

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.

Ask the right questions

While the seven Farmington Hills city council candidates have been fairly quiet (dog parks notwithstanding), the clash of swords can already be heard in the Hills mayoral contest.

Incumbent Nancy Bates and Ron Oliverio, in his second bid for public office, appear headed for a battle royale. Whatever civility they achieve won't mask their widely divergent opinions on a variety of issues, including but not limited to the city's youth programs and the responsibilities of local government.

No doubt mud will be flung in both directions, if not by candidates then by those who support them. Emotions run high, as they often do in local races. (Farmington voters get a break; only the incumbents filed.)

We urge everyone to let cooler heads prevail, because voters won't get the full picture without calm discourse.

In the coming weeks, you'll meet the candidates. While there are a couple of "hot" issues, we'd like to suggest a few questions to ask the people who want a shot at managing the communities in which you live:

■ What are your priorities for spending the city's tax dollars?

■ What items, programs or projects (if any) do you think ought to be reduced or eliminated from the city's budget? What services are needed that aren't being provided?

■ Should the city be held financially liable when sewers back up into residents' homes?

■ Do you feel the city's spending on police and fire protection is appropriate,

too much or too little?

■ What would you do to encourage redevelopment in older areas of the city?

■ How would you make city government more responsive to citizens?

This is generally the time of year when accusations fly like so many piles of autumn leaves. It's easy to get buried in them, to focus on the voices of dissension, to re-examine old wounds.

But the questions that really matter have more to do with how these folks want to spend the money you're shelling out and where their priorities lie when it comes to your city's future.

You know the answers to questions like "Are you fiscally conservative or a liberal spender?" or "Do you value open government?" Those are no-brainers. No one is going to come out in favor of closing meetings or tossing tax dollars about willy-nilly.

That's why we urge voters to press candidates for specifics. Don't settle for general, feel-good answers. Passion and enthusiasm are wonderful qualities, but no substitute for knowledge, understanding and a willingness to persevere.

Voting in any election is an important duty, but when the result strikes this close to home, it's even more vital to make an informed decision.

Don't worry about who's throwing bombs, folks. We expect both sides will, even if the candidates themselves stay calm.

Focus your attention on what's being said after all the explosions. Chances are, it'll be a great deal closer to the truth.

Make way for a dog park

While the ersatz dog park at North Farmington High School may be closing, the debate over where residents with pooches should be allowed to walk their dogs has only just begun.

City officials — some of whom have pets and all of whom are decent, compassionate people — and pet owners have been measuring this issue in dollars and cents. Council members balk at the cost and liability involved in maintaining a park where dogs may congregate, tax-paying dog owners argue the checks they write ought to entitle them to use parks with ALL members of their families.

But isn't this more a public policy issue? The heart of this debate is whether city officials should shoulder the responsibility for providing facilities and services for every group of citizens, from pet owners to parents.

Farmington Hills appears well on its way, with after-school programs, an ice arena, ball fields, a soccer complex, a public swimming pool and athletic gym, parks with cross-country ski and hiking trails, a nature center, a center for senior citizens and a new art gallery.

It could be argued all these programs have a well-defined public benefit. So does a dog park.

Frankly, we'd like to see the city provide a place for the Rover and Spots of this community to run free. Responsible pet owners deserve the chance to prove themselves, instead of being judged by the actions of those who don't care.

Maybe it'll mean upping the cost for a dog license to defray costs, but wouldn't pet owners gladly foot that bill?

We urge officials to continue working cooperatively with pooch owners to resolve this issue.

Muslims from those who advocate and wage terrorist attacks. The Detroit Metro area has a large Arab-American population. They are hard working, devoutly religious and patriotic citizens.

And despite disturbing scenes of violence against Palestinians, their leader Yasser Arafat was visibly shaken by the events and the majority of leaders in Islamic communities vigorously condemned the acts.

We are reminded of the hysteria that followed the attack of Pearl Harbor that led to the Japanese-American internment and the internment of Japanese-Americans. We must never repeat that mistake. And we also must guard against personal attacks on our fellow citizens.

This awful event raises many questions about our intelligence and security capabilities. It will be weeks and possibly months before we can sort out what went wrong.

While we act to increase security to prevent these kind of terrorist attacks in the future, we must guard against surrendering too many of our civil liberties. Quick polls were willing to give up some of our freedom to prevent terrorism. But if we allow ourselves to be cowed by terrorism and sacrifice those freedoms of movement and expression that are uniquely American, then terrorism will have won a stunning victory.

