

## Who's involved? Few businesses plan city's future

It's a dynamic time for the city of Farmington. Big plans for the future of the downtown are sprouting out all over. Problem is, much of the business community couldn't care less.

Three major long-range planning issues are on the table for the city of Farmington right now:

■ Farmington's Downtown Development Authority has finished a 12-item, strategic plan for the next 10 years. Many are aesthetic proposals and each has a price tag that, combined, could end up costing \$3 million. The idea is not to have the DDA actually foot the entire bill.

■ The city is in the middle of its Central Business District Visioning process, asking residents and business folks to participate in workshops and focus groups to help shape how the downtown shopping area should look 10 years from now.

■ Farmington is updating its Master Plan for the first time in more than 30 years, with an eye toward new development, redevelopment and zoning. The idea is to protect residential areas and allow businesses to adjust to changing commercial and retail needs. The planning commission approved it last month; a presentation will be made to the city council soon.

In the midst of this, there has been a thundering silence from most of the business community.

Last week, the DDA invited the entire Farmington business community to a business meeting and "free lunch" at the Masonic Temple. Invitations went out to around 160 of the town's businesses, yet only about 16 businesses were represented.

Part of that low turnout is understandable. No, the food wasn't bad. Many downtown retailers and smaller businesses just don't have the staff to walk out of the business at noon to get to such an event. They're owner-operators who can't afford to alienate or lose customers by closing down for an hour and a half at lunch. Besides, maybe the business community is all thrilled with the way things are going and where they're headed downtown.

The folks who did show up got an outline of the DDA's 10-year plan — featuring such once-controversial ideas as a clock tower at the



In 10 years: This artist's rendering shows one view of a plaza planned for the front of Farmington City Hall under the DDA's strategic plan.

northwest corner of Grand River and Farmington. They also got a brief outline of the city's other major projects, an explanation of an Internet advertising proposal, a discussion of parking problems and time for questions and comments. Some of the businesses represented included Books Abound, Cowley's Old Irish Inn, Pasta Stop, Cigar Emporium, Dublin Optometric, the Celtic Shamrock, Cornwell Realty, NBD, Victorian Lace, Metrobank, Heeney Sundquist and several others.

Meanwhile, in the city's visioning effort, businesses aren't exactly knocking down the door to get involved either. The city hosted a kickoff brainstorming event in October followed by several smaller, focus groups that have met since. They'll report to a reconvened group on March 23, with a healthy size invitation list of 80 people. That may be a surprising number, but it's fueled mostly by residents and some of the landlords — again, with only a tiny percentage of businesses getting involved.

That same apathy fueled the demise of the Downtown Farmington Business Association, which reportedly once boasted 65 dues-paying members. It last met in December 1996.

It's normal for downtown business groups or DDAs to be divided up into the worker bees and the passive, cocktail riders. Maybe those businesses that aren't participating are just thrilled with all the DDA's efforts and the city's plans.

Businesses that operate here and have a stake in seeing the town succeed, though, should know that now is the time to get involved in the DDA and shaping the town's road map for the future.

## Warm winter guilt abounds

Now blowers are sitting sunused in western Wayne County garages next to snow shovels, skis, snowbores, all gathering dust for the lack of use during our disturbingly warm winter.

■ Blame it on El Nino, a term coined by Peruvian fishermen to describe a change in ocean circulation off the coastline that leads to poor fishing.

While the Peruvians have had some fishless days, the warm, wet weather in the Midwest has made us forget what winter in Michigan usually means. Gone are the bone-chilling temperatures, north winds out of Hudson Bay and snow up to our knees. Some may be enjoying the balmy March. But others are waiting for the other snow-storm to drop.

Michigan residents proudly endure our winters, trudging through snowdrifts in our boots and four-wheel drive vehicles. We even turn winter into a sport. Anglers trudge onto windwept lakes, snowmobilers race along two-track roads, skiers schuss down hills, and snowshoers walk quiet back-country land-



scapes.

Turning suffering through winter into a sport is almost a spiritual experience for us Michigan residents. It builds character. We're not wimps like those folks in Atlanta who think a winter storm is 2 inches of snow.

That's why a mild winter produces some guilt in us. We're supposed to be suffering during January and February. We should be staring at the ice and snow building up on the roof and worrying it's doing some damage. Instead, we're washing our cars outside with the hose.

It's just not right. We all know this. We're going to pay for this, we know it in our hearts. Winter will arrive, finally, in April and will last through June. It'll warm up for a few days in July, we'll plant a few flowers and they'll freeze solid in August.

We've got a few weeks yet to have a winter. Bring on the snow, and some cold weather. I'll help us get rid of our guilt. Only then after some true winter suffering can we fully enjoy spring when it arrives.

### TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

#### 40 YEARS AGO — MARCH 6, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

Both the City of Farmington and Farmington Township Boards of Review saw one of their three members quit just before the local taxpayer hearings were to begin.

