

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.

Developers should talk

People talk a lot about how local governments cave in to developers, but on Monday night, the Farmington Hills City Council proved it's possible to stand up and say "no" to a very bad idea.

Officials made it clear they want Lowe's Home Improvement Centers to build in their community; they just want a plan that's friendly to the homeowners in the area. Lowe's had originally negotiated with Grand Sakwa Properties to become part of a planned unit development in the 14 Mile/Northwestern Orchard Lake area.

When talks fell through, Lowe's proposed its own PUD, a zoning designation officials can use to mix property uses or to allow developments that include a public benefit. Lowe's is a single user, and not only would the project have offered little, if any, public benefit, it would have completely isolated eight Hills homeowners.

With the Kmart plaza on Orchard Lake Road to the west, Lowe's to the north and Grand Sakwa's phased development to the east, these eight residences would have been lost in a sea of commercial properties.

The homes will likely be sold if Sakwa moves into its project's second phase, but Gary Sakwa made it clear that wouldn't happen if Lowe's PUD was approved.

Council member Chris McTear pointed out the city and the residents on Highway have no guarantees that Sakwa will proceed with the second phase of his project. But approving Lowe's would have completely closed that door.

Developers can argue the relative merits of their project, attorneys can pound the podium with dramatic flair, but when it comes to making a decision that's in the best interests of the community, officials should - and did, in this case - consider their first duty to protect all residents, especially those most directly impacted.

To paraphrase one property owner's far more eloquent statement, there comes a time when everyone must stop worrying about grand developments and multi-million dollar projects and simply pay attention to the human side of this equation.

That's the part Grand Sakwa and Lowe's both seem to be missing. Lowe's representative Evan Vlamineck talked about putting both parties on "equal footing" by approving Lowe's PUD.

If that doesn't happen, he said, in business, that's the end of the story.

McTear said he's wrong. Vlamineck said Lowe's just wanted to be a good neighbor. If that's true, the company will work to put together a plan that's fair to both sides - and to homeowners.

Relief in sight for I-275

It sounds like there might be some good news for those residents who live near I-275: The Michigan Department of Transportation announced June 28 it will do something to curb the excessive noise on the repaved freeway.

Then again, neighbors near the freeway are wise to take a so-called "wait and hear attitude" about the plan. They were told before the original project that the noise from this repaving project wouldn't be a problem; their skepticism is understandable.

Residents were worried about noise and called for quieter asphalt surfacing well before the state contractors began ripping up and completely rebuilding I-275 at a cost of \$50 million. They were told this skewed timing of the concrete surface would work well, keeping the roadway safe for drivers and quiet enough, although it was experimental.

Now, the state has at least partly stepped up to its responsibility and admitted that, yes, this experiment didn't quite work.

Whether the proposed fix - a process called diamond grinding that changes the

direction of the noisy skewed times in the concrete road - will make enough of a difference to soothe neighbors, only time will tell.

However, it is worth noting that state officials have listened to the voices of residents, no doubt amplified by our local and state representatives, and tried to come up with a solution to the uproar they created with this choice of roadway.

Local state elected officials, too, have seized upon this situation to try to ensure that future freeway rebuild projects don't end up making things noisier for those within 200 yards of the road.

Residents who live near the freeway should be proud of their efforts to bring recognition to their plight. They spent their time and money, forming an organization that brought the force of unity, information and passion to bear on the Lansing establishment not known for its responsiveness.

Now, we can all just wait and listen for the results. Of course, if the results aren't at least as quiet as the freeway was before the reconstruction, the state will need to do more.

Don't risk our Great Lakes

The U.S. House acted at the end of last month to protect the environment of the Great Lakes by voting to ban the Corps of Engineers from issuing permits for oil and gas drilling in the lakes.

Four of the seven GOP representatives from Michigan voted for the ban, a strong rebuke to Gov. John Engler, a major proponent of exploring for oil and gas in the Great Lakes.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow has been gaining support in the Senate for a ban on drilling until there is a study of environmental impact by the National Academy of Sciences.

We realize that this is not a simple issue. We are excessive consumers of energy. We have an obligation to find new and better sources of energy.

Soon we will have to make hard decisions about what areas we open up to exploration, as we cannot expect to depend on buying foreign oil for all our needs. We will also need to find alternatives to gas and oil and to develop intelligent conservation measures. But jeopardizing our most important natural resource is not a risk worth taking.

Engler supports directional drilling - pipes laid at an angle into the lake water wells on dry land. The idea is to prevent an oil spill on water.

