

## Farmington Observer

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## It's time legislators made some real noise

Residents in Farmington Hills and Livonia who live along I-275 have certainly gotten the attention of state transportation officials and lawmakers.

Now they have to wait and see just what all that attention really means.

After listening to hours of testimony last month, the Michigan Transportation Commission has issued a list of proposals, which includes just about every solution suggested so far by residents, asphalt cement industry representatives and local officials. Boring, sound walls, plantings, an asphalt cap and diamond grinding the existing surface are among the options they'll consider as they make their final recommendations on April 26.

Of course, this is your government at work. No matter what the commission recommends, state lawmakers could decide to do nothing at all. And they'd have some powerful reasoning behind them.

Years ago, the State of Michigan made a fateful decision, to keep building roads without adequately addressing noise problems. Now, residents in about 600 spots around the state need relief.

State officials don't have enough money to address all those problems, so they may not want to tackle any of them. And they'd be wrong.

It's time for lawmakers to admit the state screwed up and start addressing the entire issue of noise abatement on a policy level, establishing a plan that will allow them to eat this gargantuan piece of humble pie one bite at a time.

It is simply reprehensible to keep spending millions on new roads, which will no doubt create more noise, while existing problem areas remain largely ignored.

Where better to start than on this stretch of I-275 from Five Mile to 10 Mile Roads? Residents present a strong case, pointing out that transportation officials

used an experimental treatment on the road surface, random skewed tining, to address noise concerns.

Everyone seems to agree the experiment didn't work. The question is what to do about it. Residents still deserve some relief — relief they've said they were promised years ago — and after all this, they've certainly got the right to expect it.

Sens. Bill Bullard and Thaddeus McCotter have come up with a piece of legislation that would require the Department of Transportation to install

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noise abatement measures along an existing highway if the noise level has increased significantly due to road improvements and if residences are located 100 yards or less from the highway. It's a good start, but it doesn't say where the money will come from or what "noise abatement" should be.

We urge state lawmakers representing residents in Farmington Hills and Livonia who are deeply affected by this problem to draft legislation with some teeth in it, to take action that will move all these wonderful ideas forward.

Residents have done their part. Now it's time for those who have the power to do the most to really make some noise.

## Residents must join fight against diversion

Our Great Lakes water is not safe. Gov. John Engler  
State of the State Address  
Jan. 31, 2001

With that flat declaration Michigan's governor vowed earlier this year to fight any scheme to divert Great Lakes water to any other state, region or foreign nation for any reason.

We hear you, governor. We support you. And know also that we'll be watching you and your successors and the rest of our representative government to make certain that our water — certainly more vital than oil — stays in the Great Lakes basin where it belongs.

That Great Lakes water should not be diverted to other regions is a no-brainer, you think? Well, think again. People all over the world are casting covetous eyes on our precious water.

A couple of years ago, a Canadian company came up with a scheme to "merchandise" more than 150 million gallons of Lake Superior water each year to Asia. Thankfully, that deal was scotched by right-thinking people on both sides of the border. But planners and developers in the arid Southwest, a region that is rapidly running out of water because of careless development, are looking at the Great Lakes, which contain 20 percent of all fresh water on Planet Earth, as an untapped source to slake their mighty thirst.

The feud over fresh water has been simmering for years. But now the feud could become a battle that could turn into a war, and the politicians know it. Note Engler's statement on water diversion, delivered to a standing ovation before the Legislature. Note also that former Michigan Gov. James Blanchard, a probable Democratic candidate for governor in 2002, is out with a "Great Lakes Protection Plan." Water diversion is a coming campaign issue.

We can close our eyes and almost hear the justifications for selling Great Lakes water in the years to come:

■ But if we sold just a little water to Japan or Arizona or Florida, we'd have money to fix these crummy Michigan roads.

■ But if we sold just a little water, we'd have money to fix all the failing schools in our ailing inner cities. . . .

■ But we have so much water; we'd never miss just a little bit . . . and those people out West (or down South) are soooo dry. . . .

Let us hope our lawmakers, present and future, don't fall for those lines. Great Lakes water must stay here. Water is not a commodity to be sold away, any more than are the Rocky Mountains or the Grand Canyon.

Plaintive cry No. 3 will be especially galling when we hear it. The Great Lakes need the water that feeds them, all of the water. Lake levels, which rise and fall over the decades, are in a down cycle right now, as anyone who lives on the shore will tell you. Levels are said to be down more than two feet, leaving many docks and marinas high and dry along our lake shores. Low lake levels are becoming an expensive problem that will only be exacerbated by water diversion.

