

Hills development

Keep public part of process

It has been a long process for the Farmington Hills City Council and staff to whittle down a host of developers and their projects to a competing last three — one of which may be chosen to build on the city-owned Eleven Pines project.

We have to give credit to the developers for persevering and for exposing their ideas — good and bad — publicly. Not an easy pill to swallow.

But it's the best way. And it's the way the process — right down to choosing the finalist — should continue.

Government was meant to be open, as it has been throughout this selection process for developing the site at 11 Mile and Halsted, including expanding San Marino Golf Course from 9 to 18 holes.

Sure, some council members who now want to go behind closed doors probably can squeeze by under the Michigan Open Meetings Act which exempts talk of land sales and purchases from public discussion.

But why start that now? The public scrutiny these developers and their plans have undergone can only have served the public better. What could be sweeter for the success of the Eleven Pines project than competition — especially when it's public?

Councilman Jerry Ellis said he would like to hear from each of the remaining developers

privately so the other builders can't hear.

"So when someone comes in with a creative idea, it's their idea," Ellis told his colleagues.

Truthfully, the council by now should know whose idea belongs to whom. And by now council members should have a pretty good idea of what each developer will bring to the project — without fear of copycatting.

To date, the city council has done a fine job of conducting this process publicly. They have lived up to the crucial expectation the public has of its hometown government: conducting its business in public where it belongs.

This project also is different than your average private development. This is publicly owned land. And minds are hard to change when a city council conducts its business behind closed doors. The public vote that comes later is just a matter of form.

Also consider that creative ideas don't only come from developers or council members. Perhaps in the final match, a citizen listening to the proposals and especially the details, can suggest something that will be a boon to the proposed development. It's not unheard of.

After all, this city belongs not to the developers or the city council. It belongs to the citizens who deserve the right to listen and to offer their opinions about these developers and their projects.

Engler's voucher view on target

A group called Kids First! Yes! is backing a ballot proposal for November, 2000, which would remove the Michigan Constitution's ban on indirect aid to private schools.

The group proposes allowing about \$3,100 to each student in districts where the dropout rate exceeds 33 percent (clearly aimed at Detroit).

On the face of it, this seems like an admirable attempt to allow parents more choice in their children's education, particularly in those public school districts that are failing to provide quality education.

But the proposal is getting some close and apparently negative scrutiny from Gov. John Engler, long a proponent of programs that allow more parental choice, including the publicly funded charter schools. Engler has let it be known that he has never supported vouchers and would be examining the proposal carefully before deciding on whether to support it.

Some argue that Engler's lack of support for the proposal is more political than philosophical. They argue that a "voucher" proposal on the Presidential ballot would draw out a larger Democratic vote, especially in the traditionally Democratic Detroit and its near suburbs.

The thinking is that a growing number of Detroit voters, disgusted by the condition of the city's schools and Catholic voters in the older suburbs who want to send their children to parochial schools, would turn out to support the voucher proposal, while also casting a vote for Al Gore or whoever the Democrats nominate for president.

In addition there is a strong anti-voucher group within the Democratic party who also might be drawn out to a lackluster presidential race just to vote against a voucher program.

Neither of these scenarios help the chances of Engler's man, George W. Bush, in the always unpredictable Michigan balloting.

That's interesting political gamesmanship

and certainly the kind of thinking that has made the governor such a successful campaigner. But there are legitimate reasons for him to continue his opposition to vouchers and for those who traditionally vote Democrat to consider what vouchers might mean for the future of public education.

These newspapers continue to oppose vouchers for private schools. One of the greatest strengths of this country is the public school system, as beleaguered as it is. We believe that a voucher system would take desperately needed money from the public schools. It would also allow public money to pay for schools that aren't subject to public scrutiny in terms of test scores and budgets.

