

Walled Lake Schools blitz couldn't sway voters

Editor's note: The Walled Lake School District includes 678 students who live in northwest Farmington Hills.

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Ignorance, stubbornness and spathy among residents in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District all but doomed "Project 21," Tuesday's \$116 million bond issue that was defeated by a 53-47 percent margin.

Here are some examples:
■ Just a few days before the special election, one woman in the Commerce Elementary attendance area opened the front door

ANALYSIS

and curtly answered a reporter's query.

Question: "Will you be voting on the bond issue, which intends to address the district's worsening space crunch and provide for your children's educational future?"

Answer: "No. I don't have the time for that."

Subsequently, the respondent — the mother of at least one child who, if not now, will someday attend Commerce — slammed the screen door shut.

■ Another neighborhood woman, also with young children, said she

probably wouldn't be voting in favor of the bond issue.

When asked why, she gave a puzzling answer, namely that taxpayers shouldn't have to up the ante once again if the district can't efficiently manage things with the money they're already getting. She was referring to operating costs.

But district officials and campaign workers, throughout the many pre-election meetings, coffee klatches and telephone calls, emphasized repeatedly that money generated from Project 21 would not be slated for operating expenses, such as teacher salaries, textbooks and transportation.

The woman's answer indicated either ignorance of the issues or a lack of interest in learning those issues.

■ Just before the polls closed on election day at the Maple Elementary precinct (No. 9), a woman who lives in the small Farmington Hills portion of the district walked briskly out of the school toward her car for voting.

"I voted no. It'll raise the taxes," she said. The woman's response was a combination of stubbornness and ignorance.

She was stubborn in the sense that her only reason for rejecting Project 21 was a tax increase. Period.

However, the district tried to inform citizens that, even with a successful bond issue, their school tax bills would still be 60 percent lower than in 1993 — before Proposal A shifted the burden of funding public education from property taxes to the state government.

■ That some voters weren't tuned in to the district's extensive publicity blitz was apparent by comments made by another Maple precinct voter. "I want to see a little more than they're showing us."

Actually, those connected to the campaign provided a great deal more specific information about where bond money would

go and what it would pay for than in the 1993 campaign.

Not only were there formal and informal meetings on almost a nightly basis during late August and September, mailed to all residents was a six-page brochure containing important facts about the bond issue, to help them make intelligent decisions. And officials were available to address concerns.

Did anybody bother to read the brochure?

It apparently comes down to this: too many people suffer from tunnel vision, seeing only what they want to see when it comes to any election that raises taxes.

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Hills on road for federal money toward M-102 interchange fix

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

It looks like Farmington Hills is in line for some much-needed federal money to untangle the traffic mess at the M-102 interchange in the western part of the city.

The congested area is the point where the M-102 freeway, Grand River and Halsted Road come together.

After several unsuccessful attempts to leverage the \$10 million that it would take to ease congestion at the interchange, Farmington Hills will get \$1.3 million toward the project as part of a \$13.7 billion transportation appropriations bill passed by the U.S. House of Representatives Sept. 28.

"After two years of extremely

hard work, I am very pleased that we were finally able to put a package together that will help the people of the 11th congressional District and help end the gridlock at the M-102 interchange," said 11th District Congressman Joe Knollenberg said.

Although the money won't be nearly enough to complete the project, it will cover engineering and design costs, which are the first steps in the project, said assistant city manager Steve Brock.

"We were in for four (\$4 million dollars), then two and then 1.3," he said. "We believe we will be able to get the rest from the federal government."

The "rest" is about \$6.7 million that had been approved last summer by Congress. The government

would have given the city two \$4 million grants, one this year and one next. The state would provide an additional \$1.5 million or more and the city would have paid anywhere from \$200,000 to \$500,000 for the project.

But that plan, despite the work of Knollenberg and Lansing Congressman Bob Carr, who chaired the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, was cut from the budget.

Although future funding is not guaranteed, the initial \$1.7 million appropriation is a strong endorsement for the project, Brock said.

"If the other money comes through, we could be starting work on the project by Oct. 1, 1996," Brock said.

Judgment from page 1A

"In aesthetic conformity" with the plaintiff's subdivision.

Circuit Judge Rudy Nichols denied a request Sept. 26 for a restraining order barring council approval of the project but has scheduled a hearing Wednesday on whether to enjoin the city from going through with the project.

