

Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

Cities should work together downtown

Whether you live in Farmington or Farmington Hills, the word "downtown" means only one thing: Grand River.

From the lights of the newly renovated Civic Theatre to the row of beautifully converted homes occupied by businesses, downtown Farmington serves both communities — and serves them well. But unless both communities work to preserve and improve this valuable business district, it could fall on hard times.

Several vacancies exist, most notably the former Shoe Carnival store, which occupies a prime spot on Farmington Road. But Downtown Development Association Executive Director Judy Downey tells us that's still only a fraction of the 540,000 square feet available.

"I've been here nearly nine years, and we've never been less than 95 percent occupied," she said.

That's a healthy track record, one business leaders and citizens in both communities should work hard to maintain. We fully support and applaud the cooperative effort underway between the DDA and Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce to apply for an Oakland County Main Street program grant.

The timing of this renewed cooperative effort couldn't be better. As former Democratic candidate for U.S. Congress Matthew Frumin was fond of saying, "When the auto industry catches a cold, Detroit gets pneumonia."

Judging by the goings on at Daimler-Chrysler, the sniffles have begun.

In addition, major retailers like Montgomery Ward and Sears are closing the door on stores across the country and whispers of recession have begun to waft across the economic horizon.

The "trickle-down theory" of economics works both ways; being a small business owner may well become an even more challenging proposition.

Patterned after the National Main Street program, Oakland County's offers the kind of technical advice and

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support that helps downtown business districts thrive. Consultants form a partnership with communities, helping them develop a plan that addresses everything from attracting and retaining businesses to the overall downtown district design.

Do such revitalization efforts really work? Over the past 20 years, the National Main Street has become part of 15,000 communities, which have generated a total of \$12.8 billion in public and private investment. Main Street has had a hand in creating 51,000 new businesses and 193,000 new jobs for communities like ours.

Certainly, Farmington could do this alone, and do it well. But when citizens from both communities consider Grand River "their" downtown, both communities should do all they can to maintain its vitality.

We believe help and support from both communities' business and civic leaders and governments will give the Main Street application an even greater chance of success, in being awarded and implemented.

Miles family deserves police accountability

Who will take responsibility for the death of Travis Miles?

We speak not just of criminal responsibility or civil redress. But who will have the guts to stand up as a human being and tell Donald Miles and Roxanne Dowd: "I'm sorry. My thoughtless actions killed your son."

Certainly not John Moffitt and Joseph Respondak, convicted felons who refused to surrender to police Saturday night and led officers on a high-speed chase for eight miles through Canton and Westland. Both men pleaded not guilty Tuesday to a variety of charges stemming from the resulting crash that killed 8-year-old Travis of Garden City.

Apparently not the Canton Public Safety Department, which, even as it launched an internal investigation into the incident, took ample time in public statements to distance itself from any culpability. While calling the crash a true tragedy, Canton Public Safety Director John Santomauro reminded all that it wasn't the pursuing officers who allegedly broke into a home under construction and took off to avoid crash.

And definitely not the Michigan Supreme Court, which in a 2000 decision, stemming from two fatal police chases in Detroit, ruled that police officers and municipalities could only be held responsible in cases where they are "grossly negligent" and directly responsible for the death. In other words, if the patrol car is involved in a fatal crash and officers deliberately failed to follow chase guidelines then maybe blame can be assessed.

The question of responsibility is, of course, paramount. But there are many other questions in the wake of

events that unfolded Saturday along Cherry Hill Road. And there are no easy answers.

For example, the public needs to know:

■ Did police officers follow department policy in initiating the chase? Santomauro insists they did.

■ Should the pursuit have been abandoned when the fleeing felons approached the township limit?

■ Was a chase necessary to apprehend Moffitt and Respondak when police had two other suspects in custody?

