

Farsighted

Downtown vision shows needs

Farmington's downtown is historic, quaint and homey, but its needs are numerous. That's the view of a group of residents who helped put together a community vision of ways to improve the town (outlined in a story on today's front page).

We agree that Farmington does have many of the things other towns (like Novi for example) are seeking — a definite downtown location, numerous landmark and historic buildings, a built-in residential base and the infrastructure needed to make it work.

It also has residents willing to invest their time to come up with ways to make things better. All city council members and many city board members and commissioners were part of the 80 or so people who worked on this five-month visioning process.

What downtown Farmington doesn't have was the point of this visioning. Many of the ideas for the future were great: Bringing in some more upscale (not to be confused with overpriced) retailers; adding a major restaurant and a larger, destination retailer; building a ring or loop road to reduce traffic in town; and getting rid of the many, many drive-thrus that make it tough on pedestrians.

Many other ideas sound great, but impractical. Setting up an airport-style senior citizen shuttle service was one, removing the two tire stores from the town was another. Another less-than-practical idea is "blowing a hole" into the middle of the Downtown Center Mall to allow shoppers or residents to walk south of the mall to potential new developments with-

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out going around it. It's tough to imagine the mall's owner, Kimco Co., is going to want to give up store space just to accommodate pedestrians going to other stores and contributing to the growth of the downtown. With only a few scattered vacancies around the mall and the town, it would be even tougher to prove the need for such growth.

But the idea of this vision is to allow city officials to use it in the future, for example, when Kimco officials want something from the city, such as a sign variance.

Getting the community and business visions to meet, though, will be a big challenge for the city. After all, the business community — especially the building landlords — wasn't much involved in this visioning process, despite repeated invitations.

Farmington doesn't have the identifiable attractions that some other towns offer. Royal Oak has restaurants and trendy shops and Birmingham has art galleries and upscale apparel; Farmington is identified by its \$2 movie house, a collection of discount stores led by TJ Maxx, some specialty shops and a few choice restaurants, with little of the walkability available in other towns' multi-block shopping districts.

Farmington's challenge will be to try to make its community vision become a reality over a period of years, while trying to keep its downtown vital.

Distractions key road disasters

You've seen it. Maybe you've done it. A woman, driving down the freeway on her way to work, rearview mirror twisted toward her face while she applies her eye makeup. Her male counterpart, driving in another lane, left hand on the wheel, his right hand guiding a battery-powered shaver over his face.

We've seen drivers in such animated conversation that they take both hands off the wheel to gesture at their passenger and only occasionally seem to take their eyes off the passenger to check the road.

The mother, adjusting her child's car seat, while pulling onto the freeway. The teenager, drinking a pop and eating a hamburger, after pulling out of the fast-food drive-through into city traffic.

Then there's the dog lover with his pet hanging out the window — on the driver's side while sitting in the driver's lap.

"People have too much to do in a car," says Westland police Sgt. Peter Brokas. "They're using cell phones and fiddling around with CD players. Men are shaving in the car and women are putting on makeup."

Brokas is head of the Westland Police Department's traffic bureau. He was commenting on a study that showed traffic crashes in that community had risen from 2,094 to 2,234 during a two-year period.

"A lot of our accidents are occurring because people are speeding and not paying attention," Brokas added.

Based on our observations, more and more people ARE paying attention — but to things other than driving. Topping the list of distractions is the cellular phone.

A study on "Cellular Telephones and Traffic Accidents," published last year in the New

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England Journal of Medicine, concluded that using a cellular telephone while driving quadrupled the risk of a collision. At least one Canadian insurance company has added an extra \$50 a year to the premiums of drivers who have cellular telephones in their cars. And in Australia, Brazil and Israel, it is illegal to talk on a phone while driving.

Cell phones, however, aren't the only distractions. A letter writer, responding to the journal article, reporting being passed on I-95 in Maryland by a male driver holding a Styrofoam cup and a cigarette in one hand, a cell phone in the other and what looked like a newspaper propped on the steering wheel — all at 70 miles per hour.

And in a traffic safety crackdown in Ontario last year, provincial police stopped 60,000 motorists for, among other things, drinking coffee, reading books, shaving, eating cereal, having their legs out the window and playing the drums.

It isn't surprising in an age when automobile reviewers rate cars not only on their performance and safety features but on the quality of the stereo system and how many cup holders are built in. One manufacturer doesn't even call its product an automobile anymore. It's "the ultimate driving machine."

Call it what you will, but no matter how good the stereo or how many cupholders are included, the machine doesn't drive itself. That's still the job of the person in the driver's seat, with both hands on the wheel and both eyes on the road.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Which character on "Seinfeld" will you miss the most? Why?



