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upcoming council candidates forum - scheduled to be taped 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 30, at the Time Warner studio on Research Drive - be made open to the public.

Joanne Maliszewski and Jim Stark, editors of the Farmington Observer and Northwest Gazette, respectively, will moderate the program, hosted by SWOCC.

"I want to give residents the chance to ask their questions point-blank," said Dibert, who is challenging incumbents Bill Hartsock, JoAnne McShane and James Mitchell in the Tuesday, Nov. 2, election.

Veteran councilman Hartsock, however, said citizens will have a chance to be heard, albeit indirectly. "The newspapers will be there asking questions for the general public."

According to Dibert, taping the forum without direct public input would follow a long-standing pattern. "There's a history in this community where the council discourages public participation."

The Farmington City Council does not broadcast or tape its meetings, which take place at 8 p.m. the first and third Monday of each month. But there is room on the agenda for public comment.

In his letter, Dibert said the public needs to have an "opportunity to ask the four candidates serious questions about the future of this city."

He also expressed confusion over why the public would not be invited to the forum.

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Bill Hartsock

—Candidate, councilman and SWOCC chairman

dates would want to hear from the residents of Farmington," he wrote. "... I wouldn't rule out that either they are afraid to answer the tough questions from a live audience or they are hiding behind some archaic Machiavellian concept of government. Either way, the public is the big loser."

According to Hartsock, the Sept. 30 taping isn't the only opportunity for residents to get to know how the candidates stand on the issues.

"If this was the only event in the campaign where the four candidates get together and discuss issues, we'd have to take that into consideration" and open up the forum, Hartsock said. "And I'm more than happy to go anywhere and discuss the issues."

Hartsock said the area's Democratic Club will televise a candidate's forum on Oct. 20. In the past, the League of Women Voters sponsored similar events.

Meanwhile, each candidate running for the Farmington and Farmington Hills councils will receive 10 minutes of cable television campaign time from SWOCC.

Deciding the format of the

Sept. 30 SWOCC forum was something Hartsock said he had nothing to do with, despite his position as the commission's chairman.

Hartsock went on to say that Dibert is making an issue where none exists.

"This isn't a big city election, or a race for the U.S. Senate," Hartsock said. "We're all residents. We live in the community, we work in the community. We're available to the community."

Another council veteran running for re-election, McShane, said she was surprised to learn about Dibert's criticism.

"We've always been a very open council," McShane said. "There's no reason, no reason, that we'd want to commandeer a forum."

McShane said "there's a lot more important issues, and that's what we need to discuss."

Those include: development of the city-owned Civic Theatre; receiving state revenue sharing; road pavement programs; maintaining local control of government; the future of the Farmington Area Founders Festival.

Brickner from page A1



want it." Planning commission members voted to recommend the Farmington Hills City Council turn down the parking lot. City council approved it.

Council's decision didn't upset him. He sticks to his decision, though.

"We have to have a buffer between residences and more intense uses," he said, "and I don't consider a parking lot a buffer."

Brickner, 47, respects differences in opinions, which is why the attorney covets a seat on the city council.

The current council group debates issues and decides matters fairly, Brickner said. So much so he decided not to run in the past because it would have meant challenging incumbents.

Brickner blanches at the suggestion that council is too chummy. Harmony is preferable to the alternative, he said.

"They used to fight constantly and they didn't accomplish as much," he said. "Of course, now that the meetings are on TV, they have to put their best forward."

Ironically, Brickner inadvertently became the source of the most contentious council

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Barry Brickner

—Council candidate

debate in recent memory.

He sought to fill Terry Sever's unexpired term as a result of the councilman's election to the Oakland County Commission.

Brickner had the support of three council members - Aldo Vagnoni, Vicki Barnett and Cheryl Oliverio. After 11 votes and much teeth gnashing, council appointed Jody Soronen, who didn't plan to seek the seat in the November election.

Some construed the matter as a partisan issue, though Oliverio is a Republican and Councilman Jon Grant opposed any applicant who intended to seek election. Brickner has run as a Democrat for state office in the past.

"Forget what I did before. This is not a partisan race," he said. "I have bipartisan support. I appreciate the bipartisan support."

In fact, Brickner said he has six council members in his corner. "I haven't talked to Jody (Soronon) yet," he said.

He proudly shows a handwritten letter from Grant, who expresses admiration for Brickner's work on the planning commission.

Brickner is credited for his planning commission work on cellular tower and zoning issues. The planning commission has cited areas in the city that can be "upzoned," which is seen as a way of discouraging in-fill development.

Though such matters can be contentious, Brickner believes in the levity a good joke provides.

"On the planning commission, I'm the one with a sense of humor," Brickner said. "I get along with everybody on the planning commission. We don't all have the same viewpoints."

"That's why I like city council the way it is."

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Store

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than a store empty."

The 20,000 square-foot Farmer Jack closed down in June 1998. During subsequent meetings with representatives from Kimco and Farmer Jack's parent company, Greater Atlantic & Pacific Ten Co., city officials and residents expressed a strong desire for another full-service grocery store to be brought in.

The city council in August 1998 even vowed to take legal action against the national food chain if there was evidence of any stalling tactics in finding a suitable replacement.

Despite that pressure, Farmer Jack decided to keep the downtown store vacant, not wanting to compete with a superstore at Nine Mile and Farmington roads. The food chain has a valid lease for the empty store until September 2001.

Lauffhoff said Kimco representatives are well aware of the community's need and desire for another downtown food store. That is why, he continued, efforts will take place to bring in a smaller grocer, for a to-be-determined space.

"Kimco has listened to the city and they recognize that a grocery store in the downtown center is good for the mix," Lauffhoff said.

Some other downtown tenants have complained that the empty store has sited into the amount of foot traffic in and around the center.

Lauffhoff acknowledged that the problem is taking much longer to take care of than hoped for.

"We expected it to be vacant for an extended period of time," he said. "We knew it would be difficult to get another grocery (store) in there. But this has taken a more prolonged time than expected."

NOTABLE

Specialist joins staff

Dr. Santhosh Madhavan, MD, of Farmington Hills, recently joined the staff at Lakeland Center in Southfield. Dr. Madhavan is a specialist in physical medicine and rehabilitation.



Dr. Santhosh Madhavan

He had been co-medical director of the rehabilitation unit at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit and Bon Secours/Cottage Hospital in Grosse Pointe Farms.

He has also worked at Children's Hospital of Michigan, Detroit Institute for Children, Graco Hospital and the Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan.