

Bond battle

Second try faces big challenge

Farmington public schools officials are ready to embark on another effort to pass a multi-million-dollar bond issue to pay for building improvements. Look for the sales "information" soon in your mailbox.

Toward helping readers get the answers they need, this newspaper plans to offer its resources to scouting out the bond's issues before the Sept. 16 vote, just as we did before the last election. Readers with questions or ideas are urged to call or write with suggestions. (Contact Dave Varga at 477-5450 or 33411 Grand River, Farmington, Mich. 48335)

Back in March, voters snubbed a \$110 million bond request that would have fixed up buildings, added space to get rid of portable classrooms and pay for a bundle of new computers and technology upgrades. It wasn't a huge margin of defeat, but it was enough to get the attention of school officials and board members.

They scouted out reasons for the rejection in meetings and focus groups. About a month later, we asked readers to give us their own two cents on the issue. We got only a few responses — probably because the board almost immediately made their decision to cut the price tag and remove some parts of the

plan, while adding two choices for voters. All our responses were from readers who said they voted against the bond.

Their responses were similar — taxes were too high, the district's \$20 million fund equity was too high, falling test scores and poor decisions by the administration prove they aren't capable of handling public money or making sound decisions, etc. One "two-center" urged the board to "Listen and don't try to label opponents." Another said officials should "provide evidence that technology expenditures are efficient and provide for better education."

Both suggestions are valid.

School officials have already shown they're willing to listen; they cut the price tag, offered voters a choice and decided to try to pay for technology via other means than bond money. Just a couple weeks back, they stuck to that resolve by putting an extra \$2 million that was no longer needed to pay an expected debt right toward the bottom line on the bond, cutting the total request from about \$95 million down to \$93 million.

In the next month, we'll see whether the board and bond supporters can sell the community on its \$93 million worth of needs.

Airport wings to global standing

It no longer stands in the shadows of Detroit Metropolitan Airport or Flint's Bishop International Airport.

Waterford-based Oakland County International Airport (OCIA) is now Michigan's second busiest airfield, behind only Detroit Metro, thanks in part to the county's stature as a global marketplace. Oakland is home to 44 percent of Michigan's entire export activity.

OCIA ranks among the 30 busiest airports in the world, with 331,723 takeoffs and landings logged last year. It's the fifth busiest in the nation for business air traffic on chartered or corporate flights.

So it was fitting that County Executive L. Brooks Patterson led a rededication of the 69-year-old, revitalized airport on July 21. The addition of full-time customs service and a state-of-the-art air traffic control tower have helped position OCIA as a key component of the county's economic engine.

Full-time weekday customs service started on Jan. 2, 1996, a byproduct of Patterson's resolve and the influence of U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Township. Customs cleared 1,202 incoming flights in 1996; Patterson expects three times that many this year. The advantage: county-bound foreign flights no longer need to land first at other southeast Michigan airports to clear customs, saving executives precious time. Most arriving foreign flights originate in Canada or Mexico. OCIA's worldwide standing contributed \$100 million to Oakland's economy last year; Patterson predicts a 10-percent increase in 1997.

The \$5.6-million control tower, a dozen years in planning by the FAA, opened to air traffic June 2. It's taller, bigger and better equipped than the 36-year-old tower it replaced.

Oakland Pontiac Airport, on Highland Road west of Airport Road, was renamed Oakland County International Airport in March 1996. "The new name reflects what we are," says county commissioner Donn Wolf of Farmington Hills, "a county that is linked to international commerce and travel and that is actively reaching out to the business and economic community worldwide." Wolf chairs the county's airport committee.

Oakland is the third wealthiest county in the United States. It has more people and households than 10 states. Foreign firms operating from here include Kelsey-Hayes (Cana-

OAKLAND WATCH



BOB SKLAR

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da), Haque Steel Corp. (France), BASF (Germany), Pirelli Tire Corp. (Italy), Canon USA Inc. (Japan) and GKN Automotive Components (United Kingdom). Chrysler Pentastar's world headquarters also are here and the automaker is a major airport tenant.

Helping secure OCIA's role are these county credentials: Oakland is home to 220 Fortune 500 companies, 40,000 businesses and an Export Assistance Center. It boasts 360 foreign-owned businesses from 19 nations. It's home to 64 percent of all foreign-owned Michigan firms. Oakland robotics firms account for half of all U.S. robotics sales. Patterson, meanwhile, continues to champion trade talks between Mexico, Canada and Oakland County.

In the aftermath of OCIA's rededication, I urge county leaders to not forget the good folks who live near the runways. They call themselves Citizens Concerned with Airport Environment. And they're battling disruptive noise and noxious fumes, despite \$20 million in improvements to the airfield since 1990. Hopefully, a \$270,000 federally funded noise study that's under way will bring relief, not just gather dust.

Bob Sklar is managing editor of our Oakland County editions.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

40 YEARS AGO - AUG. 6, 1957 (ENTERPRISE)

Farmington City Council members voted 3-2 to reject the proposed rezoning of three parcels of land near Mooney Street, between Grand River and Shiawassee, from residential to commercial. One councilman said the property should not be residential, but wouldn't approve the change without knowing the plans for development.

