

# Mayor defends council's commitment

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington resident Walt Gajewski, who's been instrumental in fundraising for the downtown community pavilion project, asked what will be different this time, after Main Street officials delivered a report Thursday to the public.

The City of Farmington and the Farmington Downtown Development Authority recently received a three-year technical services grant which will provide expertise but no money.

Gajewski was part of the city's visioning process several years ago and wasn't happy that the ideas weren't brought forward.

"The visioning process had all those ideas, but for some reason they didn't materialize," Gajewski said. "They are not new ideas. What will be different this time to move them forward?"

"You will identify doable items and assign tasks to volunteers," responded Oakland County Main Street Planner Bob Donohue. "Accountability comes in. When you are part of a national program, you have

to follow a format. This defined structure will move it forward. There will be a lot of areas which will be monitored. Tasks will be assigned to volunteers serving on committees.

"What role will the City Council play?" Gajewski asked. He wondered if the Farmington City Council would "buy into" Main Street's suggestions and city administration play a key part. Donohue said. They make sure bylaws are followed and annually approve the DDA budget.

This is the community's downtown and not anybody else's," Donohue said. "The whole community has to reach consensus."

Gajewski, referred again to the multi-month work of the visioning committee that produced a pamphlet.

"I see a council member come forward and back either a strategy or an element of that plan and go forward and say, 'We are going to carry this.' Five years later I'm seeing a lot of the same things I saw five or six years ago. I would like to see council stand up and say, 'We're going to do this,' and maybe, I will vote for

you. If not, if you are just going to sit here and walk away from this and go back into the shadows which has been happening for the last five years, I'm really going to have to rethink about the people who ultimately have to buy into this thing because they make it happen."

Farmington Mayor Jim Mitchell angrily responded to Gajewski's comments about "buying-in" to the Main Street program. He resented Gajewski's comments and said he wouldn't stand for that representation of council members.

Mitchell apologized later in the meeting for his outburst, adding that everyone is passionate about the program. "We need to take small steps," Mitchell said.

The council works together, is committed and understands what needs to be done, Mitchell said.

He, personally, urged re-application to the Main Street Program when the city was turned down last year, Mitchell said.

"I specifically went to the meeting to get the Main Street grant," Mitchell said. Anna Mariani, owner of

Anna's Cafe and Baskets on Farmington Road, was the only merchant at that Main Street presentation. "The city was very enthusiastic," Mariani said.

Former DDA Executive Director Judy Downey, former Farmington City Manager Frank Luthoff, and former DDA board member Bob Heinrich also attended that meeting.

Carleigh Flaherty, executive director of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, was drawn to tears with the angry exchange. She's passionate about the Main Street process both as a resident and business advocate.

"It's unfortunate that it might have to end like this," Flaherty said. "We have new leaders taking action for our future. It's not about what happened five years ago. This is an entirely different process. This is about a community which is finally coming together saying, 'We have a future and we finally taking ownership.' This is a clean slate."

stuck@oe.home.com.net (248) 471-5450

# Merchants encouraged to use media coverage

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

The Main Street Program, which provides expert technical assistance to cities with downtowns produces proven good press, according to one Oakland County planning official.

"In just over two years, there have been over 350 stories in the media," said Bob Donohue, principal planner for downtown redevelopment for Oakland County. "There have been over 40 appearances on television and about 70 appearances over the radio," he said. Donohue made his comments as part of a resource team report provided by members following a three-day visit and interviews in the City of Farmington. Donohue spoke Thursday at Farmington City Hall.

"If our media folks here assigned a rate per column inch for an ad, that's over \$2 million worth of positive stories out of the six Main Street cities," Donohue said.

The City of Farmington and the Farmington Downtown Development Authority recently received the three-year grant along with the City of Pontiac. Both are starting the their work plans.

"You're part of this," Donohue told the crowd. "Your media has already picked up on it. Your media is one of your best friends. Those little steps make great stories. Celebrate those successes."

Donohue stressed that Brent Morgan, Farmington Downtown Development Authority Director, will be the

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point man for all discussions and told members of the Downtown Merchants Association to never have a meeting without also including Morgan.

"The merchants association meets at 8:45 a.m. Wednesday," said president Barbara Goins, owner of the Celtic Shamrock Stop on Grand River.

Speaking to the crowd who filled council chambers, Farmington City Councilman Mike Harrison hoped for continued interest and invited the public to come to speak during the public comment section of the Farmington City Council meetings the first and third Mondays of each month.

"By God, if we ever got a group in like this, I would love to hear what people had to say," Harrison said. "Unfortunately we have not had that kind of participation. I can only invite it."

Skip Rosenthal, owner of Books Aboard, expressed his appreciation. "It's given a very necessary shot in the arm at this time," he said.

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# Businesses suggest sign ordinance change

BY SUE BUCK  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington City Manager Vice Pastue will recommend Monday that Farmington City Council consider changing the sign ordinance.

Pastue thinks, for example, the new sign installed at John Cowleys & Sons is a modern example of a quality and attractive sign.

But, it's non conforming. "It's not permitted," he said.

Co-owner Greg Cowley, a newly-appointed member of the Farmington Downtown Development Authority board, didn't check before putting the sign up, Pastue said.

"He offered to take the sign down," Pastue said. Cowley will petition the city for a variance.

Cowley explained that to be

efficient, the contractor put the signs up when he was out of town in February. Identical signs are in the front and the back of the building. They required three men to lift with a cherry picker, he said.

"The signs were shipped overseas from Dublin," Cowley said.

They are a European blade-style sign. Together they cost \$10,000.

"If they want me to take them down, I'll take them down," Cowley said. "It looks like a lot of the merchants are looking for a change."

Cowley learned that Pastue has seen a need to change the sign ordinance for awhile.

"We want everybody to understand that blade signs are good," said Scott Ferres, a planner from the National Main Street program.

Cowley believes the sign provides needed visibility. He wants to catch the eye of the fast-moving Grand River motorist.

The Cowley sign and others were singled out during the meeting. In order to get away from the image that the downtown is a discount area it's helpful not to outright advertise a discount percentage as done on the large yellow and white Village Shoe Inn sign on Grand River, Ferres said.

Just as the city wants businesses to adhere to standards in the sign ordinance, Jeff Pavlik, co-owner of the Farmington Bakery, said the city needed to do the same last week with the marquee on the city-owned Civic Theater on Grand River. For the obvious lack of a needed Capital G in the movie, "Gods and

Generals," the city used a noticeably reduced sized G in Gods. The two movies offered required four Gs.

Go out and buy the fourth G and take the small g down," Pavlik said. "The city sets the standards. The city is a property owner."

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