

In Our Opinion . . .

'Public Notices' - They Don't Notify And The Public Can't Understand Them

The agenda of the Farmington Township Planning Commission couldn't have been more wrong. "Proper public notices have been given to these public hearing proceedings," the agenda said. Quite the opposite is true. While the Township Planning Commission's notices may possibly satisfy narrow legal requirements, they fall dismally to do their job—namely, to notify or inform the public. At the same time, these public notices cost money to publish, and the money is largely squandered.

In stalling out the Township Planning Commission for criticism, we're not picking out the township alone. The city is not immune from criticism; other townships produce bad legal notices. Rather, we point to Farmington Township's poorly prepared published notices because that unit is the largest in population in our area, and because its Planning Commission proceedings have generated considerable public interest.

The "public notices" have two general faults: They contain too much useless verbiage and omit some of the most important facts.

EACH NOTICE of a public hearing begins with mentioning a proposed change in "An Ordinance to amend Ordinance No. 29 of the Township of Farmington entitled:

"An Ordinance enacted under Act 184, Public Acts of 1943, as amended, governing the unincorporated portions of the Township of Farmington, Oakland County, Michigan, to regulate and restrict the location and use of buildings, structures and land for use, industry, residence and for public and semi-public or other specified uses; and to regulate and

limit the height and bulk of buildings and other structures; to regulate and to determine the size of yards, courts and open spaces; to regulate and limit the density of population; and for said purposes to divide the Township into districts and establishing the boundaries thereof, providing for changes in the regulations, restrictions and boundaries used herein; providing for enforcement; establishing a Board of Appeals; and imposing penalties for the violation of this Ordinance."

After reading it several times, we would conclude that this is a zoning ordinance; the notice never says so clearly, although the title consumes 128 words. A public notice, drafted with the idea of communicating rather than simply satisfying a lawyer's law, would find a more concise way of labelling the ordinance.

One particular notice describes an area proposed for a zoning change this way:

"T16B TIN, R9E, Section 1. Part of the SW1/4 beg. at Pt. dist. S 423-10 ft. from W 1/4 cor., then S 222.36 ft., th S 48 deg. 55 min. E 239.6 ft. . . ."

But it is useless to continue. It would take a colossal amount of arrogance to call this legal description a "public notice." Maybe a lawyer's notice; maybe a surveyor's notice; but never a public notice.

THE FACTS WHICH are of vital concern to the layman, the working stiff, the property owner are omitted from this so-called public notice.

Who owns the property? The owner? The planning commission? Some other governmental body? The notice doesn't say.

What's on the land now? Is it vacant? The notice doesn't say.

In the case in point, the property is Judge Benjamin Burdick's 4.82 acres at the northeast corner of Northwest Highway and Middlebelt, and the change to office zoning was proposed by the Township Board. The case has consumed many hours of public debate, many column inches of newspaper space and headlines, many hundreds of dollars in attorneys' fees. You would never know from the legal notice.

THE NOTICE SAYS you can drop over to the Township Hall "on any business day between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. and find out details."

Thus, if you have to visit the township hall to get the information that is vital to your economic interests and neighborhood welfare, the so-called public notice, which consumes 24 column inches of newspaper space, hasn't told you very much.

What commonly happens is that the information is conveyed by other means—by word of mouth or, more accurately, through the newspaper's news columns. The legal public notice is uncommunicative and, as currently used, a waste of public funds.

Let it not be said that we criticize without offering an alternative.

Our alternative is that the drafters of these notices should adopt an attitude of courtesy rather than legalistic showing-off; of wishing to inform people rather than complacently satisfying a lawyer's conceit by conveying facts rather than telling man to take time off work to visit the township hall.

The result would be a better informed public.

Mrs. Eicher Leaves School PR Post

Farmington schools will lose one of its good ambassadors with the resignation of Mrs. Marjorie Eicher effective April 15. For 24 years, she has been liaison person between the school district and the general public, interpreting each community to the other.

This is not always an easy assignment, for an academic organization has a tendency to be an enclave surrounded by citizens unaware of its peculiar needs and problems. Conversely, school personnel sometimes build up an insularity to the outer world and need a translator to explain its wide-ranging concerns.

