

Jeffrey Foran
A Debater

FARMINGTON
Jeffrey Foran, of Farmington, is a member of the Alma College debate team that recently competed in the Bruin Invitational Debates in Kellogg Community College at Battle Creek.
He is a graduate of North Farmington High School and a junior in Alma College.

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Proposed Charter Needs Changes

Records, Meetings Should Be Public

EDITORIAL

Some local units of government have fallen into habits of secrecy, sometimes with the idea of protecting the public interest, sometimes merely to avoid the strain and potential embarrassment of doing the public business in public.

But in the proposed charter for the City of Farmington Hills - much of which is outstandingly good work - the charter commission has written two sections that appear to put in writing what has previously been merely practice or bad habit.

MOST CITIES in this area have two simple statements written in their charter:

- "All meetings of the Council, regular and special, shall be open to the public."
- "All records of the city shall be public."

The proposed City of Farmington Hills charter has the following sections:

- "Every public meeting of the council shall be opened to the public. A public meeting means that part of any meeting during which the council votes upon any ordinance, resolution, motion or other official action proposed by or to the board dealing with the receipt, borrowing or disbursement of funds or the acquisition, use or disposal of any supplies, materials, equipment or other property or the fixing of personal or property rights, privileges, immunities, duties or obligations of any person or group of persons."

- "The ordinary records of the city... shall be available for inspection at all reasonable times by persons having a legitimate and reasonable purpose for inspection."

"Police records of arrests, criminal investigations and similar matters, personnel records of city employees and records and papers concerning pending litigation shall not be deemed public records and may be inspected only with the approval of the council."

"The council may suppress any city record if, in the judgment of the council, suppression is necessary to protect the public health, safety or general welfare."

ASST. ATTORNEY General Milton Firestone has told this newspaper the Home Rule Act makes it mandatory for a city charter to say "all legislative sessions of the council and all city records shall be public."

Since the language of the home rule act is so clear, we can only conclude it was bad legal advice that got the two sections in the charter in the first place.

The unwieldy language of the two sections seems aimed at (a) protecting the present common practice of holding "executive" (secret) sessions of a council and (b) suppressing documents that might, in the opinion of the council, be damaging to either an individual or the township.

The results of these two sections will be twofold. The first apparently makes it unnecessary to hold any meetings of the council in public, until a vote is taken.

The second in effect makes all public records the private property of the council.

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Future residents won't have the commission's explanation - all they will have is the charter.

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LIMITING THE definition of "public meeting" only to those where a vote is taken leaves all discussion, as well as "straw votes," to be done in secret.

Land acquisition, labor negotiations and delicate personnel matters are usually cited by councils as topics better handled in secret, but nothing in the language of the charter restricts the secrecy to these matters.

The section on records is downright silly. There are legal precedents which insure the privacy of personnel files, according to Firestone.

Police files, arrest records, etc., also have their status protected without the suggested charter provisions.

The loose phrase "persons having a legitimate and reasonable purpose" is particularly troublesome. Who is to decide the "reasonableness" of the purpose?

"Suppression necessary to protect the public health, safety or general welfare" is a general catchall phrase that could easily be interpreted to mean any document at all.

Underlying both these sections is the notion that the "public" is vindictive and likely to abuse the knowledge it gains through free access to the workings and records of government.

On the other hand, the assortment of clerks, bureaucrats and part-time elected officials that make up local government are supposed to be trusted with the same information.

History indicates it has been abuses of secrecy and suppression that have been a threat to society, not public "nosiness."

The proposed charter language should be changed, because it is contrary to both the law and the spirit of a democratic society.

local news

By MARIE LONG GR 4-3114

London Studies For Local Man

FARMINGTON
James Messenbring, of 28722 Farmington Rd., Farmington, will be one of 42 students from Valparaiso University studying at the university's overseas study center in Cambridge, England.

All students take a full semester load of course work, taught by Valparaiso University directors and English and German instructors.

The group will take study trips to Cornwall, Wales, the lake district and Stratford. There will also be three to four weeks of independent travel.

Mystery Trip For Retirees

PONTIAC
The Oakland County Commission on Economic Opportunity is planning a retirees-and senior citizens mystery trip to an undisclosed destination Friday, Feb. 9.

A bus will leave at 8 a.m. from the Pontiac downtown retirees and senior citizens drop-in center at 1 Lafayette and will return at 5:30 p.m.

A \$4 fee will include bus fare, lunch and tour. Reservations can be made by contacting the commission.

FARMINGTON
Jean and Bob Fielding of Farmington and Mr. Edward Hoehler of Farmington enjoyed a wonderful Christmas entertaining their new granddaughter, Jennifer Lynn, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Hoehler (the former Sue Frigling).

It was the first Christmas they have been home since they stay in Taiwan.

Pete Frigling, son of Bob Frigling, is in the Navy Air Corps. He flew home for the holidays from Jacksonville, Florida. It was a great season for the Friglings.

MRS. BESSIE Rudney, of Farmington, has been in St. Mary Hospital for some time and will be a guest at Oakhill Nursing Home as soon as she is discharged this week from St. Mary.

Wally and Betty Wauch have purchased the home of 7071 Himmelsbach on Oakland. Mr. Wauch is a teacher in Livonia School District.

Hockey Game Raises Funds

FARMINGTON
A fund-raising hockey game for the Farmington Flyer Midgets will be held Wednesday, Jan. 31 at 8 p.m. in the Westland Ice Arena, Cherry Hill Road west of Newburgh.

The game, to raise money for uniforms, will match the "media no-stars," with sports and broadcasting personalities, against the local team.

Donation is \$1.50 for adults, \$1 for students, and children under 12 75 cents.

Those attending, according to Mrs. Sharon Kozma, team sponsor, will view the performance of such non-hockey greats as Jim Northrup, Ron Kramer and Dick Purtan.

Mr. and Mrs. Curtis E. Weaver, of Grand River, recently sold their home which they had purchased from William Burnett a few years ago.

Mr. and Mrs. Ross Bates, and family, are now living in the Mather family home on Oakland. Mrs. Bates is the former Stella Mather. Her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Mather, have moved to

Alpena where Mr. Mather has gone into the recreational vehicle business.

MR. AND MRS. Jerry Ayres, of Grand River, recently held open house for their many neighbors and friends during the holiday season. They also commemorated their 25th wedding anniversary, much to the surprise of their guests.

We wish them many more wonderful years with their lovely family.

Mrs. Lucille Lemon, of Farmington, with son, Loren, of Lake Orion, drove to Iowa, to attend the funeral services of sister-in-law Mrs. Seymour Schaefer, who died suddenly after celebrating her 50th birthday.

Mrs. Lemon's eldest son, Larry flew down for the services and returned home with his mother and brother.

There will be a lecture on antique glass by Mary MacDonald in the Farmington Public Library, 32737 West 12 Mile, on Feb. 8 at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free.

Miss MacDonald is the curator of exhibits in the Dearborn Historical Museum. She is a member of the American Association of Museums, and director for the Michigan Museums.

Antique Glass Presentation

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