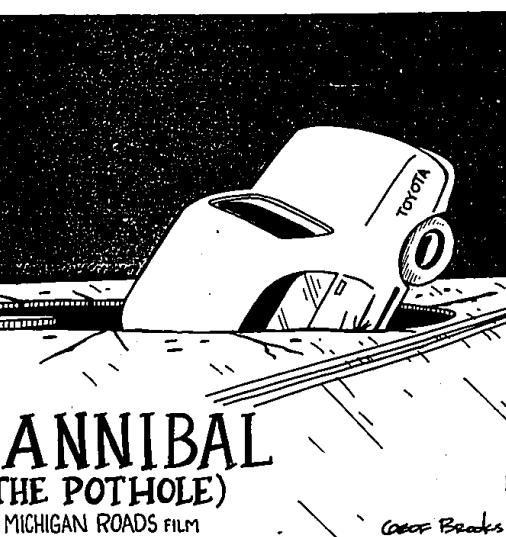
■ Is chasing suspects involved in a nonviolent property crime a wise decision and a smart use of public safety resources?

We suspect most of these questions, and others, won't be resolved until the lawyers have at it. That's an unfortunate reality in today's litigious world and one more reason why Travis' parents won't be hearing an apology or explanation anytime soon.

The Observer believes the pursuit of fleeing suspects is a tool that must be available to law enforcement agencies. There is truth in the argument that failure to do so only encourages a lawless society.

But the decision to pursue must be made with the same deliberateness and training that officers apply when they draw a weapon. This, after all, is what a motor vehicle becomes as it hurtles down the road at 70 mph or more.

And we demand that law enforcement agencies accept responsibility for the outcome of their actions. It's part of what makes our government accountable to its people. The Miles family deserves at least that much.



LETTERS

■ Make a difference

On Feb. 10, 2001, my dear friends lost their son to a high speed police chase. It could have been anyone — you, me, your neighbor, friend or relative, even your child.

It was not 3 a.m. when traffic is low, but rather early on a busy weekend evening. The officers were chasing the truck that plowed into my friend's little boy because the driver had been stealing.

An 8-year-old boy lost his life over stolen goods.

His family will never see him graduate, play sports or have a family. If this makes you angry, sad or maybe hold your children a little closer, then please take the time to e-mail, write or phone your elected officials.

I understand the officers felt they were doing their job. I always support them and their efforts. However, I also believe high speed chases should only be used under extreme circumstances.

Does it make sense that a little boy dies and the general public was put at risk over a crime of theft?

A few moments of your time is all it takes. Make a phone call, send a letter or an e-mail. The next time it could be your child.

Christina Taylor

■ "Fuzzy math"

I read with interest the guest column by Jim Pfleifer in the Feb. 1 Observer. It appears he went to the same "fuzzy math" teacher who taught Al Gore.

Mr. Pfleifer fails to realize that the city council is elected by all citizens of Farmington to represent the best interests of the entire city, not just an isolated pocket of citizens with a torch to bear.

According to my handheld calculator, the 103 signatures on the petition submitted to the city council represent only 1.38 percent of the 7,449 registered voters and only 1.01 percent of the total 10,170 population of Farmington. Hardly a 97 percent mandate as calculated by Mr. Pfleifer.

I urge the city council for making the right decision to follow the master plan. After observing this "frontline" and being a part of many similar "skirmishes" over the past 40 years, I can assure the concerned residents in the historic district that their property values will continue to escalate, their quality of life will continue to be enhanced, and they will look back and realize this wasn't such a bad decision after all.

John H. Richardson
Farmington

■ Seeks help

My name is Jamie Newman. I attend seventh grade at Callahan Middle School.

My class is doing a state fair. My project is on the state of Michigan.

If you could be so kind to ask your readers to send brochures, information about history and wildlife, statistics, postcards of your state, maps, and other things you think would be helpful. I'll be sure to send a thank you letter. Thank you.

Jamie Newman
Callahan, Fla.