Mrs. Eicher brought a new standard of excellence to the district's annual report on the schools. Her work in this field received recognition from the National School Public Relations Association.

The Michigan School Public Relations Association has also called upon Mrs. Eicher to be panel leader at their Lansing conference. She came to the school district from a journalistic background, having worked for newspapers in Detroit and Pontiac.

A family illness now calls a halt to her work. The public schools and the new superintendent, Dr. Roderick J. Smith, will do well to find a replacement. They will do particularly well to find one not only as competent but as cheerful as Marjorie Eicher.

Looking Back in the Files

8 Years Ago APRIL 12, 1962 Award for Enterprise The Farmington Enterprise was recipient during the past week of a special School Bell Award from the Michigan Education Association. Summer School Based on the number of questionnaires returned by parents expressing an interest in the summer education program proposed to be initiated by the Farmington public school system, Supt. G. V. Harrison expressed confidence that a limited program could be started this summer.	10 Years Ago APRIL 11, 1957 Zoning Protest Considerable objection was voiced at the Public Hearing Monday evening before the City Council on the proposed rezoning of a parcel of land at the southwest corner of Shawansee and Money Streets to allow for the construction of multiple dwelling units. Elm Spraying A total of 325 trees located on city-owned property will receive the first application of Dutch elm disease control within the next few days, City officials announced this week.	15 Years Ago APRIL 16, 1952 Fire Facilities The new North Farmington fire department is now in operation. It was announced Wednesday morning by Roy Bell, fire chief of the new unit. Library Plans Representatives of Farmington organizations will meet to hear Mrs. Noonan, director of the University of Michigan libraries at 4 p.m. Wednesday, April 30, in Adams Hall of Farmington Universalist Church. Short of Blood Approximately 200 more pints of blood are needed to fill the Farmington area quota for the Red Cross Mobile Blood Bank.
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The Farmington Enterprise
"A Continuing Journal of Progress" Established 1888

Publisher	Philip H. Power
Editor	Jim Richard
General Manager	Jeanne Beck
Circulation Manager	Fred J. Wright
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Printing Superintendent	Victor Howard

Published by Farmington Enterprise, Inc., 23623 Farmington Road, Farmington, Michigan, each Sunday. Entered as Second Class Matter, U.S. Post Office, Farmington, Michigan. Address all mail subscription change of address forms 3579, to Box 435, Farmington, Michigan 48024.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
By Carrier: Single copy, 10c; Monthly rate, 35c.
By Mail: \$4.00 with Farmington address; \$5.00 Elsewhere.

PHONES
Home Delivery Service 474-8737
Subscriptions and Want Ads 474-6225

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A. N. R.



In Old Farmington: Erstwhile Cagers

Coach Ralph Auten carries the ball for his 1916 basketball team at Farmington High School. In the November 24, Enterprise of that year was the announcement: "Basketball practice will begin next week. The boys and girls will each have a good team this year, and a good schedule is now being arranged." Off to a good start, the team registered wide-margin wins over Romulus and Redford. Then they were thrown for three losses due to an unfortunate inability to make baskets from the foul line. Some further bad luck was attributed to Norman Lee's sprained ankle, and the season ended on a dispirited note. Stalwart players in the back row included (from left) George Gildemeister, Stanley Gates, Carl Goers, Norman Lee, Leo Hendryx. Front row (from left) Waters Lee, Coach Auten, and Howard Osmus. The picture was loaned by Mrs. Viola Gildemeister.

The Change: From City To Metropolis...To Megalopolis

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article, by Peter R. Spivak, chairman of the state Public Service Commission, is reprinted from the February "Michigan State Economic Record" by permission of the MSU Graduate School of Business Administration.

With the passing of "Frontier America," as it had been known around the turn of the century, America embarked on a number of new courses, substitutes for the "Frontier" and necessary to sustain the dynamism and thrust of a young nation.

A new frontier, not noticed as such then but patently with us daily now, was metropolitan U.S.A. The population changed from majority farm to majority urban at about the same time as the frontier disappeared.

That challenge was the city. Far better or worse it embodies the spectrum of racial and economic achievement of Western Man.

The population of the United States grew from 78 million in 1900 to 123 million in 1930 and 179 million in 1960. The Bureau of Census estimates population today at 195 million.

