

OUR VIEWS

Road less traveled makes the difference

The Farmington Downtown Development Authority and downtown merchants today stand at a critical crossroads. The opportunity presented at this point in time is priceless: A new executive director with fresh ideas will meet a group of downtown merchants eager and ready to dig in with promotional ideas designed to improve foot traffic. There's the potential for a Main Street grant that would provide even more resources to build a vital, thriving downtown business district.

Everybody has to be on the same page for this to happen. And we're here to tell you, that's not the case right now.

City manager Frank Lauffohr and city council member Mike Harrison seem upset, almost angry, with merchants who have spoken their minds. Some DDA board members have postured in the defensive. Bill Richards, assistant city manager and consultant for the hiring process, has all but washed his hands of the whole situation. Downtown merchants feel alienated, admittedly because of their own failure to get involved in years past. They're suspicious of the DDA's closed hiring process and instead of working within the system, used the Freedom of Information Act to batter ram to open the door.

Today, this is how things stand: Three of the final 10 applicants have withdrawn over the controversy; the DDA will have to spend thousands on a professional search firm and merchants are really no closer to being part of a process in which they would like to become deeply invested. It's time to stop talking about what should have been done, and saying "Can't we all just get along?" isn't enough. Complex, historic issues are driving this situation, issues that can't be resolved in a day or a week or a month.

Still, on Wednesday morning, voices converged in these points:

■ Everyone wants to do what's in the best interests of downtown Farmington.

■ Everyone recognizes trust issues exist between merchants and the DDA board.

■ Everyone knows the future of downtown Farmington depends on volunteer efforts by folks who already work 20 hours a day just trying to keep their businesses afloat.

It would be simple for both sides to continue down the path of blame and fault-finding, creating an enmesh that will block progress for years to come. Inaction, after all, is the path of least resistance. Instead at this crossroads, we urge the DDA and merchants to choose the road less traveled, beginning the dialogue where everyone agrees. For those already involved and for the entire community, it will make all the difference.

School year starts, our hopes are high

A perfect school year may be just so much wishful thinking. Still, there are things we wish for students to be exposed to, helping to make them well-rounded lifelong learners.

First is awareness of the joys of pleasure reading. Reading for school assignments can pile up and make pleasure reading difficult, but teachers know that students who read for fun do better academically. Pleasure reading can run the gamut, from the quick and easy to the thoughtful and challenging. The point is simply to get into the habit of reading for enjoyment. Learning will follow.

Second is exposure to the world of work. Vocational courses are excellent in our local school districts and expose students to the world of work. Whether a student is college-bound or headed directly to the workplace upon graduation, a thorough understanding of the world of work helps.

Student jobs can be part of this learning process, but shouldn't require so many hours of student time and energy that school performance suffers.

Third is exposure to the world of physical fitness. Few of us will become pro quarterbacks or Olympic gymnasts, but we all need some basic physical fitness to live in good health.

A Latin phrase, "Mens sana in corpore sano," says it well: "A sound mind in a sound body." Learning and enjoyment of life are enhanced when one is in decent physical shape.

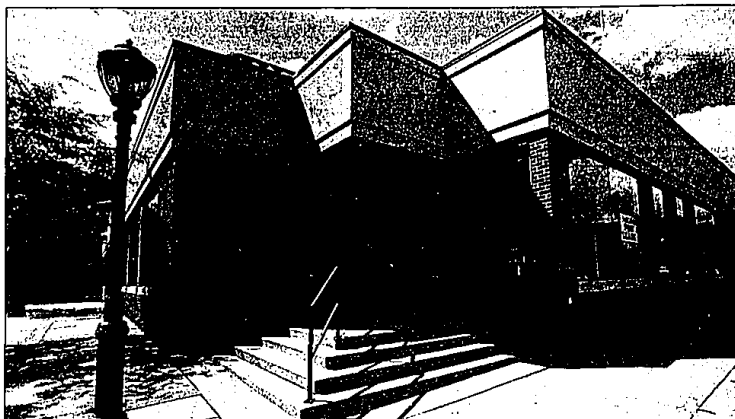
Fourth is community involvement in the learning process. Opportunities such as chamber of commerce job shadowing pop up during the school year. Business people can take advantage of these and learn more about local educational efforts in the process.

Such efforts can be a great way to line up future employees, too, along with helping business people to realize they're getting something in return for tax dollars invested in education.

Fifth is a realization that students learn differently, and not all will perform optimally on standardized tests. It can be difficult for a classroom teacher to individualize instruction, but we all need to remember that young people aren't robots and can't be expected to learn as such.

Last but not least is a hope that all students will glean an awareness of the joys of learning both inside and outside the classroom. In time, knowledge of history timelines will fade, but ideally lifelong learners will remember how to find information when it's needed or wanted.

Along with that, we hope all students will find time for friendships in school. Classroom instruction may be mostly a distant memory when you're at your 25-year reunion, but the lasting friendships won't be. Students who have good friends in middle life, can access information readily and have learned to care about their communities are a treasure beyond words.



BILL BRESLER/OBSERVER

One of the biggest challenges faced by the new Downtown Development Authority director will be helping to fill vacant storefronts like this one at Shae Carnival.

LETTERS

Bilzman backs Brady

I want to extend my congratulations to Jim Brady on his privacy win in the race for the 47th District Court.

He conducted himself as a judicial candidate with dignity, fairness, and respect for the office which he seeks. He is a credit to the legal profession and deserves the Outstanding rating he received from the Oakland County Bar Association Public Advisory Committee.

I will be supporting him for Judge of the 47th District Court on November 5, 2002. I urge my supporters to join me in working for his election.

