

## Specifics, please

### What kind of rink would it be?

An ice arena was proposed for Farmington Hills more than a year ago. Since then members of city council and a special committee have been meeting and talking and talking and meeting on the subject. In our opinion, nothing much of substance has been said.

Last year we supported spending a few bucks on a serious study on the feasibility of building an ice arena here. The study was completed. The idea looked good.

But now we're disappointed that the project isn't much farther along... or that it hasn't been relegated to the ash heap of good intentions.

Several Farmington Hills council members want to ask the voters how they feel about a municipal ice arena, presumably in an advisory question attached to the August primary ballot.

Very good. A public servant is never wrong to ask the voters their thinking, especially on a project that could cost upwards of \$6 million.

But ask them what? Do you want an ice arena in Farmington Hills? Well, the voters might come back with: What kind of an ice arena have you got in mind? Provide specifics, please.

Ah, that's been the problem over that past year — there's been lots of talk on dollars, locations and votes, but little about just what kind of facility it would be. Voters would need such information.

We've said it before, but it bears reiteration: It takes more than just ice to have a successful ice arena.

It takes the amenities (restaurants, banquet

facilities, lounges, pro shops and other stores, an indoor running track) and a comfortable setting to get the customers in and keep them coming back.

We believe that if you build it right — yes, spend the dollars and make it nice! — they will come. A rink would be user- and spectator-friendly, and multiple surfaces are a must.

If the local rink is going to be a corrugated metal hulk, freezing cold inside with uncomfortable seats, filthy restrooms and no place to buy a cup of coffee or bag of peanuts, forget it. It'll be out of business in no time.

Another important question is who should build and operate the rink, the city or a private firm? If it's privately run, should Farmington-area residents get first dibs on the ice and other facilities? We think they should.

And what about location? Please, city fathers and mothers, don't even think of putting it in Heritage Park or Woodland Hills. The Founders Sports Park (also known as the Sod Farm) on Eight Mile Road looks like the best bet.

There seems to be a demand for ice arenas in suburbs like Farmington Hills, especially right now with winter Olympics fever still in our bones. Studies — and the testimony of arena managers in other communities — have confirmed that the demand is great.

When it comes to an ice arena for Farmington Hills, let's ask the voters and then abide by their wishes. But let's also make sure they understand what they're voting on. Give them specifics, please.

## Protect aid to your schools

Proposal A looks better and better as the TV campaign against it gets dirtier and dirtier.

The chief issue next Tuesday is not "they" or the sales tax or the income tax or the lottery. The chief issue is protecting school funding. Proposal A does this by locking the 2-cents increase in the sales tax into a constitutionally-protected school aid fund.

The Legislature can't raid that fund for prisons, perks or pensions. The fund is reserved for public schools. Proposal A not only cuts property taxes but corrects the real problem we've faced for 25 years — heavy local pressure on the property tax because of declining state school aid.

Plan B, the legislatively-approved "backup plan," is merely statutory. The Legislature wrote it, and a future Legislature can change it. That bodes poorly for public schools.

For that reason alone, Proposal A deserves your yes vote. And there are other good reasons to vote yes:

■ Proposal A will cap most of our school operating property taxes. It would amend the Michigan Constitution to say those rates may be changed only by a 75 percent supermajority in both chambers of the Legislature. We suspect that is the real reason Proposal A is opposed by leaders of the Michigan Education Association. MEA contributions may be able to win 51 percent of legislators' votes, but they'll never get a 75 percent vote to hike property taxes.

■ Proposal A keeps the single business tax (SBT) at 2.35 percent. Plan B raises SBT to 2.75 percent. If there's anything business investors hate worse than a plague, it's the SBT. We can't guarantee that keeping SBT at 2.35 will

bring more jobs into Michigan, but we know that taxing businesses more can't possibly help.

■ Proposal A will result in a bigger property tax cut for homeowners — 6 mills instead of 12 under plan B. (Both are a vast improvement over the current statewide average of nearly 35 mills.)

■ And if rising assessments are your worry, Proposal A would cap them at 5 percent a year. Plan B has no assessment cap.

There are a hundred small details we could nicker in the State Capital machinations that produced Proposal A and plan B. School finance reform is the classical camel — a horse designed by a committee. It's ugly. Yet it's a very functional beast, better at its job than a donkey or elephant.

Those who would like to vote "none of the above" are in the wrong.

The Michigan Legislature finally has stepped up to its constitutional responsibility — funding a public school system. It has taken much of the burden of school finance off property. For all but a relative handful of districts, it has taken the burden of high-pressure millage campaigns off local school boards. In outstate Michigan where many districts are starving, eventually it will guarantee \$5,000 per pupil.