Cities began to be referred to as metropolises. Now the metropolis is passe and the megalopolis is upon us. A megalopolis is usually defined as a continuous urbanized zone containing more than one metropolitan area.

Several urbanized areas around the world seem to deserve the title of megalopolis, involving multiple ties of transportation, communication, and economic, social, and cultural links and contacts.

In the United States we most often think of the east coast from Baltimore to Boston as "our" megalopolis. Rather, it was our first megalopolis, but it appears destined to be neither our biggest nor most significant as we approach the last two decades of this century. It will be the Great Lakes megalopolis which will predominate and Michigan can, will, or should be its center.

Doxiadis Associates of Athens, Greece was engaged by Wayne State University and Detroit Edison Co. to make a study of the development of the Michigan area. Their survey of existing conditions, trends, and prospects has been completed.

Some future portents are already discernible.

There will be a great city stretching from Pittsburgh on the southeast to Cleveland, Toledo, Detroit, Ann Arbor, Jackson, Battle Creek, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, South Bend, Chicago, and Milwaukee on the northwest. Flint, Saginaw, Bay City, and Midland will be within its boundaries.

From Detroit, northeast through Windsor, London, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec runs the Canadian area of the megalopolis. More than incidentally this is the area most served by the St. Lawrence Seaway which officially opened in June of 1959, and which has already far out-performed its most optimistic supporters' early estimates for the current stage of its life.

The Great Lakes area is richly endowed with natural resources and good farm land, already in a high state of development. The economy is mature, but somewhat under-diversified.

And the Great Lakes economy is now diversifying. There is a more healthy industry mix containing a higher percentage of non-durable goods industries.

Detroit is the center of a six-radial pattern. The radii run to Saginaw-Bay City, Port Huron-Sarnia, Chatham-London-Toronto, Toledo, Ann Arbor-Battle Creek, and Lansing.

The natural role of Detroit and that part of Michigan which is within the Great Lakes megalopolis will be that of a major trade and transportation center. It is at the crossroads of important land, water, and transportation routes. It is the center of the megalopolis itself.

The 1960 census showed 7.8 million people in the State of Michigan. In the year 2000 it is estimated that the figure will be 15.4 million. The percentage of the 1960 figure in the megalopolis area is 80.7; in 2000 it will be 87.6.

Changes in some major service industries reflect and anticipate the development of the Great Lakes megalopolis. In March, 1966, the Michigan Public Service Commission approved contracts by which the major electric utilities serving the megalopolis Michigan area would be interconnected by 1970. This means that Consumers Power, Detroit Edison, and Indiana & Michigan Electric Company—which is a part of the American Electric Power System—will be able to exchange, sell, and borrow power from each other as circumstances and economics dictate.

The megalopolis area in Michigan is one of the most completely served gas distribution areas in the United States.

Within the Michigan megalopolis there are 56 telephone companies. This is down from approximately 90 ten years ago. Mergers, consolidations, and interconnection agreements appear directly attributable to the coalescing influence of the emerging megalopolis.

There has been considerable interest in banking mergers and affiliations in Michigan. The Michigan National Bank outside of metropolitan Detroit and the Michigan Bank within are an example. The merger of Public Bank with Bank of the Commonwealth in Detroit is primarily significant because two large core city banks, with many branches, did combine. Public Bank had been discussing mergers with City Bank and then Commonwealth before the actual act of merger. There are banks in the Detroit area much smaller than Public and it will be interesting to see if more mergers come about in the near future.

Regulation of what are generally referred to as "regulated" industries may become a problem soon in the megalopolis. Banking, stationary utilities, transportation, and insurance, for example, will be intimately involved in the growth of the area.

The State of Michigan's newly enacted county home rule provision is a manifestation of the consciousness that certain territorial units larger than "cities" are now being called on to exercise effective planning and administrative suzerainty. The Toronto Metropolitan Authority, which is already in effect and which is in our megalopolis, is another example of this kind of governmental change.

There is a need for much careful study in all the fields mentioned and many more. The immediately awareness by the economic community of the part it is playing in this new and significant development—megalopolis—is vital to Michigan's success in maximizing its position as the center.

The economic problems of the present and the future are those of the megalopolis and a facing of that fact now is essential.