

Whose road is it? City should pay for dust control

We'll say it again. Maintaining city roadways should be part of what Farmington Hills offers its taxpayers, including those who live - willingly or unwillingly - on gravel roads.

But the city council Monday again voted 4-3 to establish a special assessment district to pay for dust control on gravel roads - all approximately 22 miles of them.

Again, and wisely, Mayor Nancy Bates and Councilwoman Vicki Barnett opposed gravel road homeowners paying an additional cost for calcium chloride to restrict dust on these roads. In his first year on council, Barry Brickner also opposed the assessment.

The overriding issue here is disagreement on a philosophical issue. Is dust control an improvement or maintenance?

The homeowners are right. Like fixing potholes or working on shoulders, dust control on city-owned roads is maintenance. It's pure and simple.

Any argument that gravel roads are used only by those residents is unrealistic. There are paved subdivision roads that lead to gravel roads. In other words, the gravel roads get public use, not just use by those residents who have particularly chosen to have a gravel road, or those who have no choice because they cannot afford to pay for paving.

The city's policy to assess gravel road prop-

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erty owners for \$59,410 annually - for four applications - is setting this group of residents apart from the rest. These residents, like all others in the city, pay taxes that include road maintenance.

Council members must also be reminded that gravel roads are a part of the city. In fact, many of the gravel roads add a certain charm to this medium-sized metropolis where concrete is god.

Interestingly, resident Sy Kornicky who lives on Power Road - the gravel part - spoke with concern about the health and safety aspects of calcium chloride. Not only is the chemical destructive and corrosive, but there is some thought that it might be a carcinogen, according to Kornicky. Web sites that address calcium chloride say so much.

Hmmm. Perhaps city officials need to check this out before they start the applications and charge homeowners for where they happen to live.

Drain renaming is a good idea

A drain by any other name may indeed smell sweeter, especially to members of the hardworking Farmington Hills Beautification Commission.

Members' efforts to rename 11 brooks, creeks and streams, whose names now end in the word "drain," may be viewed by some as inconsequential. After all, why bother renaming something to which many people may not pay attention?

An answer lies in the fact that any community is about pride. Believe it or not, Farmington Hills has plenty of waterways - drains or otherwise - running through it.

Let's face it. If you call something a drain, it's just a drain and that's all it ever will be. Call something a creek, brook or stream, and different, more positive images - than a drain - come to mind.

People just might take more pride in these

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waterways if renamed. But something called a creek, stream or brook might also get more attention and loving care than most people would give a drain.

The idea is something akin to dressing up and your demeanor and behavior improve to match what you look like.

Right now commission members are looking for historical and cultural information about these waterways, such as the Caddell Drain or Pebble Creek Drain. Keep in mind, these waterways were not always so named.

If you have information that could help the beautification commission in their renaming process, give Marie Donigan in the Hills planning office a call, (248) 473-9543.

Read and learn at the library

It's called the digital divide, the gap between the information haves and have nots, between those with computers and those without.

The front line effort to narrow the gap is being waged at your public library. This week is National Library Week and the theme is "Read! Learn! Connect! @ the Library."

The public library has always been on the cutting edge in providing information to everyone.

Until relatively recent times, libraries were the personal preserve of the rich. The vast majority of people were illiterate and many of those in power would just as soon keep them that way.

But others saw the need to educate everyone, to make them more productive workers, yes, but also to make them better citizens.

In the 19th century self-made multi-millionaire Andrew Carnegie gave away a large portion of his fortune to create public libraries all across the country. His example and his condition that communities raise taxes to continue the work of the library helped make libraries an essential institution in any forward looking community.

Now, another rich patron is giving a large share of his wealth to libraries. Bill Gates obviously has a business interest in providing grants for computers, but he is also contributing to the dissemination of information to everyone. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is supplying billions of dollars worth of computers and computer training to libraries, especially those in less prosperous areas. Our area libraries will receive some of this largesse.

Computers and the Internet have created an information explosion in recent years that makes access to a computer an essential part of participation in the political, economic and social life of the community. Children who don't learn how to use computers soon find themselves far behind their peers.

The library has always been a source for people to improve themselves through knowledge. Public libraries have given us all access to thousands of books from self-help drive to classics of world literature. Now the library is the place to go to learn about and use the Internet.

"We are in the business of quality education and lifelong learning," said Ann Long, president of the American Library Association in a release on Library Week. "There has been an explosion of information, not all good or reliable. Librarians are information experts who can guide people to quality resources whether that's a book or a Web site."

