

Parker again to serve as 47th chief judge

The Michigan Supreme Court has appointed Judge Maria E. Parker to again serve as chief judge of the 47th District Court in Farmington. Parker's two-year term began Jan. 1.

It marks her second stint at the 47th District Court helm. She also was chief judge in 1994-95.

Parker succeeds Judge Frederick L. Harris, whose two-year term as chief judge concluded Dec. 31.

According to state law, the chief judge is the director of the administration of the court, and its primary representative in its relations with the Supreme

Court, other courts, other agencies of government, the bar, the general public and the news media.

The graduate of the University of Michigan and Wayne State University Law School began serving as a 47th District Judge in January 1993, following election in November 1992.

She is an active member of the Farmington/Farmington Hills communities, serving on the Farmington Hills Commission on Children, Youth and Families, Optimist Club and Chamber of Commerce, among others.

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questioned costs, how homeowners are assessed and the petitioning process where residents collect signatures.

"I was rather impressed with the whole thing," said Charlie Henry, a Ridgewood Street resident. "It was a civic duty and I was pleased with the outcome. I think the nature of the thing does pit neighbor vs. neighbor."

Henry is one of 27 out of 49 Ridgewood residents who wanted their dirt road paved. His next door neighbor was dead-set against it, wanting to maintain the neighborhood's rural setting.

The two joked about it the night they went to speak at a council meeting. They're still friendly to one another.

At the Dec. 15 meeting, though, Henry said another resident muttered "a-hole," as he walked past her.

"She said at the meeting, 'How dare you change my neighborhood?'" said Henry, who lived on Ridgewood since 1985. "It changed when I moved in; it changed when she moved in. It changes every time someone moves in."

Such rancor is a byproduct of politics, a Farmington Hills city official said.

"The way we've always looked at it is, it has been an existing situation out there. Somebody has to actively pursue it to change it," said Tom Biaselli, Hills Public Services director. "You shouldn't have to actively maintain a status quo."

Residents who wanted to maintain the status quo in the Springbrook subdivision questioned the petition process.

Those in favor — 20 of 38 residents or 52 percent of the subdivision — wanted to tap into a city-installed water main. Supporters collected a majority of signatures under the 60-day deadline. All 38 will be assessed an average of \$10,094 per single unit.

Council members accepted the petition but allowed residents a couple of weeks to withdraw their signatures. No one did.

"It was awkward," Biaselli said. The answer is not necessarily changing the threshold, he added.

"Whether you do a simply majority, a two-thirds majority, a 60-percent majority or whatever, the issue is going to be the same if you're on that edge. One vote will swing it either way."

"Is there a difference between a 65-percent majority or a 61-percent majority, I don't know. A majority is a majority."

Protecting all

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett understands that, but democracy also means "recognizing the rights of minorities," she said. Barnett has questioned how residents are assessed, especially those with corner lots where the cost is 18-20 percent higher. That's because the lots are on the front of two streets instead of one.

Under one recommendation, those who live on the corner of a major thoroughfare — such as 11 Mile — would only be assessed for frontage on an interior road.

On road improvements, the city helps out with up to 20 percent of the costs. The amount varies whether the road improvement involves an already-paved thoroughfare or a gravel one. Officials see that as protecting existing infrastructure. No such aid is typically offered on sewers, drains or water mains.

That leaves Pop puzzled.

The city can afford to buy land for such things as soccer fields, he said.

In all, Pop figures he'll pay \$16,000, which includes \$3,600 to change from a septic field to a sewer system and another \$1,500 for a tap-in fee.

Two programs allow for assessments to be deferred — in proven cases of financial hardship — until the property is sold. Pop is not interested.

"I'm not begging for money," said Pop, who plans to take a second mortgage on his home. "It's unfair ... The burden is on us."

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700 employees live in the city.

"This is a little different than with Holla ... This is an interstate issue," Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said.

City council members are not happy being stuck in the middle. There will likely be pressure from the state and ultimately the county to grant a tax break, they said.

"I have no problem with Bosch asking for it; it's there on the table," Councilman Jerry Ellis said. "They've been a good corporate citizen and they pay their taxes."

"What I have a problem with ... is the state is offering this and they want us to pay for it."

Council members want to look at comparisons of the two economies submitted by Bosch that show it's cheaper to do business in Indiana.

Operating costs are estimated at \$1.5 million more in Michigan than Indiana; construction would be \$20 million in the Hoosier state compared to \$37 million here.

"One of the comparisons is not fair," Vagnozzi said. "They're talking about building a new facility here compared to buying an existing building there."

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett also wanted to look at whether companies stay after the tax abatement is up. Meanwhile, some council members are concerned about the precedent such an abatement would set.

The council plans to examine tax abatements at its annual goal-setting session Saturday, Jan. 24.

"This is going to be a very difficult decision," Councilman Terry Sever said. "I hope the people at Bosch understand ... We need to look at this decision in several different ways."

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The Farmington Public School District is seeking input from residents about the feasibility of lighting its high school football fields.

Input received by Friday, Feb. 13, will be considered by a committee now studying the issue. The committee, made up of students, staff, parents and community members, is expected to make a formal recommendation to the school board this spring.

A survey form is now available upon request, by calling Diane Bauman at the community relations office, (248) 489-3349. The

form asks residents whether they "favor or oppose" lighting of the fields and if they have specific concerns to pass on to the committee.

All forms must be returned, by Friday, Feb. 13, to the School/Community Relations Department, 32500 Shawansee, Farmington, 48336. Responses also can be faxed to Bauman at (248) 489-3314.

Bauman said the survey will also be included in the next issue of the district's "Update" newsletter, mailed in early February to all district homes.

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