Hills City Council

Incumbent, challengers speak to the issues

Randy Bruce

Randy Bruce says he's got ideas, drive and experience to bring to the Farmington Hills city council.

Randy Bruce

The Hills Zoning Board of Appeals chairman said, "I promise I will be absolutely fair and open and honest as I can be. And I will put forth the ideas, the energy, and the creativity.

"I don't think you should show up to council meetings once a week and vote; that's not even a minimum commitment," said Bruce.

He has served on the zoning board of appeals for more than six years, and became chairman a year and a half ago. "I'm very interested in how development and redevelopment occurred in the city."

"We're 90 percent developed; everything's redevelopment. It has to be handled in a way that makes sense with existing areas.

"I'm also about making council open," he said. "I think you need seven independent thinkers. They've been too enmeshed with each other. They're less likely to challenge one another's ideas."

Bruce said he went to council to get permission for televising zoning board meetings, giving residents an opportunity to look in on meetings. But he said council turned him down, citing cost. He said they were also unenthusiastic.

The candidate favors developing a comprehensive sidewalk program "and looking at other ways to improve the quality of services in this city, looking to see if we can make city services more efficient so we can keep our tax rates as low as possible."

"With the increased assessments you have people that have been here 33 years on fixed incomes that are really struggling. We have to see what we can do to help," Bruce said.

Bruce said his experience as ZBA chairman has uniquely prepared him for city council. "You see us (ZBA) battle over every issue and we sometimes get very passionate," he said, adding the board members are still civil and respectful of colleagues' opinions.

To seek consensus, "I try to explain things as clearly as I can. It's being vocal, but not hostile, angry or negative. You must always try to understand the other person's point of view. It's not getting up there and belittling other people," he said.

"With my background and experience I have the necessary tools to make a contribution."

Jerry Ellis

Incumbent Farmington Hills councilman Jerry Ellis said he has helped the city make solid progress.

A lawyer specializing in commercial law, Ellis was appointed to the parks and recreation commission after his private baseball group sought better fields. Working with a coalition of softball and baseball parents, Ellis said he helped secure more than $4 million in grants for land acquisition to improve and expand ballfields.

Jerry Ellis

As a councilman, he met with an FCC official in Washington to get information that resulted in an ordinance to keep cell towers out of residential neighborhoods.

"I generally look at the facts, and try and make a well-reasoned decision that will influence my fellow council people. We have been able in the five years I've been on council to build a consensus on most issues. We don't always start out on the same page, but we talk our way through it and try and come to a reasonable conclusion.

"The more you communicate, the greater chance you resolve an issue. As a lawyer I learned a settlement is better than continuing litigation," Ellis said.

On the 11 Pines golf course expansion, "I think we've done a phenomenal job," he said. "We spotted the opportunity when a developer came to us and said he wanted to build an industrial park there."

Instead, the city bought the land to expand the golf course, and to keep out industrial development which would have generated significant traffic.

Ellis said that voters have supported several park millages that included setting aside funds for a golf course expansion. "Now we're trying to fulfill the commitment."

He said preliminary action to develop the "Triangle Project" at 14 Mile Road and Northwestern is promising, as the city has finally found a developer willing to spend money on sewers and roads in the area – in contrast to requests for city funding made by earlier developers.

"I try and be a creative thinker who'll get together with people and get the job done rather than fight. I just want to make sure the community works well, with a high level of services," Ellis said.

While some challengers claim council is secretive and not open enough, Ellis said, "Would they rather have us like Southfield, fighting like cats and dogs and calling each other names?

"One of the things I've appreciated is we have these study sessions. The study sessions are open, they're not on television, they're more informal. We get a lot of questions out. We always comply with the Open Meetings Act."

Jess Elson

Jess Elson says he'll bring leadership and business experience to the Farmington Hills city council, and a desire to listen closely to residents.

"I work for the people. If I'm on council, I still have a boss and that is the people who live here, the people who pay taxes. I have an open mind and I would be working on their behalf," he said.

Elson, owner of Brad's Ads Inc., a promotional products firm, is also president of the Michigan Promotional Products Association. He has served on that group's board of directors for 10 years.

"Through my business dealings I've had the opportunity to work with small businesses, large businesses, and deal with all types of people in all types of environments."

