart of the 25 percent," Donohue said. "They're going to give it an awfully long look."

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