Now it remains for this country to determine with absolute assurance who was behind these heinous acts and to pursue justice to the ends of earth, even as the president has said to those who knowingly harbor such monsters.

It is for all of us to join together as a united country and to go forward as free Americans.

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Forward as free Americans

Sept. 11, 2001.

This date will burn in our collective memory forever. On this date we learned how vulnerable we are to the irrational savagery of terrorism. On this date we experienced the fear that has gripped so much of the rest of the world for so long. On this date we learned the price of freedom and the burden of world leadership.

The carefully planned and precisely executed attack on the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center and on the Pentagon was in the words of President George W. Bush, the work of "faceless cowards." It was a premeditated assault on the economic and military power of the United States.

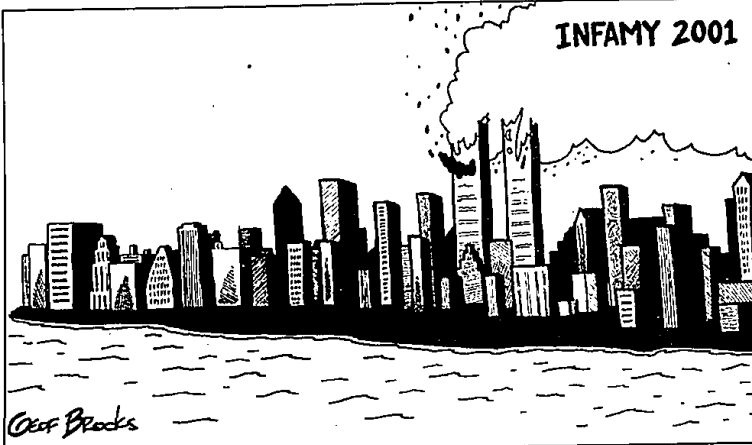
Across the Detroit area and the nation, we watched in numb disbelief. Even the example of what happened in Oklahoma City could not prepare us for the magnitude and audacity of this evil act.

But out of evil we saw great evidence of the heroism, generosity and fortitude of the American people. Early reports are that more than 300 New York firefighters and police officers lost their lives in an attempt to save those trapped in the towers. Thousands of volunteers from metro New York offered their help, so many that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani had to ask them to let the professionals continue the grim duty.

Across Metro Detroit and the nation, thousands of people lined up to give blood, so many that the American Red Cross is asking that donors wait until next week to make a donation. The University of Michigan Medical Center and Detroit Medical Center are prepared to send specially trained medical help.

But terrorism has a rippling effect. Long after the initial act, it leaves fear, anger and mistrust.

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LETTERS

■ Vote yes on millage

On Tuesday, Sept. 25, voters in Oakland County will be asked to decide critical special education and vocational education issues. As advocates for excellence in education, we strongly urge you to join us in voting yes on these issues.

As special education costs continue to rise at an average rate of 9 percent per year, funding for these programs have not. By voting yes on this ballot question, Farmington would receive more than \$3.5 million. This will offset the recent \$3.2 million budget reduction the Farmington Public Schools experienced this spring. Our excellent special education programs would be maintained and education funds would be restored to general education programs that benefit all students.

In order to develop advanced career preparation programs in Farmington, and to upgrade Oakland Technical Centers, we urge a yes vote on the vocational education issue. Did you know that we have never had an increase in Oakland County for vocational education? It is difficult to prepare 21st century students for the world on 1967 dollars. This millage would also aid in fostering partnerships between Farmington and other Oakland County schools.

We all want our children to become productive members of society. This millage will help to achieve this goal for a cost of less than 25 cents a day for a home with a market value of \$125,000.

Please vote yes on both ballot questions Tuesday, Sept. 25.

Angie Smith
Vice-president Farmington, PTA Council; Kimberly Heath
Legislative Chairperson
Farmington PTA Council

■ Thanks for lunch

I would like to thank Fire Chief Marinucci on behalf of my grandson for the great tour and birthday party we had with the Farmington Hills Fire Department on Aug. 16.

We were the successful bidder for a party for eight at the station house at the Annual Stoppingstone Auction this past Spring. Not only was everyone at the station wonderful but the kids have a new and higher regard for the firemen and their jobs.

The ride in the fire truck around Farmington Hills was the final and best touch, that is after having lunch with the chief, of course. Thanks.

Carol Levitt
Farmington Hills

■ Dog park funding

This letter is in response to Denise Moll's Sept. 6 editorial on the makeshift dog park at North Farmington High School.

One of her primary arguments against this activity is that her tax dollars are inadvertently supporting this use of public property. As a dog owner that lives in this community of many parks, of which none permit dogs, even on a leash, I can appreciate concern over public funds.