■ Diversity/divisiveness

Reading the glowing article about Jennifer Granholm and her praising of the "Rainbow of Diversity," I began to wonder what she is talking about.

We already are a diverse nation of people, united under one flag and one Constitution. Encouraging diversity is like encouraging divisiveness. A homogenous people are a strong people. The Balkans has had plenty of diversity — do we want that here? Those who encourage "diversity" are adopting a divide and conquer strategy. The United States is already one of the most diverse nations in history.

Ms. Granholm seems confused about a number of issues including ethics. Recently she sued the Public Service Commission while, at the same time defending them. This breach of basic legal ethics didn't apply to her, Ms. Granholm claimed. The Michigan Court of Appeals disagreed and disqualified Ms. Granholm from suing the PSC. Ms. Granholm did not appeal to the Supreme Court, perhaps after reading the Law.

Who in their right mind would want a prosecuting attorney acting simultaneously as their defense attorney? Certainly no same person.

Public servants who claim ethics rules which apply to others do not apply to them are, to put it nicely, either confused or mad. Ms. Granholm's actions are more akin to those of a tyrant who claims to be above the law rather than a public servant who enforces the law.

It's troublesome that Ms. Granholm has gubernatorial ambitions. Ms. Granholm's bizarre claims that the American Bar Association Rules of Professional Conduct 1.7 do not apply to her are a glaring red flag.

Ron Oliverio
Member-Farmington Hills Ethics Committee

■ Let's talk

On Feb. 5, Farmington City Council rubber-stamped the controversial ordinance that rezones the historic home at 33432 Oakland St. to "Central Business District."

A lot of people got mad. They thought they were demeaned and discredited by the council, the mayor and the planning commission during public hearings. A harsh editorial aimed at the mayor and city council was published in the Farmington Observer. So were letters to the editor that criticized the city's decision. The mayor responded with an editorial of his own...

Whew. That's a whole bunch of slings and arrows flying all over the place. Time for another angry response, right? Me.

What got us here is over and done. So where do we go from here? We move in a direction that works for everybody.

It's a fact of life that stuff like this happens in cities, big and small, all over the place. No city government worth its salt purposefully devises plans that it knows in advance will pack its halls with angry mobs. It's no fun being yelled at during public hearings. Moreover, elected officials don't particularly like getting "voted off the island."

Conversely, concerned citizens of a community tend to get a little antsy if they perceive that their government is playing "keep-away" from them with their favorite parts of town. They get angry. And a public hearing is the accepted forum for angry people to holler at their government if their gov-

ernment does something they don't like.

The residents of Farmington's historic district are, logically, the most affected by the city's decision to rezone the old Oakland Street home. Many residents on the perimeter of the historic district also feel that all the addresses on that strip of Oakland Street should remain residential.

The issue of rezoning, as well as the city's master plan (in its current revision, which includes CBD zoning for the "Oakland Street strip") has brought the neighbors in the historic district and its surroundings together. The "new" Farmington Old Village Association wants to work with the city to resolve all differences. Peacefully.

We want to build and maintain a good relationship with the mayor, the council — everybody. We want to sit down and talk about what has happened over the past several months and iron out all misunderstandings. We want to talk about the future of our beautiful city, too.

We want to play a stronger role in helping to shape our neighborhoods and our business district. We want to make sure all possible methods of communication between the city and its residents (and vice versa) are being utilized.

If history has taught us anything, it is that a failure to communicate is no excuse for a conflict of any kind. (And, just to be clear, we believe the citizen duty to communicate is just as important as the duty of their government.)

So let's sit down. Let's communicate. Let's resolve our differences.

Life is too short and we have a city to nurture and grow. We can do that together. Let's start today. We'll be giving you a call.

Jim Pfleifer
Farmington

■ The Farmington Observer welcomes longer articles as guest columns. Send them to the editor at 33411 Grand River, Mi. 48335 or e-mail them to jhubred@oe.homecomm.net.

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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