We're pleased that our leaders are recognizing the threat and planning action to stop it.

The shame is that Michigan residents may have to comply with new water use rules to protect the Great Lakes from diversions by others who have already abused their water resources.

According to Tracy Mehan, director of the Office of the Great Lakes, and Dennis Schornack, of the governor's office, any law prohibiting diversion or "withdrawal" of water from the Great Lakes basin that does not also apply to Michigan residents themselves would likely be susceptible to a court challenge.

And it would apply, not just to pipes laid directly to the lakes, but even to far from the shoreline that draw water from aquifers supplied by the Great Lakes. Users or diversions who take a net amount over 1 million gallons per day would have to comply with the new rules.

It all seems somehow backward. Those who choose to live in arid climates and abuse their own water supplies apparently have a right to dip into ours. The only way to prevent that is for residents here to submit to water use rules in an area abundant with the resource.

## ■ Nursing home issues

As a gerontologist and former member of the Farmington Area Commission on Aging and still a weekly reader of the Farmington Observer, I wish to comment on Jonathan Stanton's recent rebuttal to Lydia Rizzo's column in which she accurately warned readers of the possible harm that can result from reliance on the Consumer Guide to Michigan Nursing Homes, published by the Health Care Association of Homes and Services for the Aging.

As director of communications for the association, it was Mr. Stanton's job to reply to the column, but he must have labored long and hard in an effort to justify the "inaccuracies and misinterpreted data" he brushed aside as understandable and forgivable for presenting what should have been true and factual information for family members suddenly in need of making a choice of facilities for a loved one.

From personal experience of seeing both my mother and my sister's lives brought to a premature end by totally avoidable sub-standard care in the several nursing homes in which we attempted to place them, I can only respond to Mr. Stanton's remarks about how good Michigan nursing homes are and about the industry's burden of over-regulation and under-funding, are totally false. I suspect he knows it. Regarding his constant reference to "reputable" industry surveys, again, I know from personal experience and from talking with family members of other residents in nursing homes, that as long as a loved one is in a facility, the fear of retaliation is such that an honest answer cannot be expected.

The Consumer Guide to Michigan Nursing Homes is merely a marketing tool for the industry. The Health Care Association and Mr. Stanton can best serve the consumers of Michigan by publishing it as such, and then simply referring them to "Michigan's Long-Term Care Companion," available from Citizens for Better Care, a reliable guide without the inaccuracies and misinterpretations.

Doris M. Austerberry  
Livonia

Jonathan Stanton, the director of communications for a nursing home industry association, in his letter of March 8 wrote that his industry's publication *Consumer's Guide to Michigan Nursing Homes* includes surveys of nursing homes through Nov. 1, 2000. That means that the information was out of date as soon as the guide was published. He acknowledges that.

What I don't understand, then, is why the industry officials even bothered publishing these out of date surveys, which can be misleading to families searching for a nursing home. All the guide needed to do up front was to refer customers to Citizens for Better Care which can provide not only up to date information on nursing homes but also more specific descriptions of the violation citations. All it takes is a call to their 800 number 833-9548.

Citizens for Better Care, a nonprofit advocacy agency for residents of nursing homes and their families, also provides many free publications that help consumers with nursing home questions and problems.

The staff at CBC is the best source not only for advice regarding nursing home questions but also for actual assistance with nursing home problems residents and their families might face, for its consumer-oriented, not a profit organization, and therefore, there's no conflict of interest.

I find it upsetting that Mr. Stanton writes that the guide's publishers are the Health Care Association of Michigan, the Michigan Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, and the Michigan County Medical Care Facilities Council, but he doesn't state that these are all trade organizations of the nursing home industry that promote its own interests.

Ensl Shore  
Farmington Hills

Once again, the Michigan nursing home industry is trying to run away from its poor performance record by publishing a so-called consumer guide that is factually incorrect.

Thank goodness that there are people like Lydia Rizzo and others who are active in Michigan for Quality Nursing Care who have been pointing out these inaccuracies. Lydia Rizzo's recent column in the Observer was right to the point. The nursing care industry is trying to use a slick consumer guide to cover up shortcomings that caused Michigan to be placed at or near the bottom of service among all the 50 states.

Even the March 8 letter from an industry representative admitted that there were some inaccuracies in the 1999 version of the consumer guide. It was the Michigan for Quality Nursing Home Care that pointed out these inaccuracies. By their own admission

in the March 8 letter the industry admits that Michigan nursing homes are cited for violations at a rate higher than the national average.