In recent months, public libraries have been under assault by self-appointed censors who see the Internet as access to a cesspool of pornography that is corrupting the youth of America. These same censors have long attacked the book selection policies of public libraries as well.

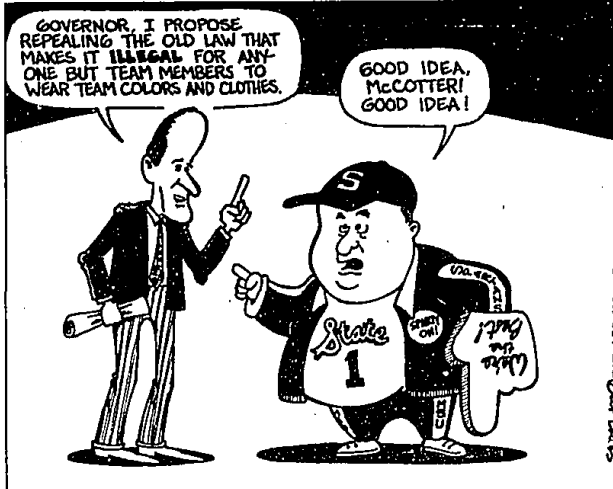
Libraries and library associations have generally stood firm against censorship while working with genuinely concerned parents and educators to make the Internet a positive rather than negative source of information. It is through their efforts that the most rural and most poverty stricken sections of the country are achieving ever wider access to the Web.

It is through their efforts that pre-school children and seniors are all learning to become experts at navigating the information highway.

Good libraries are also providing the kind of training and guidance that makes the Internet more than a jumble of useless public relations announcements. Good libraries provide a roadmap with clear destinations.

The theme of this year's library week says it all. Go visit your library and "Read! Learn! Connect @ the Library."

GEOFF BROOKS



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) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oc.homecomm.net

Vindictive remarks

As a "Man of the Cloth," I can't shake off my embarrassment at the vindictive nature of the language used by the Rev. Brian Brewer in his very public sermon to Aldo Vagnozzi of March 28.

As a nation we are increasingly concerned about our violent society and to read such inflammatory language coming from a minister of the Gospel calls into question the man's ability to truly lead.

For 28 years, I have been privileged to be both pastor and friend to Mr. Vagnozzi. I have never met a public person so dedicated to being of service and so willing to put himself on the line in seeking justice in Farmington Hills and far beyond. If Rev. Brewer's intention is to demean Mr. Vagnozzi by implying guilt through association, it won't wash.

I can only hope Rev. Brewer will find some peace born of the good God whose Gospel he preaches.

Rev. Jim Wright
Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church
Farmington Hills

Good Judgment

As a parent of two Farmington elementary students, I read with great interest the article on the front page of the March 12 edition of the Farmington Observer.

The article titled "Shooting troubles district educators," explained how Bill Smith the principal of Longacre Elementary handled the news of the shooting that occurred in Mt. Morris early in the week.

Mr. Smith alerted his staff, and prepared them in the event that students began to discuss the shooting. But he felt it was the parents' responsibility to inform their children if they so chose. As a parent I commend Mr. Smith and his insight, and show of good judgment at keeping this information from being introduced in the school.

Let me tell you how another Farmington public elementary school handled the shoot-

ing. My children are in the 4th grade and kindergarten at Flanders Elementary. On Wednesday every class was informed by their teacher about the shooting. Why were we as parents not allowed to make the decision as to what information, if any, to share with our children? As a parent I had decided not to share this information with my children. There is no reason that my 5-year-old needed to know about the shooting.

In the article Mr. Rice, a psychologist states "At six, he (meaning the shooter) doesn't know what it means for someone to be dead and buried in the ground. As a psychologist, I'm telling you he has no idea of the full impact of what he's done."

If the boy pulling the trigger does not comprehend this, then how is a 5-year-old going to understand? The administration at Flanders has put itself in the position of making parental decisions on behalf of our children. The damage that the school has caused by doing this cannot be undone. Children should not be exposed to violence, whether it is on TV, or discussed in the classroom.

Earlier this same week, a second and third grade class was told about the suicide of a Farmington High School student. The 7- and 8-year-olds were given detailed explanation about the suicide. The parents of these children were not informed until after the classroom discussion. Once again the administration at Flanders has completely disregarded the rights of the parents.

These are both very serious adult subjects that most parents would not want their elementary-age children exposed to. The Farmington Public School District needs to be more aware of what its building administrators are doing. I never dreamed it would be necessary as a parent to have to request the school exclude my children from the discussion of such serious adult subjects, but apparently not all building administrators possess the good judgment as demonstrated by Mr. Smith at Longacre.

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— Philip Power