

Council candidate stays out of pockets

Editor's note: In the coming weeks, as the Nov. 5 city council election draws near, the Observer will be talking with candidates and letting you know who they are, what they think they can do for the city, and how they stand on issues.

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

What you see is what you get. That's how Farmington Hills City Council candidate Joanne Smith describes herself. "I can't be pressured by groups," she said. "And I can't be in anyone's pocket. I don't have any private agenda. I am an honest and open person."

The 35-year Farmington Hills resident's jump into the political arena for a shot at one of four seats on the city council this year isn't something new for her. She's done it before. A former council member in 1975-79, Smith also served in 1978 as mayor pro tem.

The political process isn't her only involvement in city government. You probably recognize her name. Most recently, she's served as chairwoman of the Farmington Hills Planning Commission in 1990 and this year. She's been on the commis-

sion since 1985. Before that, she served on the Zoning Board of Appeals in the 1970s.

"I've learned to listen more," said Smith, 65, a therapist in the St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center Treatment Foster Care Program.

Smith said her involvement in city government and particularly her role on the planning commission has taught her to ask pertinent questions and to balance the needs of the community when making a decision.

"I'VE LEARNED to ask more pertinent information of the experts and the public. I don't have any private agenda. I have to go with what experts tell me. What I see. What I read."

"That is not to say we don't listen to the people. But you have to say, 'These are the reasons why we do this — for the benefit of the whole.' Sometimes residents next door to an issue have the most compelling reason to be heard."

Change is also something Smith said she has no problem with. After years on the planning commission, she said she knows that "ordinances become more than something in a book. It's living and growing. When it's not right, it's got to be changed."

Change, however, is also something Smith can do in her own life.

FARMINGTON HILLS

CITY COUNCIL

'91 ELECTION

While her daughter — one of Smith's five children — studied for her master's degree, so did Smith.

"I had a goal, something I wanted to do. I didn't just want to go to class. I wanted to learn and get good marks and I did," said Smith, who received a master's in social work from the University of Michigan in 1989. That degree led to her job at St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center.

Her decision to seek office was aided in part by others who in the past few years continued to ask her if she would run again. "It's good for your ego," she correctly thought there would be an open seat this year, she said. Councilwoman Jean Fox is not seeking re-election.

SMITH ACKNOWLEDGED that the city council in the past few years has been having problems. Referring to the council meetings — as many do — as "Monday Night at the Fights," Smith said she believes it's clear the council "seems to have a difficult time making decisions. I'm



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— Joanne Smith
Farmington Hills City
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not sitting in those seats. So I don't know what the problem is.

"The mayor this year has avoided the bitterness of the previous year. That's fine. I congratulate him. But someone has to grasp the leadership and take the better atmosphere and let's get on with it. They haven't done that," she said, referring to issues that were postponed or bumped back to the planning commission for further study.

How would Smith handle the meetings?

"I'd probably say: 'Let's have a motion. Let's discuss this point, that point.' But no one says that. Let's make a decision. People are afraid to open a can of worms. I can only guess what's going on."

In the next four years, Smith believes the city should be concerned with maintaining its quality and rehabilitating older areas — residential and commercial — of the city to avoid decline. "You never stop growing. Growth is something we all do. Farmington Hills has got

to get busy trying to avoid that (stagnation)."

SMITH ALSO wants to be a part of improving communications and relationships with the Farmington Public Schools. "The schools are ours. I'm not sure we have addressed how we can work with the school system. We have one financial pocket."

Buying land for parks and recreation is also on the top of Smith's list of things that must be done in the city in the next four years. Having grown up in Grand Rapids, Smith said she understands the value of having open space.

Officials at the time believed open spaces in subdivisions were adequate.

Smith is running her own campaign but Dennis Fitzgerald, chairman of the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission, is her honorary chairman.

She is writing her own campaign literature, walking door-to-door and has put up lawn signs. The money to pay for her campaign, Smith said, is coming from fund-raisers and her checking account.

"I represent all the people. I don't represent a subdivision. My name is in the phone book. People can call. I have an answering machine. I will sit down with people."

Forest fund-raiser helps child's wish come true

Students, staff and parents at Forest Elementary will help a child's wishes come true this year.

As part of the commemorating of the school's 25th anniversary, the parent-teacher organization there got involved with the Rainbow Connection, a Michigan-based charity dedicated to fulfilling the wishes of chronic and terminally ill children ages 3-18.

"We wanted to put something back into the community that has served us so well," said Forest principal Walt Jablonski, who has been at Forest for nearly 19 years.

"It was a wonderful way to start off our 25th year," said co-president Linda Kaplan. "And this is just the beginning."

A roller skating fund-raising party was held Sept. 25 at the Bonaventure skating rink in Farmington Hills, where students, parents and teachers participated. Even local TV talk

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show host Marilyn Turner, honorary chairwoman for the charity, was on hand selling buttons that said "Forest Makes Wishes Come True."

A total of \$1,000 — proceeds from the skating party, button sales and a further donation from the PTO — will be spent on the wishes of one child from the area.

"We asked that these funds be directed to one recipient," said PTO co-president Bonnie Murphy. "That way, the child will know it was our children at Forest who worked so

hard to make their wish come true.

"We picked this theme because we liked the idea of our kids helping other kids."

The Rainbow Connection is based in Rochester Hills and grants at least 80 wishes each year. It was founded six years ago by former Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson in memory of a friend and two children of his who were killed in a plane crash.

Many children and their families have gone to Disney World in Florida, while others have requested trips to see their grandparents or other family members. Often, children from urban areas want to go on a northern Michigan vacation. One unusual wish granted was a teenage boy's request to have PASS, the all-sports cable television channel installed on his television.

Information on the Rainbow Connection can be obtained by calling 651-1261.



Elissa Kraft, a third grader at Forest Elementary, skates with her schoolmates as part of the all-school fund-raiser.

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Forest Elementary third graders Kathryn Kerna (left) and Gina Ray take a break to share a frozen cherry Coke during the all-school fund-raiser at Bonaventure skating rink. Television talk show host Marilyn Turner (below) skates with Forest Elementary students Brianna Silborschein (left) and Vanessa George at Bonaventure skating rink in Farmington Hills. The students skated as a fund-raiser for the Rainbow Connection, a Michigan group that makes wishes come true for ill children. Turner is honorary chairwoman for the group.



photos by SHARON LeMIEUX/staff

