

Flooding

City must respond actively

If some Farmington Hills residents cringe when they hear that heavy rains are on their way, it's no wonder. For too many years, too many residents have been plagued with flooded basements, some with raw sewage.

As expected, some of the affected residents descended upon the Farmington Hills City Council following heavy rains Aug. 6 and 9. They're angry and they have a right to be. Flooding is not new to Farmington Hills homes.

Over the years, the city has tried to address some of the problems, such as improving piping to some of the Kendallwood subdivisions, which are among the oldest in Farmington Hills. Unfortunately, the work didn't include Kendallwood I, which suffered in the latest rains. Again, unfortunately, drainage and piping requirements some 30-40 years ago — when many neighborhoods in the city were built — weren't as strict as they are today.

Nonetheless, residents are urged to keep the flooding issue before the city council. Complain. Make sure you and your problems are noticed.

Currently, city employees are making the rounds — based on phone calls from residents — to review individual flooding problems. If you have such a problem and haven't called, do so. There's no other way to let the city know of your problem.

According to Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi, some

improvements in older sections, such as Nine Mile and Orchard Lake, have been mapped out. But it's clear the city doesn't want to pay for individual homeowners' problems with original piping in homes. And you can't blame the city for that.

But it is incumbent upon the city to study the flooding issue, commit money to improving trunks under their jurisdiction and to work with homeowners to make their homes secure when heavy rains come.

Let's be honest, when homeowners complain of raw sewage floating in their basement, it's not a good advertisement for Farmington Hills — whether the city is responsible for individual home piping or not.

We urge the city to respond quickly and actively to homeowners who have been plagued with flooded basements. Again, flooding — like losing electrical power — is increasingly synonymous with living in Farmington Hills.

It's pretty late in the city's history to attempt a building moratorium — as suggested by residents — to alleviate flooding problems. Legally, it's not likely the city could stop the little remaining growth that's occurring.

Clearly, the problems lay in the city's development history, not to mention the age of many subdivisions. But there's still an opportunity for the city to step forward and improve what is under its jurisdiction.

Sadly, Sen. Michael Bouchard, R-Birmingham and Mat Dunaskiss, R-Lake Orion, continued to support the cruel law by voting against reform.

The House voted 66-31 for reform. Voting yes were Penny Crissman, R-Rochester, Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake, Patricia Godchaux, R-Birmingham, Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak and Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield.

Sticking with the hard-liners and voting no were Tom Middleton, R-Orionville and Andy Raczowski, R-Farmington Hills. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, was absent, the equivalent of a negative vote.

The vote was prominently reported in this newspaper. So far, however, no one has made it a primary campaign issue. Perhaps that's good. We have heard no demagoguery saying that a yes vote was a "vote for drugs," or "a vote against crime victims," or other such nonsense.

Getting much credit for fighting for the reform is Dobb who opposed the prevailing emotions of her Oakland County base. The Senate had passed a bill that it billed as a modification of the 650-lifer law, but actually it gave too much power to police and prosecutors in deciding on paroles. Dobb amended it in the right direction.

As Fortia, in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, explained:

*"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven*

... It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

"Tis mightiest in the mightiest."

Or as the Bible, in Micah, advises us:

"What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy ...?"

Pioneer



Congratulations: Gerald M. Furi, Farmington Community Library assistant director, deserves recognition as a MCI Cyberian of the Year, a national award, for his work with computers and libraries

LETTERS

Let's wake up

I just finished listening to President Bill Clinton's 10 p.m. address to the American public regarding his appearance before a grand jury today.

Being neither Democrat nor Republican, I would just like to express my personal views of Mr. Clinton's behaviors. He has repeatedly and intentionally tried to deceive everyone about his predatory sexual behaviors over a long period of time. There is Monica Lewinsky, Gennifer Flowers, Paula Jones and several other women who have come forward expressing that Mr. Clinton either had extramarital sex with them, groped them or made overt sexual advances toward them.

We have probably seen just the tip of the proverbial iceberg due to the fact that others do not wish to come forward and have their lives ruined in the process.

Many say, "So what? His private life is nobody's business." Oh, really? Then why do we have laws prohibiting this behavior? Suppose Monica Lewinsky were your daughter, a 21-year-old government employee working in close proximity to Mr. Clinton. Would you not be concerned about her being taken advantage of by the most powerful man in the world who has a reputation for being a sexual predator? Would it not be easy for her to become overwhelmed by the attention and advances of such a man? Mr. Clinton is handsome and personable.

