

ZBA members want suit over sign Youth Assistance to honor volunteers

**BY PAUL R. PACE
STAFF WRITER**

Farmington Hills Zoning Board of Appeals members want the public to know they're not the bad guys in the debate over Harrison High Schools new message sign.

Three ZBA members appeared before the council Monday to voice their dissatisfaction in how administration at the high school ordered, installed and dedicated a message sign that did not meet ZBA approval.

ZBA member Randy Bruce told the council that board members are miffed the school ordered an "illegal" sign after four years of negotiations.

"To have them order a \$28,000 sign without our approval" sign without our approval" sign without our approval" he said, adding the last-minute action does not set a good example to children about following rules.

The major issue is the red lettering in the electronic message board. The ZBA requested the lettering be white on black and that it only run at certain times, to avoid distracting motorists who travel along 12 Mile.

"We did everything we could and (Dennis Noe, an assistant principal at the school) broke all the agreements within the final hour," Bruce said.

He suggested the city sue the school district or take the issue to Lansing and push for new laws where local government has control over school zoning.

The council said schools and places of worship are not restricted under local zoning ordinance, but are governed only by the state's building code. That issue was further defined in a 2001 lawsuit involving Northville Public Schools.

Council members held off on any immediate action, with Mayor Nancy Bates suggesting the city attorney look into what actions are available to the city in gaining local control in such cases.

She also suggested administration investigate whether red lettering and the speed by which the message is delivered was an issue to motorists safety.

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett said the sign issue started with Harrison parents wanting a way to promote events at the school.

"Through a long effort they (boosters) raised the money," she said.

Mr. Noe simply went ahead and did what the parents told him to do, she said. "...Schools don't have to operate under our zoning."

Council Pro-Tem Christopher McRae said allowing the city council in school and church zoning is a positive step.

"Just because people are novices shouldn't let them off the hook," he said of the school installing the sign.

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On Monday, Oct. 28, 70 volunteers from the Farmington/Farmington Hills communities will be honored at the 43rd Annual Youth Assistance recognition hosted at Glen Oaks Country Club.

The event is sponsored by Akosono of Farmington Hills. This event is a way for Farmington Youth Assistance to say "Thank-You" to all of their dedicated volunteers for their willingness to give back to the community, and to help strengthen the youth of the Farmington/Farmington Hills area.

The Farmington Youth Assistance Board and its many volunteers have given over 2,500 volunteer hours to many worthwhile programs such as Mentor's PLUS, Family Education, Summer Activities Center, Camp Scholarships, Youth Recognition, Skillbuilding, After-School Tutoring and other community meetings.

The Annual Breakfast Committee is chaired by Farmington Hills Mayor Pro

Tem Christopher McRae. He will serve as the host as he introduces various state, city and school dignitaries such as Congressman Joe Knollnerberg, Mayor Nancy Bates of Farmington Hills, Mayor James K. Mitchell of Farmington, Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Robert C. Maxfield, State Representative Andrew Raczkowski, Oakland County Commissioner David L. Moffitt, Sheriff Michael Bouchard of Oakland County, and the Chief of Oakland County Youth Assistance Kalvin Engelberg.

Farmington Youth Assistance Chairperson Sharon Vincent will present opening comments as well as introduce the 27 Board of Directors as they give a brief summary of their successful committees.

Farmington Youth Assistance volunteers have increased in numbers, and include 70 youth and adults committed to aid in the expansion of services to the community.

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