Trees were being cleared along Farmington Road from 10 Mile to 12 Mile to prepare for widening and improvement of the roadway with

asphalt.

25 YEARS AGO - AUG. 9, 1972

Farmington Township voters ousted incumbent Supervisor Earl Tepley and voted in challenger Robert McConnell in the Republican primary. McConnell rose to prominence as a leader of the Future Farmington Association, a group supporting cityhood.

2 YEARS AGO - AUG. 7, 1995

Farmington Hills' city manager, police chief and fire chief were pushing the need for a new 1 mill public safety tax, before the issue was even approved for the ballot by the city council. That approval was one week away, with voters set to decide the issue in November.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What do you think about Walter Budzyn's conviction being overturned?

We asked this question outside the Farmington Post Office.



"I really think they got shafted. Nev-ers was right... If they had been black, there never would have been this trouble. These men were persecuted for doing their job."

Fran Drahusa
Farmington Hills



"Yes, I think Nev-ers should have had the same thing. I think they're innocent of murder."

Bill Frisby
Farmington Hills



"If Budzyn receives a new trial, then Nev-ers should receive a new one too."

Bridget Stammers
Farmington



"It's pretty amazing how they change things... how they make a decision and later come up with new evidence and put the families through all that turmoil." (Both merit a new trial.)

Lynn Manal
Farmington Hills

LETTERS

We owe it to our students

Shame, shame, shamel On June 9 - 6 p.m. - O. E. Duncel Middle School - millage and bond proposals - I was voter number 1651! Shame on you voters who failed our public schools by dismissing this issue.

Our children's roots go back to Bond School - 33 years old when our first son started in 1961. Forty-three years old when it was closed in 1971 and our twins went to Kenbrook. Our five trod the well-worn linoleum floors and grooved stone steps - then deemed too old for renovations.

Most of our schools were built to meet the needs of our community's children 35-40 years ago. Today these same schools require more classrooms (our kids sat two to a desk), upgrades for science and media centers, improvements in cafeterias for happy lunches, etc. We can't close all of these 1950s-60s buildings as we did with Bond.

This grandmother is voting for both of the September bond proposals that will maintain our public schools as the excellent system that brought our family to Farmington in 1961. We owe today's students the opportunity to be part of a fine, forward-looking Farmington Public Schools education.

Maryse E. Long
Farmington Hills

Drive was dangerous

In reference to the letter in the 31 July 1997 issue titled, OCC's Unfriendly Move, the following is offered.

The millage increase approved by the citizens of Oakland County is providing the opportunity for their community college to undertake much needed improvements toward classroom modernization, technology enhancement, and building and infrastructure repair.

The multi-year program for the Orchard Ridge Campus, under the guidance and direction of Dr. George Keith, Campus President, specifically includes this summer's projects of:

- Renovating gymnasium locker rooms, weight room and heating/ventilating system.
- Realigning/resurfacing the four west side parking lots to include the installation of emergency telephones.

- Replacement of the boiler and chiller units in the power house building adjacent to Oakland Drive.

- Replacement of deteriorated exterior sidewalks and stairs.

These are much needed enhancements to the campus, and will provide for the campus patrons and the community as a whole, a better, more compatible environment in which to live and learn.

The decision to close Oakland Drive to through traffic was made independently of but coincidental to the closing of the Farmington Road bridge. This decision was based on the facts that heavy construction vehicles, equip-

ment and materials would be moving and positioned throughout and about Oakland Drive, that west side parking would be eliminated through the summer and that the parking lot renovations bordered two sides of the tennis courts. It is felt that permitting through traffic on Oakland Drive under these conditions presents too great a safety hazard to the public. To do anything other than close the drive would be irresponsible. This decision was made in coordination with City of Farmington Hills' officials.

We are convinced that this temporary inconvenience will be overshadowed by the benefits to our students and the community that will result from these improvements.

George F. Mergner
Director of Campus Services
Oakland Community College

OCC priorities on track

Ruth Moehlman's letter to the editor dated July 31, 1997 regarding the priorities of OCC's mission statement reads "OCC's learning opportunities are open to all who seek to learn." The statement does not mention open opportunities to those who seek to play tennis. The Orchard Ridge campus is currently undergoing various construction projects to better serve the needs of its students. The college for safety and liability reasons is correct in limiting access to areas deemed temporarily unsafe for pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

I'm not qualified to address Mr. Keith's abilities as an English professor, but I feel qualified to address Mr. Keith's priorities regarding meeting the academic needs of students. When the administration of Farmington Public Schools declined interest in meeting the academic priorities of my daughter, Mr. Keith proved himself equal to the task. OCC, with the concurrence of Mr. Keith and the math department chair, welcomed my daughter on campus at age 10. Thanks to the academic opportunities afforded by OCC and its faculty my 11-year-old daughter has achieved a scholarship-level ACT composite score of 30. When OCC's millage comes up for renewal or increase, they have my vote. Mr. Keith and OCC's priorities, students first, are on track.

Warren H. Schroeder
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

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— Philip Power