As an active member of the Michigan for Quality Nursing Home Care, I constantly hear of patients being mistreated, left unattended for long periods of time, even raped in our state facilities.

The writer of the March 8 letter indicated he was open to suggestions and feedback. I'll take him at his word. My main suggestion is for the industry to quit fighting every piece of legislation offered by Michigan for Quality Care that would improve patient care.

Aldo Vagnozzi  
Farmington Hills

## ■ Appeals pointless?

Your March 16, 2001, page 3 article "Hills board of review meetings begin . . ." with about as much fanfare and hoopah as a dog sleeping on the porch" is rather interesting.

Could it be that the average taxpayer has learned over time that it's just about pointless to appeal? I don't know of anyone who ever won that scrimmage. I imagine the percentage of people who may have gotten relief is in the lower end of the single digits, if any.

Whereas, if you are a rich and profitable multi-national corporation who simply wants to increase your profits with little effort, just go for a tax abatement appeal and threaten, however seriously, to leave the state. What chance do senior citizens on fixed incomes, for instance, have against such overwhelming influence?

Oh, well, maybe the review board can stay awake through another appeal season.

Henry Grysh  
Farmington Hills

## ■ Sign CCW petitions

Fourteen students and one teacher killed at Columbine High School in Colorado last year; two killed, 13 wounded at Santana High School in California last week, thousands of children killed every year by gunfire; road rage is on the rise.

Yet, under a new Michigan law, anyone over 21 who applies is entitled to a concealed weapon (CCW) permit unless the county gun board can prove that the person has a criminal record or is mentally ill. This "shall issue" gun law takes effect July 1 unless a petition drive to put a stop to it is successful by March 27.

Under present law, concealed weapons permits are issued only when the applicant can show there is a special need for one: business men or women who carry large amounts of cash to and from the bank; those who have received serious threats to their personal safety, for example.

The change in the law requires that county gun boards "shall issue" a general permit to carry a criminal record or is mentally ill. This "shall issue" gun law takes effect July 1 unless a petition drive to put a stop to it is successful by March 27.

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## ■ Arts people special

After reading last week's letter to the editor entitled, "Effort unappreciated," I feel I must respond in support of all of the dedicated, hard working mem-

bers of our exceptional arts community. These are the very special people who donate an enormous number of hours to our cities' many festivals, expecting neither payment nor special recognition.

Mr. Leon Schoichit's bitter statements are full of inaccuracies, and a complete reversal of a letter he wrote last year immediately following the Festival of the Arts, which was published in another paper. I cannot understand how he can suddenly use such terms as "unappreciated" and "ill-mannered" after stating at that time that he was "glad to be able to play my small part in contributing my efforts for the benefit of this great community." He also pronounced in the same letter that the festival was a "great success" due to the "countless hours" put in by the volunteers and city staff who were responsible for this great event.

It was generally agreed by all that last year's festival was the absolute best yet. The members of the Arts Council, as well as all the contributors, volunteers and city employees had a wonderful experience presenting this fun-filled, educational event for our community. Not only are they humorous, polite and resourceful people, they give their time and labor in a spirit inspired by their belief in the inherent value and beauty of the arts. Their hard work is a generous gift to our community, and it is a shame that one disgruntled person should malign the great efforts made by so many.

Ellen Kendall, president  
Farmington Community Arts Council

## ■ Section buried

A few years ago, Tom Baer of your newspaper invited me to be part of a panel to suggest ways to improve the Farmington Observer.

I was pleased to be part of the panel and enjoyed the dialogue with Mr. Baer and other participants. Knowing that the paper is open to suggestions, I hope that you and other staff don't mind my offering some at this time.

The Farmington Observer is a suburban newspaper that of course emphasizes local news. That's primarily the reason residents of the area buy it. I'm puzzled, therefore, as to why the Home Town Life section is buried within the paper, in the back pages, rather than being given a section of its own or at least a more prominent spot.

Then, too, as I recall the section won a first place award from the Suburban Newspaper Association; this should be a matter of pride for the paper and another reason for giving the section more prominence.

The features are well written and selected, but I would suggest further that the Home Town Life section be expanded to cover a greater number of interesting local events and people. A suburban paper can do a lot to promote a real sense of community.

By giving the Home Town Life section more space and prominence, the paper would send a message that community life, its people and events, is important. More people will buy the paper when they see themselves or their friends mentioned in community events and features.

Lydia Rizzo  
Farmington Hills

■ The Farmington Observer welcomes longer articles as guest columns. Send them to the editor at 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48336 or e-mail them to jhubred@oe.hometown.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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