

Farmington Observer OPINION

21898 FARMINGTON RD., FARMINGTON, MI 48336

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Development dustup Can anything be learned?

Suddenly there are real development problems in the city of Farmington Hills.

For years and years it has been peace with honor on the Farmington Hills development front. Sure, there were concerns: The usual suspects would shine around the city council meetings if someone dared to suggest that so much as a bench be placed in Heritage Park.

Of course it all worked out in the end, like a B movie. The park remained more nature preserve than sand volleyball pit, and even those awful carp eventually were dredged out of the park's pond.

Development problems? Hey, there are Oakland County suburbs where the officials would just about kill for those kind of "problems." Isn't that right, Rochester Hills?

But this has turned out to be the summer of the development wars (well, OK, make that battles, skirmishes and dustups) in Farmington Hills. Battle lines have been drawn around:

The 14 Mile/Northwestern Highway area, where Kmart and Home Depot projects were planned, much to the chagrin of some of the residents who live there. Oh how they hoisted and hollered at that planning commission meeting in May. But lately there have been counter demonstrations in favor of the development. People are saying, "Buy my house, please! Mr. Moneybags Developer, give me a fair price so I can move out of this congested, commercial area." Wow, only in Farmington Hills.

Twelve Mile/Middlebelt, where a developer wants to put up a commercial and residential complex in what is now scrub brush and a stand of woods. The city council first approved

the plan, 4-3, and then recanted, 6-1. Mayor Larry Lichtman, who had the courage to stand by his original vote, now is the target of a recall drive. Somehow we don't think there will be much of a backlash from people who favor this plan.

Twelve Mile/Drake, where NBD (that used to be short for National Bank of Detroit; it's just plain NBD now) plans a major, 145-acre headquarters (eat your heart out, Troy!). At a recent council meeting, the project was approved despite the protests of some residents who live nearby. Even the man who read a prepared statement opposing the project admitted that NBD probably would do a nice job developing the property.

Now, we believe that suburban development has to be viewed with a cynical eye and a pessimistic heart. There are developers who want to pave over and populate every square inch of Michigan from Temperance to Ironwood.

But each development must be considered on its own merits. Locally, two of the three seem to have redeeming features. And in the other - the 12 Mile/Middlebelt scene - at least the angry residents, the developer and the city are talking things over. The residents have indicated that they want to be in on the planning process, and the developer seems willing to let that happen.

Gosh, do we see another happy ending coming up?

Two truths seem to be coming from the Farmington Hills development war news this summer: Unbridled growth is a dead end; and communities must grow (we could substitute "change") or die.

Adopt a road? OK, but...

That's that you're asking? Adopt a road (or at least a mile of it), you say? And keep that stretch of highway clean through your own volunteer efforts?

Adopt-a-road. Maybe you've seen the signs along the sides of the interstates and other major highways in Michigan. The signs proclaim something like: "This stretch of road maintained by the Jolly Boys of Farmington Hills through the Adopt-a-Road program."

We're all supposed to think highly of the Jolly Boys (a mythical service club for caring enough about its surroundings to take on this responsibility).

But, as much as a business, government entity or service club might like to help keep the roads clean - and as much as the officials of these concerns might benefit from the positive publicity that might result - we do have one nagging concern about the apparently popular adopt-a-road program.

We hate to spoil this warm feeling that volunteerism always gives, but we have some blunt questions:

Why are they asking for volunteers to help keep the roads clean and maintained? Isn't that what we pay taxes for?

Will our taxes be reduced if many, many miles of Michigan roadways get so "adopted"?

We raise these questions in light of a recent announcement that Wayne County officials have planned an adopt-a-road program modeled after the successful state setup.

Local volunteer groups will be given the chance to keep roadsides clean in residential and business areas throughout the year. Apparently, the "payment" will be the name of

the company or organization prominently displayed on the sign. There'll also be a plaque or certificate to hang on an office wall.

"Community pride is at an all-time high right now, and it is becoming contagious," said Wayne County Executive Edward H. McNamara, thumping the tub for the program in a press release.

"To accommodate this volunteerism, we chose the adopt-a-road program because it offers a lot of opportunities and is ongoing. Our goal is to make community cleanup a habit."

Participating groups must agree to clean their adopted mile of roadside at least three times a year, or more often if they like. In return, they will receive personalized signs at each end of their section of road and a certificate to display in their office or place of business.

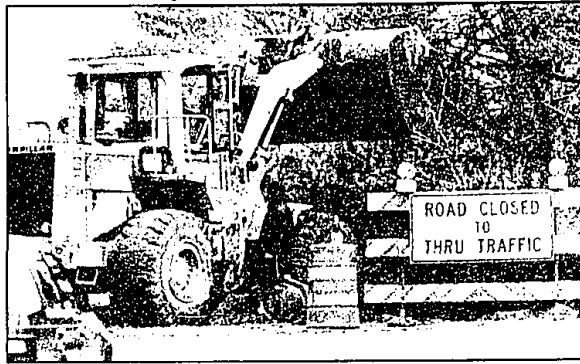
The required trash pickups will be coordinated with the county's schedule for mowing local roadsides.