Jess Elson

Asked why he's running," Elson said, "I have issues on how I was treated as a citizen by the city council."

Elson said a primary concern of his Old Kendallwood Subdivision neighbors is sewers.

"I find that our sewer system is very obsolete. There is standing water long after rain – something the city is aware of but nothing gets done. They just seem to be passing that by."

Elson said the city council was similarly not helpful when he presented a request on behalf of city dog owners for a dog park.

"They told me to come up with the property, the cost of fencing, they said do all the leg work. They said there wasn't a need or desire, but there's 4,000 registered dog owners in Farmington Hills and I'm sure there are quite a few that aren't registered. Dogs need exercise. Socializing makes dogs friendlier.

"I just felt they threw everything back to the citizen's hands," Elson said, adding his impression was they were hoping he'd go away. "If it's not a project they're involved in or want to be involved in, it's 'Go away, leave me alone.'"

He supports revisiting the proposed 11 Pines project, to determine whether a golf course expansion is what people really want. Spending for the project should also be reviewed.

To make things happen on council, "You have to know what you're talking about and explain to everyone so they understand the benefits," he said. "The real concern is: Is it going to be for the benefit of the city?"

Profiles of challengers Ken Massey and Robert Monroe Webster and incumbents Cheryl Oliverio and Jon Grant will be published Sunday.

staff photos by Bill Bresler

Residents urged to clear leaves

While blustery wind and rain caused power outages Tuesday in some Oakland County communities, only intermittent power outages were reported in Farmington Hills.

Public Services Director Tom Biasell reported Wednesday, "We're in great shape." Biasell said some flooding was caused by leaves blocking catch basins. He added that Halsted Road was closed after the storm until late Wednesday just south of 14 Mile Road, "because that's a swamp right there."

He encouraged residents to rake accumulated leaves from catch basins.

CAMPUS PIPELINE

EASTERN DEAN'S

Daniel Robin, son of Susan and Neal Robin of Farmington Hills, was on the dean's list first and second semester of the 2000-2001 school year at Eastern Michigan University. He was also chosen to participate in a leadership training program.

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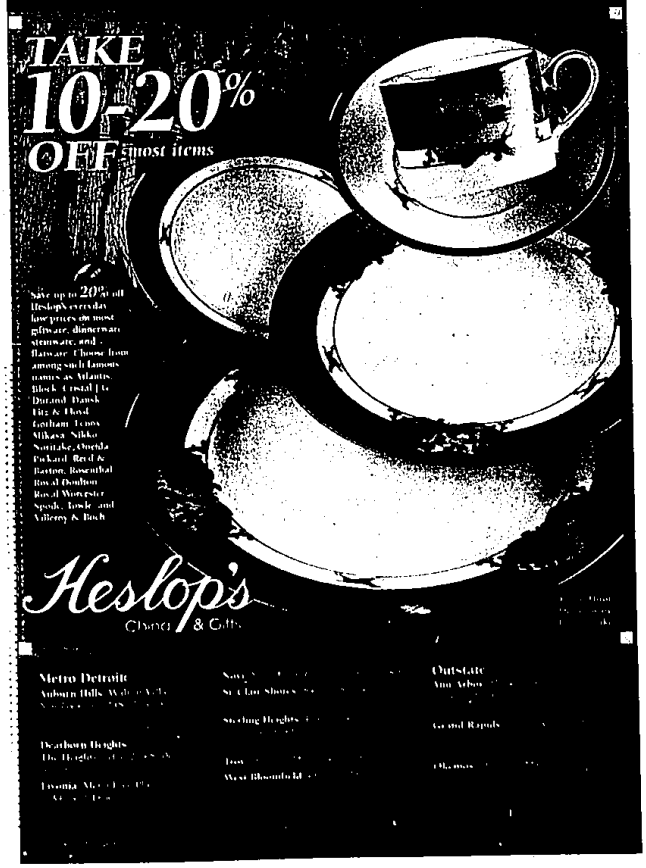

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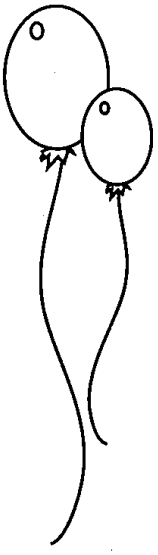

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