What kind of a lesson in morality is Mr. Clinton teaching those who look to him as a leader of the free world? Isn't morality one of the biggest problems in this country? Should not our president lead us down a moral path? Is not morality mostly due to not giving in to urges and temptations we know are wrong? Morality is the true mark of human decency and civil behavior. When are we going to wake up and smell the garbage?

What would I do if I were in charge? As McGarrett used to say, "Book 'em, Danno!"

Kenneth Kemp
Farmington Hills

Voters denied

Perhaps one reason the voter turnout for primary elections is so low is that many voters are denied the opportunity to vote for the candidate of their choice.

This occurs when candidates of choice are members of different political parties. I'm sure there is some basis for forcing a voter to select a party and then only vote for candidates in that party, but I can't believe that should override the principle that allows a voter to vote for candidates as/he deems best.

I also assume the turnout is so low is because voters feel disillusioned with the whole process. Once elections are over, it's politics as usual. After all, the individual voters

don't have PACs. We don't employ lobbyists and we don't send thousands of dollars to the political parties in the form of soft money. That's an interesting concept in itself. Some candidates even claim they don't accept PAC money, but willingly accept distributions from various organizations that raise thousands of dollars from various PAC contributions.

Then, of course, thousands of dollars are raised by unions through dues and a portion of those funds are used to support a particular party or candidate.

The question is whether the individual really has a say in the political process. With campaigns largely financed by corporations, PACs or union dues, the individual seems to be left out of the equation.

But don't be disheartened. The process does work for some. Think of all the millions in tax dollars the Chrysler executives will save because the capital gains rate was lowered to 20 percent. And just remember, the FCC is looking out for your best interest by keeping cable rates low and encouraging competition in the local phone market. Unfortunately, the political process just doesn't work for most of us.

Tom DeWard
Farmington Hills

Check agenda

Columnist Tim Richard purports to care for Michigan's children, yet he feverishly opposes any attempt to allow parents more options for improving their children's education.

Tim rejects all forms of school choice, from charter schools to vouchers. He erroneously claims that the Mackinac Center "is pushing vouchers, hard."

Tim needs to rent a clue. The Mackinac Center has proposed a tuition tax credit, not a voucher. There is no transfer of public funds to private schools, as Tim maintains; parents and businesses simply get a credit against their own tax liabilities when they pay a child's school tuition with their own money.

Rather than belittling parental involvement in their children's education, Tim should check his ideological agenda at the door and embrace school choice as a real way to improve education.

Steven P. Schaller
Clawson

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

Drug lifer reform overdue

The Michigan Legislature did a relatively good job in modifying the so-called "650 drug lifer" law in the closing days of its 1998 session. Those who worked for the change hereby earn our praise.

For years, it was known not only as the toughest law in the nation but as a cruel law that exacted harsher punishments than many murders. Some thought it should be considered "cruel and unusual punishment," a violation of the U.S. Constitution, but the nation's highest court left it to the state's discretion.

From 1978-98, the law mandated — with no judicial discretion — life in prison with no hope of parole for anyone caught with 650 grams of a controlled substance. It was aimed at drug "kingpins," to use the police lobby's term, but didn't catch many. It took no account of the fact that many in the drug scene are young, dumb and likely to outgrow their behavior patterns after 15 years.

The new and improved law says: Penalty is 20 years to life, at the judge's discretion.

Current convicts are eligible for parole after 10 years if they have cooperated with the prosecutor. (A prosecutor could abuse his or her discretion, unfortunately.)

Current lifers with no other convictions for serious crimes are eligible for parole after 17 1/2 years; 20 years if they have been repeat offenders.

The parole board must consider whether the convict played key role in the trade, whether the offense involved children 17 or younger, or committed the offense in a "drug-free zone" around a school.

The Senate voted 26-9 for improvement. Sen. Willis Bullard, R-Milford, John Cherry, D-Cliff and Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Hills had the courage and wisdom to vote yes.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What is your opinion of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair?



"I'm torn. He procrastinated through a sense of shame and regret. I hope he did nothing illegal."



"I have no opinion whatsoever."



"I think he should have been honest a long time ago without wasting taxpayers' money."



"I don't think that he gave enough information in his speech."

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— Philip Power