"Not having to worry about clearing debris before mowing will make our equipment operators a lot more efficient," said Lorenzo Blount, deputy roads director.

Throughout Wayne County, there are hundreds of miles of roads available for adoption, many of them boulevards with grass medians, where groups may choose to plant flower beds or trees.

The Olive Garden restaurants in Livonia, Southgate and Dearborn already have signed on to the program, along with St. John Hospital, NBD, the Northville Eagles, Sinai and Grace Hospitals, and several Detroit-area community groups.

CUT OFF



DAN DEAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Closed roads: Everywhere a car turns these days, its driver seems to run into road construction like this in the 14 Mile and Inkster road area. Patience - and a good map for rerouting - seem to be necessary driving accessories. But, say officials, it will be worth the wait.

LETTERS

Many thanks

Voters of Farmington Hills.

Re: Ice Arena.

Thank you to all the poll workers.

Thank you to all who distributed literature.

Thank you to all who contributed financially to the campaign.

Thank you to all who displayed signs on their lawns.

Thank you to all who wanted to display signs, but we couldn't get them to you in time.

Thank you to all who convinced friends and neighbors to vote yes.

Most of all thank you to all who voted yes.

To those who voted in opposition: I'm sure once you see what a positive impact the arena will have on this community, you will appreciate it as much as the supporters.

Watch for the grand opening sometime in the fall of 1995 and plan on visiting this wonderful facility.

Dennis Fitzgerald, chairman,
Say Yes to the Ice Arena Committee

Writer's naivete

In reply to Leon Schoichit's letter of Aug. 4 calling Mayor Larry Lichtman "a miserable human being," it is obvious Mr. Schoichit neither knows Mr. Lichtman nor understands the political process.

Mr. Lichtman is one of those rare political creatures, a completely honest man doing community service for altruistic reasons.

And as for accepting political contributions, is Mr. Schoichit naive enough to think that a campaign is still run from a soapbox on a corner?

A campaign contribution is not an inducement for favors, but an endorsement of the candidate and his abilities.

Penny Lehto, Sue Smith,
Margie Anastasio,
Farmington Hills

Making points

Point of View in the Aug. 11 issue printed Andrew Nickelhoff's opposition to the planned unit development proposal at Orchard Lake Road and Northwestern Highway.

Observer readers will appreciate knowing numerous facts which he failed to recognize, or toward which he expressed skepticism. As a homeowner resident of Glen Acres I wish to point out several.

First, Glen Acres/Highview (the land name for the area) is a residential area totally surrounded on all sides by commercial development. The proposed development would thus adjoin other commercial development and would not abut a residential area.

Second, Glen Acres/Highview is without city water, city sewer, storm drains and paved roads, which continues to limit its development and hold down its property values.

Third, Glen Acres/Highview informed and concerned property owners are 100 percent in favor of surrendering their homes for this project and have signed agreements to this end.

Fourth, the developer has proposed to bring in city water, city sewer, storm drains and pave a four lane ring road, all at his expense, thus saving the city residents well over \$1 million.

Fifth, taxes from commercial developments are vital for school and city budgets, and without the taxes this project will generate each resident will pay more taxes or face cuts in services.

Shoppers from outside our city will help us both directly and indirectly with taxes.

Sixth, the retail outlets proposed will offer all our residents local convenience in shopping. Many of our city residents shop outside our city.

Seventh, the ring road will relieve traffic pressure at the Orchard Lake Road/14 Mile Road/Northwestern Highway corner. It will also improve access to Orchard Lake Road for residents of the condominiums just south of the present Kmart store.

If we neglect to approve this proposal, the city will have forfeited a special opportunity for a cohesive development in Glen Acres/Highview which meets many needs and better fits the road improvements, curb cuts and traffic pattern while enhancing this area of our city.

Roland C. Crosby, Farmington Hills

Stop dollar flow

In early July, the Detroit Free Press published a list of schools that applied to be charter schools. Under the sponsorship of a public school system or a public university, such schools would declare themselves specializing in a particular academic area such as science or math.

If approved, these schools will receive state tax money with which to operate.

The registered voters in this state should take note that all of the schools applying were private schools. This means that if any are accepted into the charter school program, public tax dollars will be used to finance private education. This is clearly against our state constitution.

Keep this in mind when voting this November. Gov. John Engler and our legislature are siphoning public dollars into the private sector.

Patricia A. Faletti, Farmington Hills

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What do you like best about your job?



"I like the hours and these are good people to work for."
Tina Echlin
Farm Hills Donuts



"The people I work with are friendly and caring."
Roy Pletzer
Waste Management



"I own the business. I like my freedom. I can do my own thing."
Dale Stanley
De-Mar and Associates



"The people I worked with."
Glenn Stock
Ford Motor Company (retired)

We asked this question at the Farm Hills Donuts shop on Farmington Road.

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