

Less paved road Dust control decision only fair

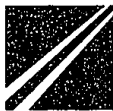
A few Farmington Hills residents who complained last week about paying a special assessment for dust control on their unpaved streets didn't get all that they wanted from the city council — but they got what's fair.

They wanted the city to pay the entire cost of putting calcium chloride on the city's 23 miles of gravel road. The treatment, which is applied four times a year, covers and binds the dirt and stone to diminish the dust. This serves a couple of purposes: It improves safety for drivers and pedestrians by making it easier to see after a car passes and it improves the quality of life for neighbors by keeping dust off their foliage and vehicles and out of their houses.

Residents and council members Nancy Bates and Vicki Barnett argue, with some validity, that this is really just maintenance, the same as sweeping or patching potholes, would be on paved roads. And, they claim, that maintenance should be paid by the city through general fund taxes — not a special assessment.

The city's administration contends that dust control has always been ruled an improvement and paid through an assessment, which means the cost per square foot of road frontage is divided up and paid by residents along the road.

It's an improvement, the city says, because dust control only applies to gravel roads and only benefits road neighbors directly. Besides, the costlier maintenance needs of gravel roads includes things like grading, sanding, graveling and ditching, as compared to paved roads that need hole patching, sweeping and salting. In addition, the Road Commission for Oakland



County doesn't consider calcium chloride normal maintenance and charges separately.

The type of maintenance work done on Farmington Hills' gravel roads — like grading or graveling — helps to extend the useful life of the road. Webster's Ninth New Col-

legiate Dictionary defines maintain as: 1. to keep in an existing state ... preserve from failure or decline. In that context, keeping down the dust level isn't really making the road last longer — only improving the quality of life for those who live next to it.

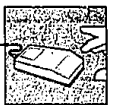
Once council members decided (with a 5-2 vote) to continue calling this an improvement, they also decided to give these unpaved road residents the same break that paved road residents got for improvement projects (such as repaving). The city picked up 20 percent of the bill. By doing that, the city is doing the fair thing.

There is no way the city should pay the full rate. Gravel roads generally cost much more to maintain than paved roads, with one city estimate comparing the two showing the cost per mile was more than twice as high for gravel as pavement. Including the cost of dust control in the city's maintenance costs for gravel roads would have pushed that city's spending on gravel roads even farther beyond paved roads.

When it comes down to it, few things drive home the need for local government more than the quality of the road or street that meets the end of our driveway. When it comes to paying for improvements on that road, folks who choose to live on unpaved roads ought to get the same price break as residents on paved roads.

Gov't needs to click into public

Inter-active adj. 3. of or involving a mode of operation in which there is a continual exchange of information between the computer and the user at a video screen.



That's the dictionary's third definition for a word that has become more and more a part of the average person's vocabulary. The increasing use of the term can no doubt be traced to the growth of the Internet and the virtual (no pun intended) explosion of the World Wide Web.

Just about everyone today seems to have a Web site, from the White House to perfume makers to the fly fisherman who lives down the block.

As the growth continues, more and more local communities and governmental units are adding their own sites. And that's what brings us to a discussion of "interactive."

A Web "site" can be as simple as a one-page, text-only document with biographical information about the page "designer," but with little information of use to anyone else. An "interactive" site, on the other hand, allows you to seek out useful information or perform necessary tasks right from your home computer. You can buy airline tickets online, invest in mutual funds or learn more than you ever wanted to know about the Titanic.

Many of the local community Web sites we've visited are somewhat similar to the one-page biography: text and pictures describing the community and its services with welcome messages from the local head of government (mayor, county executive, township supervisor). Such sites are interesting but not particularly useful.

Some communities, however, have developed truly "interactive" sites that make use of the potential of the Internet and offer valuable information or material to local residents. Rochester Hills has such a site at metronet.lib.mi.us/ROCH/RH/index.html.

Users can view and download press releases, information on city parks, recycling, election information (including a list of precincts by number and address), official fire incident reports, a municipal directory with address and phone numbers for all departments plus the usual list of officials and commission members. There's more, including a downloadable form to enroll in the city's automatic water/sewer bill payment program.

The city of Farmington (www.ci.farmington.mi.us) has a similar site, although it isn't quite as developed as Rochester Hills. While it is still in the testing stage, the Farmington site is developing on-line application forms for electrical, plumbing and mechanical building permits — forms that can be filled out online and submitted electronically, without even

... Developing and maintaining a state-of-the-art Web site is not an easy task ... We think the benefits to the community are worth the cost and the effort.

having to download them or print them out.

Oakland County's Web site (www.co.oakland.mi.us) is well-designed and attractive and contains a good deal of information about vital statistics and legal records, listings of congressional and state legislative districts and a telephone directory for county offices and departments that a user can print out and save for future reference. But it lacks the interactive component that makes some other sites more useful.

Certainly one of the most "user-useful" sites we have found is the Washtenaw County Web site (www.co.washtenaw.mi.us). Among the services it offers is an extensive online recycling guide with links to local recycling agencies plus specific information on how to dispose of anything from ammunition to yard waste. A "forms" link allows users to print out official forms requesting birth, marriage and death records, concealed weapons affidavits and parks and recreation forms.

An extension service section of the page provides links to local extension service and garden programs plus horticulture links on how to grow and care for everything from asparagus to zucchini.