But experts say the biggest threat is not to the water but to the delicate animal, plant and soil ecology of the shoreline. Anyone familiar with the dunes areas along Lake Michigan understands just how fragile this area has become. Michigan depends on the lakes as a source of water and as the primary draw to our important and growing travel/recreation business. Should there be just one accident along these sandy shores, the political party responsible would probably find itself permanently

powerless. That might have dawned on the Republican representatives who balked at drilling in the lakes.

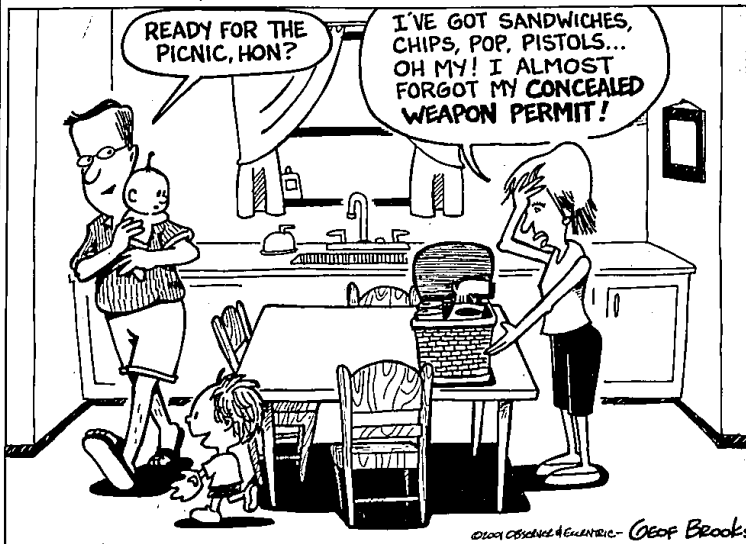
President George W. Bush began his administration with an aggressively anti-environmental stance. Despite his narrow and controversial victory in the Electoral College, Bush seemed to find a "mandate" to turn back years of progress in defending the environment and open the doors to every kind of exploitation. His own background in the oil business has been his only guide in approaching environmental issues, despite lame rhetoric to the contrary.

In recent weeks Bush has been in a slow retreat on his most outrageous proposals. On the issue of Great Lakes drillings, Bush Press Secretary Ari Fleischer wouldn't let his boss become embroiled in yet another battle with environmentalists, saying, "There is nothing in the president's energy plan that deals with the Great Lakes. That's a state matter."

Fleischer, of course, is fully aware of Engler's pro-business, anti-environment proposals. Support for allowing the states to decide on this matter is support for drilling along the shores of the Great Lakes that granting drilling permits is a state matter.

We believe this is of national consequence and importance. The Great Lakes touch on eight states. If just one were prepared to act irresponsibly, as Michigan is apparently prepared to do, it would have a negative effect on the prosperity of those other states. Indeed, the Great Lakes future is an international matter, as we share the lakes with Ontario, Canada.

The U.S. House acted in the best interests of us all, now it is up to the Senate, the President and the governor of Michigan to do the same.



LETTERS

Vote them out

Once again, our current state government has stomped on the will of the people and rammed a spurious piece of legislation down our throats.

Completely disregarding the overwhelming opposition by a considerable majority of the people of Michigan, the bought-and-sold legislature put their mouths where the money is and passed the concealed weapons bill before them. Tellingly, they and their handlers took \$1,000,000 from the NRA (a group whose members comprise only about 1/50th of our national population) in a shameless bid to avoid a referendum and circumvent the voice of the voters.

They call themselves representatives, and it is clear who they represent. It is not you and me. Consider also the example of the deep injection well to store toxic wastes slated to be put in the Romulus area. Even after the residents vehemently objected, and state and federal government studies have determined that it is a bad idea, our governor has insisted that it will be built.

It should come as no surprise that the company building and operating the well has contributed substantially to Mr. Engler's campaign coffers. Just another example amongst the many blatant thumb-snoosings given to the good folks of our state by those who owe them their jobs. Our state judicial system is also rapidly becoming just another branch for partisan pandering.

The positions that were once decided on merit for the most part have become political payoffs for moneyed special interest groups, and the Supreme Court's infamous decision to uphold the legislature's end-run around the voters is clear proof of that. It's going to be a long time before they're able to gain back the respect and integrity they have squandered on this one.

I sincerely hope the next occupant of the governor's office, as well as the next legislature, regardless of their party, will take the huge "For Sale" sign off of the capital dome in Lansing. It's time for this travesty of democracy to come to an end. Think of your state as the "permit to carry" law a hot item and many candidates will say, "I told you so." A decrease in violence will hardly be noticed - only bad news makes headlines.