My wife and I view our pet as a member of the family. As such, we seek out activities that foster the dog's well-being. Socialization with other dogs has helped us to rear a well-behaved and very happy pet. An inquiry to any vet will confirm that when a dog is acclimated to other dogs they are less aggressive, less likely to bark when encountering a new dog and, in general, a healthier animal.

Would we prefer to visit an established dog park in Farmington Hills as opposed to using the soccer field on

Sundays? Absolutely. But the reality thus far is that our esteemed Mayor and City Council have behaved as though they do not share our view of the importance of such a park.

The recent public discourse on setting aside land for a dog park has increased awareness over the current soccer field use. As such, the number of dogs present on Sunday mornings has nearly tripled. Perhaps this is a very tangible sign that interest exists in our community for a dog park?

This issue has come up several times in recent years, but lacking critical mass, dog owners have been easily brushed aside or placated with platitudes from City Council. No more.

If the current efforts to elect new members to City Council that support a dog park fail, we will repeat the whole process until we are satisfied with the end result.

Randall Foutch
Farmington Hills

■ Fields for athletes

I continue to be amazed that people of good conscience, and otherwise

upstanding citizens, would leverage the health and well being of our children merely to further their cause for a dog park.

I, too, am a dog owner. I am also a coach, a jogger, a referee, a girls soccer team booster club member, and a parent of three daughters who use the athletic facilities at North Farmington High School.

As a booster club member, I have volunteered for the past three years to assist the game officials, serving as the scorer for North Farmington girls soccer matches. On three separate occasions, I have been approached by the players and coaches of visiting teams advising that their players have fallen onto dog feces.

Setting aside the significant health issues associated with these incidents, this is certainly not the memorable experience that North Farmington High School, the Farmington Public School District, or the City of Farmington Hills would like to advertise to visitors of our pleasant community.

My daughters and I often jog around the track and the athletic fields of North Farmington. I have met several of the pet owners who frequent the athletic fields. Generally, the owners are friendly and genuinely try to pick up after their dogs. However, far too many make no attempt to clean up.

On far too many occasions I have unexpectedly encountered dogs and their owners at night, in the dark, running free on the fields. There was no way to even see the dogs in the dark of night, let alone keep track of the animals, or clean up after them.

Any person who asserts that merely picking up the majority of the dog feces is satisfactory, should demonstrate their conviction by rolling around in the subject area and placing their hands and face in the residual area. If you are unwilling to make the demonstration, then how can you ask your neighbor's children to do the same.

In all my discussions with parents of children who attend North Farmington, and those parents whose children use the athletic fields, I have received an unequivocal response that they do not want their children playing on fields with dog feces. Moreover, Superintendent C. Robert Maxfield has clearly stated the position of the Farmington School District that the fields are not to be used formally or informally as a dog park.

I would hope that the good conscience of the dog owners, and their concerns for the welfare of our children will prevail.

Ed Hogan
Farmington Hills

■ Bates is gracious

Nancy Bates is a very non-combative and gracious mayor. When I watch her on television I marvel at her patience with some citizens who are rude and obnoxious.

So, I was surprised to read the other candidate for mayor said or implied the mayor said that he was a "bomb thrower." When I went back to read the article in question, all she said in that article was that she was not a "bomb thrower." Someone might want to tell her opponent (candidate Ron Oliverio) that everything isn't about him.

The Mayor has a right to describe her style of leadership. She offers stable, thoughtful and respectful leadership and, she is correct, she is not a "bomb thrower." For her opponent to say that what she said means he is a "bomb thrower" is immature and pathetic.

It is more like someone trying to stir up controversy and mislead the voters. His own letter tells us more about him than anything the mayor said, or in this case, did not say.

Judy Antishin
Farmington Hills

■ Protect Great Lakes

I have been working to protect our Great Lakes from directional oil and gas drilling for several years and have introduced bills to ban this practice. Unfortunately, despite the overwhelming public support for a ban, the Republican majority of the Michigan Legislature has refused to consider this legislation.

On Sept. 13-14, the fight to protect our Great Lakes takes a major turn. The Natural Resources Commission will be holding a public hearing on this issue and will likely vote on whether to once again lease our lake's bottomlands for oil and gas exploration.

I hope your readers will contact the commission and urge them not to issue new leases or drilling permits. For more information on this matter, contact my office at (888) 2PETERS or e-mail me at SenGPeters@state.state.mi.us

Gary C. Peters
Vice Chairman
Senate Natural Resources Committee

Share your opinions

We welcome 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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