I want to thank all of my campaign staff and volunteers, friends and family for their unstinting support during my campaign. They were the best and have my gratitude.

I also want to thank all of the voters of Farmington and Farmington Hills who voted for me on Tuesday, August 6. I will continue to serve my community in a manner that expresses my appreciation for their trust and confidence.

Paul Bilzman
Farmington Hills

City says thanks

On behalf of the Farmington City Manager's Office, we would like to personally thank the anonymous person that donated the signed book

Brotherhood to Farmington City Hall. This beautifully photographed and documented book was created as a tribute to New York firefighters after 9-11 and includes all the firefighters that lost members and their names. It will be on display in the Clerk/Treasurer's Office, 23600 Liberty St., Farmington.

City of Farmington
Administration and Staff

Knollenberg Thanks

I want to extend my gratitude to all the voters in the Ninth Congressional District who voted for me in the August 6 primary. It is an honor to once again be nominated to serve Oakland County in Congress.

I look forward to a fall campaign focused on the issues that matter to you—improving our homeland security, winning the war on terrorism, strengthening our economy, adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, and protecting Social Security for the future without raising taxes, cutting benefits, raising the retirement age, or privatizing the system.

You'll see me in every part of the Ninth District in the days and weeks to come. I am anxious to see old friends and meet new faces. And I am committed to proving to the voters that I am the best person to represent you in Washington, D.C.

I'll see you on the campaign trail.
Congressman Joe Knollenberg

Farewell to Donohue

Recently, the City of Farmington lost a lot more than our long-time city attorney — we lost a dear friend, John Donohue. Though John's legal shoes will be hard enough to fill, there's this big

hole in our hearts that needs time to heal first.

Much of John's professional life is well known in the legal community. He was widely respected as a municipal advocate. His knowledge of water quality related environmental law is surpassed, and will likely remain so far into the future.

John's expertise in this area alone will be greatly missed, even by those outside Farmington who will never know how influential he was in keeping the perspective of communities, citizens and taxpayers before the Courts.

The Farmington City Council, administration and staff will miss John's legal advice and steadiness when dealing with complex, challenging issues. But more than anything else, we will miss John himself, his unique sense of humor and infectious smile.

At his memorial service, the theme of "God, Country and Notre Dame" was selected to commemorate John's life. With deepest respect, we would like to add the following indispensable relationships in the life of John M. Donohue: Faithful husband, doting father, inspirational colleague, trusted counselor, and first-class friend.

Farewell good friend,
Farmington City Council,
Administration and Staff

Wake up

What will it take for this region to wake up to the facts concerning the wasting of public money and natural resources?

We continue to allow and promote land developments without a regional (or state) master plan. As we miss the big picture and continue duplicating costly infrastructure to support our undisciplined land development.

Citizens, government leaders and developers all share equally in the blame. We talk of and laud community, family, traditional values, the way it was, urban renewal, conservation and preservation of historic districts. Then we turn around we look for a new home on a larger piece of land further out so we can live the ideal country life.

There are three major public policy problems that are promoting this insane duplicity.

1. "Home Rule" which allows each individual municipality to be a short-sighted maverick competing with its neighbors for stores, jobs and citizens. No one seems to notice that we already have the land, houses and infrastructure needed in an already existing city right next door. Home rule needs to be amended to require and reward teamwork and regional planning.

2. State revenue sharing that is based on the population growth rate rather than on existing population and needs is rewarding newer sprawling cities that are greedy for population and business growth. The older cities have existing roads, sewers, water and other systems which can support development/redevelopment, but also require maintenance.

Maintaining existing infrastructure is much less expensive than building new, but the public is forced to cover the cost of new systems for developments in more distant areas. Developers should

be responsible for these costs, since they profit from them.

3. Under Prop. A, older communities have a cap on needed tax revenue because of more older existing homes. Newer cities can tax the numerous big new homes at the higher current market values. Older denser cities and suburbs are at disadvantage even though they have much higher costs of maintaining existing services.

4. Michigan is only getting back 70% of the money we send to Washington do to poor work by our representatives. We are losing \$100 million every year in federal transportation funds because we do not have a regional transit plan.

5. We continue to fund new road projects which do not relieve traffic congestion, but instead promote more "rural-ban" sprawl and kill quiet historic towns turning them into new congested Novis. A new five mile stretch of highway can cost the public \$100 million, while putting in a fast, clean, convenient commuter rail service on existing tracks between North Oakland County and Detroit would cost about \$80 million and could take 300 drivers per train off the overcrowded roads.

A true conservative should see how reasonable these moves toward good stewardship are. The thoughtless and competitive lust for more and more may look efficient on the surface, but in the long run it is costing us greatly.

Barry Malek, Transportation Rider
United member
Farmington Hills

Sir Loophole

Once upon a time, David Bonior was Sir Lancelot who battled to save Camelot from the evil giants. Then, campaigning for Governor, he took \$990,000 of taxpayers' money, promising to cap his spending at \$2 million. But Bonior found a loophole.

The St. Clair County Democrat Committee does not have to make financial reports as long as it does not advocate a vote for one candidate or against another.

So, it bolstered Bonior's spending with \$1.4 million of "issue ads" slamming Granholm. Bonior is no longer Sir Lancelot. He is Sir Loophole.

Cortland Rook
Farmington Hills

SHARE YOUR OPINIONS

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your 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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QUOTABLE

'Even if what they are doing...doesn't violate the Open Meetings Act, it's bad form to keep all this a secret and puts a bad taste in all the merchants' mouths.'

Business owner Becky Burns on the DDA's closed hiring process

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