Hold them accountable for the innocent folks who will have to pay for our politicians' lack of spine. VOTE THE BUMS OUT!

Scott Stevenson
Farmington

Predictions

Michigan citizens applying for gun permits inspire many predictions:

Any controversy will escalate into a shoot-out. People will become polite to be safe. Rapists and robbers can't tell who is armed and may alter their behavior. Baggy clothes that conceal weapons won't appeal to the young.

A year from now the results will be known. An increase in violence will make the "permit to carry" law a hot item and many candidates will say, "I told you so." A decrease in violence will hardly be noticed - only bad news makes headlines.

I predict this will fade away and no apologies will be offered.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

Supports petitions

By one vote (4 to 3), the Michigan Supreme Court has effectively removed from the people the constitutional right to petition for a referendum. The split decision removes from the people and the Michigan Constitution Article II, Section 9 which states: The people reserve to themselves the power to propose laws and to enact and reject laws enacted by the legislature, called the referendum.

The referendum issue before the court dealt with the desire of the people to subject legislation to a vote which opens up the issuance of concealed weapons to practically anyone who asks for one even if local police authorities determine that certain applicants should not be granted such a permit because it would pose a threat to public safety.

If there ever was a bill that should be subject to referendum, it was this one, which opens up the issuance of concealed weapons permits to an estimated 200,000 more Michigan residents and the subsequent addition of that many more guns to the state's already vast arsenal of the lethal weapons.

The bill was snuck through the Michigan Legislature in the darkness of night during a rump, lame-duck session without public input nor public notice. Action had been proposed during the regular session because it was an election year and the incumbents did not want to vote on it for fear that it could cost them their re-election. Many of the lawmakers who voted for the bill were themselves lame ducks who were not coming back in January and therefore were acting without any mandate from the voters.

The bill poses such a threat to public safety that it has engendered opposition from police organizations, prosecuting attorneys and sheriffs throughout the state. Our Oakland County sheriff has said that he will resign from the gun board rather than issue a concealed weapons permit to anyone who walks in the door.

Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer, who is president of the Michigan Association of Police Chiefs, is 100-percent opposed to the measure and to the supreme court decision. He sees the new law as presenting a significant threat not only to the public but also to police officers, who can't be sure when responding to a house call that the person who answers the door won't pull out a concealed weapon and start to shoot.

I was active in gathering petition signatures in the Farmington area for the sponsoring organization People Who Care About Kids. We had some 100 volunteers circulating the petitions, and they gathered some 5,000 signatures. It was the easiest petition drive I have ever participated in. Nine out of ten people asked ended up signing indicating the overwhelming opposition to this law.

The Michigan Supreme Court may have thrown out the right to referendum in the Michigan Constitution, but we still have the right to initiate legislation. I will be supporting coming back with an initiative petition that will call for protecting our children, adults and especially police from a bill that is so bad that it had to be passed through in the dark of the night during a lame-duck session.

Aldo Vagnozzi
Farmington Hills

Crime rates lower

In the July 5 Observer, Richard Dillard of the Michigan Coalition of Responsible Gun Owners says, "In the 31 states (that have 'shall issue' gun laws like the one that just took effect in Michigan)... there has been a precipitous reduction in violent crime." It should be noted that while violent crime dropped 11 percent in so-called "shall issue" states, it dropped 25 percent in states with strict CCW (carrying concealed weapons) laws. This is more than double the rate of decline in "shall issue" states.

I agree with Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer when he says, "The new law exposes the state's citizens to a greater potential of handgun violence." It needs to be repealed.

Margaret Schaeffer
Farmington Hills

CCWs and cows

In the "Afterthought" of the first July 5 editorial, the Farmington Observer talks about the "stupid" people who broke the legs of the Silver Dairy cow.

The editorial concludes with the following statement, "How can we end up on concealed weapons restrictions in a state where people would kneecap a concrete cow?"

Although I agree with the description of the cow vandals, I'm having a hard time following the Observer's connection to someone legally carrying a concealed weapon. Does exercising the 2nd amendment imply stupidity, with a propensity for concrete cow destruction? Is the Observer hoping its readers make that implication (based on the other July 5 editorial against the current CCW law)?

Jerry Smith
Farmington

Editor's Note: Mr. Smith initially received a private response to this letter, which he asked that we share with our readers. The Afterthought, which was written tongue-in-cheek, was not meant to imply anyone who would own a weapon is stupid or would kneecap a cow. Our line of thinking was more that the new concealed carry permit law doesn't provide protection against anyone crazy enough to commit such a senseless and stupid crime, unless the person had been formally diagnosed with a mental illness.

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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