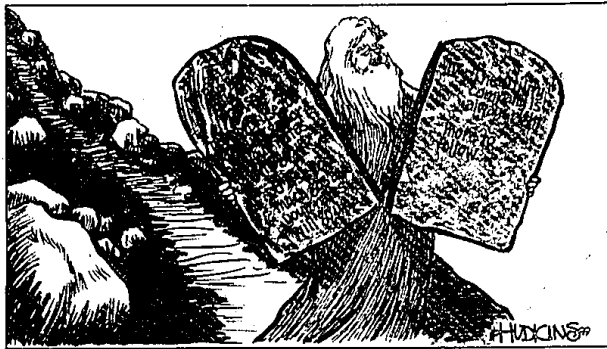
In addition, the idea of "choice" is distorted. Public schools must accept all students. These private or parochial schools are actually the ones given the choice of which students to accept and which to reject. And, when it comes to the students who are the most costly to educate — whether it's handicapped children, those with multiple impairments, or even those who are in high school — guess what the choice will be?

Yes, the voucher system will provide a stipend that would help middle class parents send their children to private schools, but it will not provide enough money to help poor parents. Over time, the result would be that money would be drained from those public schools that are often the only option for many parents.

In addition, we believe, any public money used to support church-centered school instruction programs is a violation of the First Amendment's prohibition against the establishment of a religion.

We need to spend our money and invest our public efforts into making the public schools in all of our communities the best that they can be. We support any efforts by Gov. Engler in that direction and urge him to continue his opposition to voucher systems.

ARKIE HUDGINS



LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 469-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.hometown.com.net

A big help

The 1999-2000 Farmington High School PomPon Squad would like to thank these generous sponsors for the donations that have been made toward their program. With these donations, the squad has been able to add a new Junior Varsity Squad of 14 members, as well as increase the Varsity Squad to 28 members.

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Cindi Hellesek
Farmington Hills

Smoking Isn't pretty

Thank you for the "Smokescreen" article in the Observer, Aug. 8.

If people don't get hooked on cigarettes when they're young, they're not likely to take up smoking later. I am alarmed at the resurgence in smoking I see outside of schools (just beyond the school grounds) and among young adults. Product placement and glamorization of smoking in movies and other media encourages insecure young people to try it and they're soon hooked. I'm waiting to see a movie where the only "jerks," pimply faced, buck-toothed young people or wrinkled hags are shown smoking instead of Leonardo di Caprio and the cool ones. A picture is worth a thousand words and a little deglamorization would go a long way to discourage kids from smoking.

Kudos to the former Winston Man for speaking up and to the Observer for publishing this article.

Margaret G. Schaeffer
Farmington Hills

Remembering Vets

When I was in the Army in 1950, I saw many casualties and wounded vets. One in particular was really a great guy; he was a young soldier who was actually half a human being; he apparently had fallen onto a live hand-grenade on his right side, destroying the whole right half of his body entirely. He had a glass eye, prosthesis right arm, prosthesis right leg, and walked with a slight limp. When you reached out to shake his hand he always extended his real left hand.

I used to go into town in a jeep and I always took this lad with me. We had much fun drinking Cokes, listening to music and mixing with civilians and other G.I's. I tried very hard to show him and myself a good time. We never discussed his injuries. How I wish I could remember his name!

I'd like everyone to always remember the sacrifices of our brave young folks in the service of our great country. Respect the flag, and be thankful. Remember your veterans.

Leon Scholchit
Farmington Hills

COMMUNITY VOICE

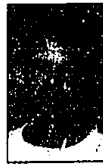
QUESTION:
What's the best and worst about going back to school?

We asked this question at Clarenceville High School on Tuesday, the first day of school in that district.



"You get to see all of your friends. Homework is the worst."

Jenny Haspala



"See all of your friends. Skip homework!"

James Harm



"See your friends. Homework!"

Kandice Krokciayk



"Seeing all the new stuff in school. Having to get up early."

Jennifer Swider

Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450, jmaliszewski@oe.hometown.com.net
HUMI GALLAGHER, ACTING MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149, hgallagher@oe.hometown.com.net
PEG KNOXPEL, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177, pknoxpel@oe.hometown.com.net
SUSAN ROSEK, PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100, srosek@oe.hometown.com.net
RICHARD BRADY, VICE-PRESIDENT/INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252, rbrady@oe.hometown.com.net
MARK WARREN, CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, 734-953-2117, mwarren@oe.hometown.com.net
RICK FIORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150, rkfior@oe.hometown.com.net

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— Philip Power