A county court link makes available the complete dockets for all of the local courts for a two-week period, while a "self-help" section offers extensive information on how to file a case in small claims court and how to collect the money if you win.

It's a site worth visiting just to experience the potential of the Internet for providing useful, local information. And it's a site that other communities could well emulate.

We'd like to see Wayne County officials do some serious upgrading of their Web site (www.waynecounty.com). Its offerings are limited and some of the material that is available, such as departmental telephone directories, is not formatted in such a way as to allow a home user to simply hit the "print" button and print out a usable copy or, a standard printer.

We know that developing and maintaining a state-of-the-art Web site is not an easy task and that such a site requires constant updating. But we think the benefits to the community are worth the cost and the effort.

We encourage local communities and governments to develop genuinely "interactive" Web sites that, while they may serve as public relations vehicles for community officials, also provide useful services for local residents.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What improvements would you like to see in downtown Farmington?

We asked this question in the downtown Farmington library.



"It's pretty good already. It's nice the way it is."

George Grantham
Farmington



"I think it would be nice to have more restaurants."

Erica Case
Farmington



"I think they have planned very nicely on their own. It's coming along nicely."

Mary Barnett
Farmington Hills



"One thing I'd like to see is less congestion at Farmington Road and Grand River. Other than that, planners have done an excellent job."

Lisa Shamle
Farmington

LETTERS

Recruiters: a different view

I am very perturbed by the answer your writer George Hayes gave in reference to a question concerning a career in executive recruiting in an article on Sunday, Feb. 1.

First, why would any supposed career counselor give such a trite (cute?) answer to an apparently serious question, whether the career in question was real estate sales, being an attorney, a funeral director, etc.? You can paint negatives for any of these careers also.

More importantly, Mr. Hayes' answer seems to be based on a very biased understanding of the recruiting profession as it exists today, perhaps due to his own past lack of success in the field.

My own background includes a solid education — B.S. degree in engineering and pharmacy and an M.B.A., executive positions with two "blue chip" companies — DuPont and Parke Davis, and a 28-year career in recruiting. We help fill positions (for substantial fees) for many companies throughout the world, and play a significant part in the U.S. and Michigan economies, in both good and bad times. Our company, including other offices throughout the U.S., specializes in certain consumer industries. Most recruiters in the industry are likewise experts in their specific fields or functions, and have similar solid career educational experiences.

If any of your readers would really like to gain an insight into recruiting, please have them talk to people that have been successful in the field. They would hopefully give a more balanced and educated viewpoint than Mr. Hayes.

Sam Skeegan, C.P.C.
president, Roth Young Personnel
Farmington Hills

No point to uniforms

As you already know, many schools require their students to wear certain style and color uniforms to school each day. Many students think this is a bad rule. I do too. There are a lot more advantages to not wearing these uniforms than wearing uniforms that almost everyone complains about and hates. More and more schools are making their students wear uniforms each day to school. If they took a vote to see who wanted uniforms and who didn't, the people who didn't want uniforms would win by a lot of votes.

One advantage to not wearing uniforms is the students may feel more comfortable wearing their own clothes. Then they could concentrate a lot more on their work and not on their uncomfortable uniform that makes them worry about how they look in it. If students did not wear uniforms they could feel a lot more confident about themselves. They can express themselves through what they wear each day. If students were allowed to wear

what they wanted (as long as it was reasonable) they would be much happier people. They would also concentrate a lot more on their work. And when being happier and concentrating more come together, that means better test scores and less missed assignments. If there were no uniforms, everyone would be much happier.

Of course, all of the principals say they make students wear uniforms to get rid of gang symbols and all that kind of stuff. The truth is, there are not that many gangs. Of all the people in an average school, less than 1 percent would be involved in a gang, or gang activity. Wearing uniforms is not going to stop gangs, or drugs, or anything else they are trying to prevent by making their students wear these uniforms. For some people, uniforms are too expensive to buy. If a student had to wear a uniform and was in a gang and was going to show that he was in a gang, all he would have to do is wear a little pin, or make a mark on his arm, or something of that kind. So, you can see there is no point in making students wear these silly uniforms to school.

Bobby Mead
Power Middle School

Final comment

This will be our last letter to the editor regarding Tim Richard and his columns. Mr. Richard has spent years venting his anger about Ameritech in the pages of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. We respond with a letter to the editor that clarifies and corrects his information, yet the process continues.

We've met with Mr. Richard and the editorial board at the newspaper several times to discuss the issues and offer our participation in his columns. Unfortunately, Mr. Richard steadfastly refuses to contact us and his columns are filled with factual errors, misrepresentations and half-truths. His latest column "Ameritech, fairness tough to put in same sentence" is a prime example of the vitriolic name-calling he is famous for.

We at Ameritech would rather focus our energies on serving customers with quality communications products and services. We have stopped reading Mr. Richard's columns and we urge your subscribers to view his columns with a critical eye and to be wary of anything he reports as "fact."

Robert Cooper
president
Ameritech Michigan

CLARIFICATION

A letter to the editor in the April 2 issue incorrectly cited the "city" as being responsible for work being done at North Farmington High School. Those references should have been to the Farmington School District.

Farmington Observer

DAVE VARGA, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450
SUSAN ROSEN, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149
HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118
KATHY HURCHFIELD, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 248-901-2501
LARRY GEMER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234
BANKS M. DASHOW, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100
STEVEN M. POME, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252
RICK PICCOLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JEANNE TOWAR, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBER
OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power