Essentially, all Michiganders now are responsible for all kids in all public schools. No more of this "we've got ours and the rest can go hang."

Is the job done? Of course not. Eternal vigilance is the price not only of liberty but of controls on taxes, accountability in schools and better quality teaching.

Proposal A deserves a yes vote on March 15. And don't watch too many TV commercials.

ARKIE HUDKINS



## LETTERS

### Greene's is great

I can't tell you how much we enjoyed your wonderful article (Feb. 28) about Greene's hamburgers.

Our family has been "pigging out" on Greene's since 1957. Although our children are scattered from East to West, whenever they make the trek home the first thing they do is make a "Greene's Run." It doesn't matter what time they arrive in Farmington, that's their first stop.

This article will be copied and sent to all family members. They will appreciate it.

Some people would call these burgers junk food. We refer to them as "comfort food."

Pat and Jack Thoresen, Farmington

### What 'citizens'?

Gov. John Engler was at the Mercy Center Feb. 26 for a "citizens" forum on Proposal A.

The forum was open and very informal, but I was agast at the lack of "citizens" in attendance. There were a little more than 20 people present. About 15 were people in local government or involved in grass-roots activity.

I am really stunned that the people of Farmington/Farmington Hills are so apathetic. If apathy is not the cause, then I have to assume one of two things: Everyone in Farmington understands the issues in Proposal A and has decided how they are going to vote, or once again there will be a poor turnout at the polls in Farmington on March 15.

I fear the latter is true. I am very discouraged and disheartened with the American people's lack of concern for their government's actions.

We've heard the expression "Use it or lose it." I apply this to our right to vote. If we don't use it, we will surely lose this right — if it's not first taken away from us.

Melody A. Jasko, Farmington

### Concern about 'A'

Our newspaper editorially recommended support of Proposal A some time ago (Feb. 17), long before the recent giveaways by Gov. Engler to get the support of special interest groups.

As you know, changes were proposed by the governor which would benefit real estate agents, the Michigan Farm Bureau and the auto dealers to the tune of more than \$500 million.

In addition, we are now told that the \$100 million that the Keno game was supposed to raise is no more.

The question that raises is how is the short fall going to be met and, if not, how much of a reduction will be our school districts take?

Other parts of Proposal A already impacted unfavorably on city governments — specifically, language in the sales tax proposal that no longer guarantees the full revenue-sharing funds provided in the present constitution.

As a Farmington Hills City Council member, I am concerned over this potential loss of revenue, which is now used to provide, fire and police protection and other services.

Despite the admonishments of the Engler administration that no such reductions are planned, let us not forget that only last fall the governor proposed doing away with all non-constitutionally guaranteed revenue-sharing for the cities.

It took a super lobbying effort by 1,000 Michigan municipal officials to defeat this proposal. In view of these major crippling changes in Proposal A, should not the Observer reconsider and reverse its decision to support the ballot plan?

Aldo Vagnozzi, councilman,  
Farmington Hills

### Where's the ice?

How much longer until we get an ice rink?

How do I answer my son's question? The city of Farmington Hills needs to move and move at a pace faster than that of a snail.

Children are clamoring to get more ice time. A paper ran an article about the Detroit Skate Club's \$4 million expansion to more than double its current size. Farmington Hills hasn't even dug a hole for one ice rink.

DSC has 500 members, a waiting list of 75 figure skaters and another 200 who want to play hockey.

I appreciate the city council's continued interest and support in this project, but actions speak louder than words. How long is this city going to allow its children to be deemed "out of district" when it came to hockey and figure skating?

As a progressive city, we should be picking up this overflow of ice sporting business.

Let's keep our kids out of hot water, and put them on ice. Now.

Mary Soley, Farmington Hills

### An excellent job

I wanted to take the time to thank reporter Larry O'Connor and photographer Sharon LeMieux for the wonderful tribute they made to our teachers and support person of the year. They really captured the reading audience with their stories and photographs.

Thank you once again. Keep up the good work.

Clifford Scherer, interim superintendent,  
Farmington Schools

## COMMUNITY VOICE

**QUESTION:**  
Could you suggest something to read?

We asked this question at the Farmington branch of the Community Library.



"This new county form — 'Exemption From School Property Taxes.' Why do they want my Social Security number?"  
Ray Kelly  
Novi



"I liked 'Having Our Say' by the Delaney sisters and 'Written By Herself' about autobiographies of women."  
Laura Schmidt  
Farmington



"Any of the books by Charlotte McLeod, a mystery writer."  
Miriam Porath  
Farmington Hills



"Bridges of Madison County." It's the best I've read so far.  
Fred Moore  
St. Petersburg, Fla.

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