The city of Farmington also began an ambitious road paving plan that was approved by the city council this week. Three of the streets were to be paved with city funds: Shawwassee, Astor and Power roads. Another paving project, on State Street, would be paid through a special assessment

district.

#### 25 YEARS AGO — MARCH 7, 1973

Methaqualone, a depressant drug used in sleeping pills, is being reported to be the latest "in" drug currently being used by a great number of high school students according to the Farmington Area Advisory Council's Rap Line. A seven-month survey showed that 86 percent of the crisis calls to the center were about methaqualone.

#### 2 YEARS AGO — MARCH 7, 1996

State Rep. Jan Dolan announced she wouldn't be running for a fifth term in the state House and announced that she believed her replacement should be Cathy Webb of the Farmington Board of Education.

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

Can you recommend a good book?

We asked this question at the Farmington Community Library.



"The Polar Express." I like to read it to the kids and get them involved in the story.  
Lynn Halton  
Farmington Hills



"The Light in the Attic" by Shel Silverstein. I'm going to get "Falling Up" for my birthday.  
Carl Balough  
Farmington Hills



"Clep Your Hands." It's interactive. My kids like to get up and do the actions in the story.  
Mary Kashat  
Farmington Hills



"The Little Critters." They're funny sometimes.  
Karlie Rae  
Farmington Hills

### LETTERS

#### Listen to the community

In the article "Still ticking?" published in the Feb. 16 edition of the Farmington Observer, (Farmington City Manager) Frank Lauhoff is quoted, "If the DDA ever plans to go forward, then I'm sure they'll be asking for community input."

Two quick observations: (1) If the DDA and Mr. Lauhoff were listening to community input, then a clock tower would not currently be under consideration, and; (2) With their 8 a.m. meetings, the DDA sends a strong message to the residents of Farmington about their interest in input from the taxpayers.

Michael Shelly  
Farmington

#### Sour grapes stain his view

The recent (letter to the editor) about state Rep. Andrew Raczowski is an excellent example of the willingness of some to engage in inaccurate mudslinging, which I believe is the byproduct of a particular gentleman's "Sour Grapes."

I too ran for the 37th District seat held by Rep. Raczowski. He won by playing by the rules and getting out his message. Get over it, Steve.

The truth is that Rep. Raczowski is doing an excellent job as our representative. He is open to listening to all sides of a particular issue. He takes a genuine interest in how the laws passed in Lansing affect the citizens of Farmington and Farmington Hills, and that is what we elected him to do.

Linda Jolicœur  
Farmington Hills

#### Smokeless is better

A good restaurant just got better. Hooray for the owners of Family Buggy on 13 Mile and Orchard Lake in Farmington Hills! As of Feb. 14, the restaurant has become smoke-free. Employees are no longer working in direct contact with second-hand smoke. Customers can now enjoy their meals in a true non-smoking section, not just a booth away from a smoker in the smoking section. Kudos and good move!

Mary Wentz-Lindsay  
Farmington Hills

#### Smoke-free eatery great!

To Donald Payne, president, Family Buggy Restaurant:

It was with great pleasure that I read in the Feb. 12 Farmington Observer that your Farmington Hills Family Buggy Restaurant is going smoke-free.

When we dine out, we always ask for a non-smoking table "as far away from the stink as

possible." Regardless of how few smoking tables are available, the stink always drifts through the restaurant.

This letter is to thank you and to encourage you in this endeavor. We realize that a change of this magnitude could have economical ramifications. We feel it will increase your business and pray God will bless you for this change.

Joyce and John Weigel  
Farmington

#### Tougher laws on littering

These past few years I have been thinking about all the garbage on the side of Michigan's highways. Whether I travel to downtown Detroit or Colon, Mich., I always look out my window and see garbage. Then I think what the highways might look like 10 years from now. It really hurts my feelings to see many tires or other car parts, fast food containers, cigarette butts, glass or plastic bottles and many other types of human waste strewn along our roadsides.

I think that the 10 cents deposit for pop and beer bottles helps clean up some of the waste, but we need more recycling and stricter laws for littering. I also think that there should be more groups adopting highways and more groups helping to clean up the trash.

Teressa Pilon  
Farmington

#### All equally unsafe

Politicians began "Reinventing the automobile" in the early '70s to lower emissions. Ignition timing was retarded and exhaust gas was recirculated. Mileage and performance dropped nearly 50 percent. CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) mandated more miles per gallon. Automobiles became smaller, lighter — and more dangerous. Air bags were mandated. With kids in the back seat only short adults are killed by the bags.

Trucks crush these cars. Government experts have turned their attention to vans, SUVs and pickup trucks. Soon all vehicles will be equally UNSAFE.

Hank Borgman  
Farmington

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 or e-mailed to dvarga@oe.homecomm.net

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— Philip Power