"Last night was the first time I ever saw it and I really enjoyed it."
John Cunliffe
lives in Florida



"Elaine, without a doubt. I like her facial expressions and I think she's very cute."
Bill Peters
Farmington



"Seinfeld. I think he's the best part of the show."
Bob Hutton
works in Farmington



"Kramer. The way he acts, he's the most memorable."
Paul Bojicic
Farmington Hills

We asked this question in the downtown Farmington library.

LETTERS

Why the lights?

Thanks to the Observer for its editorial support of residents protesting the plan to light the Farmington-area football fields. As one of those residents, I was dismayed to hear, at the April 2 meeting of the Lighting Committee, that we were to discuss only those matters germane to the proposal as approved at the Board of Education April 7.

We had heard that the booster group was close to the board and had their ear, which may explain the haste with which the proposal has rushed along. It may also explain some of Thursday's coercive remarks — that we should move away, or participate in the events at the fields.

Our front window looks out at the athletic field of Farmington High School. The parking lot is to our left as we walk out the door. All of this moved into our view during the 1968 expansion of the school, which toppled all trees and shrubs in its path — and which used to comprise our view. And it's not only lights, noise, etc., we'll have out our window, but toilets, fences and parking lot lights as well.

Thursday night, I talked to one vocal booster (these seem to be mainly adults) who expressed the desire to be able to take vacations on Saturdays — because as it is the family must stay home and attend their children's athletic events. We had already heard the report that teachers wanted the games moved to Friday so their work week could end at that time. These are good parents, and good teachers, but is it fair to foist this nightmare of noise, lights, sound and ugliness on unwilling neighbors, and to spend \$700,000 of the taxpayers' money, so that they, the teachers and athletic boosters, can have their cake (athletics) and eat it, too (have weekends off)?

Anne Sennish
Farmington

Face mental health issue

The media are rife nationally with the shock and horror of the Arkansas school massacre, yet scant reference is made to the one factor, above all, that should be addressed; the importance of dealing with the pathology of the episode through mental health treatment by highly trained persons. It is not just that guns are easily available. There are guns in hundreds of thousands of households accessible very often to children, yet they don't pick up and use them as happened in Arkansas. There are many less than perfect relationships between parents and children but all unhappy children do not act out their hostilities.

The answer lies in the particularities of the two children impelled to kill. Media accounts tend to indicate that the boys were troubled. As reported in the New York Times, for instance, some children apparently knew of threats to kill. Were there no adults informed? If there were, where was the help, the explo-

rations into the meaning of the clues? There cannot be too much money spent to cover personnel who are trained to understand these matters. We do as much with fire and police protection in an attempt to protect lives, to avert catastrophe. Why is there less of an effort when evidence is presented of the potential lethality in an institution where taxpayers seek an education for children with an attendant security? All communities must have well-established, easily accessible mental health systems ready, prepared to act. Michigan, whose recent tragic encounters have been headlined, should be no exception.

Sylvia Iwrey, A.C.S.W.
president
Alliance for Mental Health Services
Farmington Hills

Every litter bit

I am writing this letter to express my concern for the future of our planet. Pollution is such a major problem in today's society. I am sorry to say that I feel too many people take that fact, that pollution is a major problem, for granted. They think that they can just go on polluting the earth and that it will never affect them personally. We need to make the effects of pollution and how serious of a problem this is getting to be more well-known. I think that a simple way to express these concerns is to do more by helping clean up the Earth projects in school. All too often, all we do is sit around and talk about what we should do and not what we actually are going to do.

One simple way to help clean up and make a little difference in Farmington's society is to have one day where the students of the Farmington schools go out and pick up trash. I know (from walking home from school) that you could fill a whole garbage bag of trash from off the ground, just from going along Colfax from Gill to Farmington. I know this would not make a huge difference, but I believe that every little bit helps.

Valerie Evans
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 and brevity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a day-time contact telephone number. No anonymous letters will be published.

The week prior to an election, this newspaper will not publish letters that discuss new issues, since last-minute attacks don't allow a chance for rebuttal. Responses to already published issues will be accepted.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; faxed to (248) 477-9722; or e-mailed with your name, city of residence and phone number to dvarga@oe.homecomm.net

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

40 YEARS AGO — APRIL 17, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

The Farmington School board approved a huge \$2.5 million school budget, which was about 25 percent higher than the previous year's budget. The reason: Extra staffers were needed to handle the growing ranks of students in a burgeoning community.

Blacklock Edsel in Farmington was advertising about its new model by proclaiming:

"Edsel scores highest in owner satisfaction." 25 YEARS AGO — APRIL 18, 1973

Farmington City Council members approved the first reading of ordinances to ban pornographic movie theaters and book stores in the city. No such businesses were planned but officials saw the ordinances as precautionary measures.

2 YEARS AGO — APRIL 16, 1990

Village Commons Center owners asked Farmington council members for a sign variance for the mall on Grand River. It was the first step in plans for a structural overhaul.

Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power