Councilman Terry Sever, who voted for the project along with five other council members, said he wasn't surprised about rumors linking him with Nichols, a former state senator.

"I supported him, but it was insignificant," Sever said. "I wanted to bring him here (during Nichols' judicial campaign) as much as anything so that he would understand the problem, and we would get a fair shake. I don't look for favors."

Sever said that one of his best friends, Pat Doherty, approved the language of a petition seeking the former mayor's recall, which should put to rest the idea he is

getting political favors.

In addition to Sever, the recall targets Mayor Larry Lichtman, council members Joanne Smith, Jon Grant, Nancy Bates and Cheryl Oliverio. Councilman Alde Vagnoni, who has consistently opposed the project, is not involved in the recall.

"I stuck my neck out on this project (Timbercrest)," said Sever. "I'll take my lumps. But it is unfair that I would try to influence a judge."

88-year-old from page 1A

people might think they can't do something because of a problem they have," she said. "But if you're up front, people are willing to accommodate you."

The arrangement has worked out so well that Kingston said she had a hard time finding activities to keep her father occupied during the summer.

"He saves us time," said Kristin Martin, who teaches a grade 1-2 split class at Eagle. "And that time can be better spent with our students. He's very thorough. He's just wonderful to have here."

Likewise, Kravitz says he "feels right at home here. I enjoy coming here."

Working diligently is nothing new to him. With his late wife, Rebecca, Kravitz founded and operated Michigan Roofing Co. for 40 years.

"When he was 65, he started his second career with my mother," Kingston said. Together they operated a typing and phone service company in Southfield for a number of years, working for accountants and others in need of their services.

"She was 76 and he was 81 when they stopped working," Kingston said.

Kingston has three daughters, all grown and living on their own. She and her husband share their home not only with her father, but her in-laws, too.

"My father goes out and plays bingo with my mother-in-law two nights a week," she said. "Sometimes they go out and get something to eat."

"It keeps me busy," Kravitz said. And he seems to thrive on keeping busy.

Dolan from page 1A

field, Novi and Commerce Township will develop the way the Farmington Hills did, creating possible problems for this down-stream community. The proposed expansion of a waste treatment plant in Commerce Township is one of those issues.

"After Lake St. Clair (pollution this summer), you know that things can happen," Dolan said.

Dolan is concerned that the expansion proposed by the township and awaiting approval from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, would cause environmental and flooding problems in Farmington Hills.

"I lived on a property backing up to one of these (drains)," she said.

Dolan said that while Commerce Township needs more wastewater capacity, she'll try to get the DNR to choose a different route from the currently planned discharge stream through the Beley Drain. That drain goes

through both cities, and Heritage and Shiloh waste parks.

As to her close call in the primary, where she best Rackowski by only 112 votes out of 10,158 cast, the former Hills mayor said some of her views are controversial.

"You can't be all things to all people," she said.

Dolan, a mother of four grown children, said she would have never considered an abortion, but sees it as a decision government should not make. Dolan won the support of 11th District Congressman Joe Knollenberg, who is pro-life, but was criticized by Rackowski and former GOP gubernatorial candidate Richard Headlee for that stand.

As a member of the appropriations committee, Dolan said she will continue her vigilance to see that education is adequately funded. Of special concern, she said, is the problem of high school graduates who cannot perform minimal skills, such as basic

reading and math.

"We have so many community colleges and universities that have to have remedial programs," she said, adding that a guarantee provided by some high schools that students have learned certain skills, is an idea that could help.

Magnate schools and programs that allow teachers to be flexible and creative are also ideas she encourages.

Dolan said crime is a big issue for a reason, but added that without solid educational and social institutions, more prisons and police will be needed. And they cost.

What separates Jan Dolan from many candidates?

"I think life experiences are important," she said, adding that her lengthy service in local and state government and ability to work with both parties has paid dividends.

"It helps in Lansing that I was a dad mother for five years," she quipped.

Move from page 1A

and get accustomed to the new school."

Bolithe agreed that it would be better for the youth to transfer right away to catch up with the work.

If the key steps in Farmington through Oct. 7, that will present another problem. That date is the first official head count of students for the school year. And student number is the basis of funding.

"There is a grace period following that day. We've given some time to verify the count," Bolithe said. "But Northville would like him here before that date if possible."

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