

editorial opinion



The volatile issue of senior citizen housing, or precedent-setting high-rise zoning (depending on which side of the political fence you sit), has reared its ugly head in Farmington Hills once again.

Actually, it's confusing enough to require keeping a score card on who is for and against what. This week's council session is an example.

Consider Councilman Earl Oppertbauer. A strong supporter of the special zoning for senior housing last year, Oppertbauer recommends the 60-foot height limitation be studied for possible reduction to 50 feet.

Councilman Joe Alkatieb, who is known for his opposition to high-rise buildings, votes against reconsideration and declares that under certain circumstances senior citizen housing in the city could be built to heights ranging up to 20 stories.

Could this be the same Joe Alkatieb who authored the anti-high-rise pamphlet which featured a collage of Southfield-type skyscrapers with the attached warning that special zoning for senior housing could lead to the same thing in rural Farmington Hills?

Joe's political foes are really making hay out of that statement. He justifies it by saying that it isn't senior citizen high rise he objects to, but the possible precedent special zoning would set. In other words, other developers might go to court, yelling discrimination and claiming they weren't allowed to put up high-rises (or mid-rises) for other uses.

Joe claims that fixing the special zoning and letting the city finance the project would end all the controversy.

Frankly, I've got some qualms about Joe's logic, considering the vehement opposition to any kind of senior citizen housing in this community over the years.

But even more mystifying is Oppertbauer's action. His logic was that reducing the height from 60 to 50 feet would snuff out the opposition to the special zoning. But it should be remembered that the same persons who opposed the 60-foot limitation also opposed the 30-foot limitation of the sister zoning designation for senior housing.

The danger in Oppertbauer's motion is that the whole issue of senior citizen zoning would be opened like a barely healed wound. Thankfully, the proposal to send the height limitation back to the Planning Commission died at the table.

Oppertbauer should have known better than to bring this up.

In the coming months, the senior zoning issue will fester, time and again, with those opposed taking a stab at every opportunity. Proponents certainly don't need the kind of aid that Oppertbauer offered this week.

The real battle will come later this year when the council debates the fate of the property on the corner of Drake and Freedom. An industrialist donated acreage to the city with the stipulation it be used for senior zoning.

Everybody seems to be enthused over this little tid-bit.

The rift, naturally, will come to a head when the issue of how to finance the project comes to debate. Nobody seems too concerned about Bud Cline's project up on Orchard Lake Road, south of Fourteen Mile. After all, it's going to cost an arm and a leg just to move into the place. Only certain folks can afford such luxuries.

But the Drake Road project is a horse of another color—with many possible shades—depending on how it is financed.

At any rate, when the Drake project comes up for debate, the air should be cleared and observers may be able to see just who is and who isn't opposed to senior citizen housing.

Now, let me see—Alkatieb Towers. It does have an interesting ring.

A bad tradition

The signing of the Declaration of Independence on July 4 nearly 202 years ago was accompanied by bell-ringing and fireworks. It's in the history books. There's no disputing that our forefathers loved fireworks. It's a tradition.

It's a tradition we suspect we could do without, this use of fireworks.

The use of fireworks starts days or even weeks prior to the Fourth of July, at all hours of day and night, and drags on past the memorable anniversary.

Institutional fireworks displays need re-examination. We recall the horrible event in Redford Township when a young man, injured by a hit-run driver, couldn't be rescued by an ambulance because firework watchers' cars jammed the streets.

The signing of the Declaration of Independence was accompanied by bell-ringing and fireworks. We'd as soon stick with the bell-ringing and phase out the bad part of the tradition.

THERE WILL NEVER BE ANOTHER



Did Babe point? And why?

The Spider, as he was known in those days, brought his maitre d' sponge to our luncheon table to sop up the soup I had slurped on my shirtfront, and to get even he posed this puzzler:

"Who played quarterback for the Philadelphia Eagles in the mid-'40s when Steve Van Buren was running wild as Philadelphia's halfback?"

Now, how the hell would I know? Before coming back to that issue, let me insert that where my friends and I have lunch—and it's a variety of sites—we laugh a lot. The cast usually includes a sampling of newsmen, a couple of lawyers, several horseplayers, at least one ex-college athlete, plus the inevitable expense account sales types.

Many of them are married to women who are afraid of heights and because of this they have taught their husbands never to climb higher than a barstool.

On any given day, sports, sex and sales vie for conversational win, place and show. When The Spider went back to Van Buren, I knew he had me pegged.

USING THE HOUSE PHONE, I placed calls to no avail. Nick Kerbawy was sweeping out the Hall of Fame; Vince Banonis was at Dom Polski, and Probate Judge Frank Szymanski was regaling followers with true tales of the on-and-off gridiron exploits of Alexander Francis Wojciechowicz.

Then inspiration struck. Call a woman! John Prebik, a tackle from Yale, played for our Lions in the late '40s and now lives in Canton Township. Taking the call was his lovely wife, Pat . . . but, no, she didn't remember either.

Thirty minutes later she called back, having posed the question to Mary Piccolo of Northville. Mary's husband, Bill, was a center with the New York Giants in the days when Wojciechowicz was wreaking havoc for the Lions from the same position.

Bill had pointed out the answer in a National Football League Directory: Tommy Thompson.

Oh, yes. Bill pointed because he can't speak. Formerly with Ford Motor Co. personnel, he's been floored medically in a way big ol' Wojie never would have wanted for any foe. But he's coming along, says Mary. A card from you wouldn't do any harm either. It's William Piccolo, 41896 Sunnydale Lane, Northville 48170.

THEN STEVE REDFERN, the direct mail expert interrupted the debate between super salesmen Bob Sego and Dick Storch with the gem of gems: "Did Babe Ruth actually call his fabled 1892 home run against the Cubs or did he not . . . and what was the ball and strike count when he hit it?"

Accurate answers to queries like that one have made bartenders such as Dolph in Birmingham, Abe in Southfield, Jerry in Livonia, Herman in Plymouth and several ladies up and down the 50-mile golden O&E corridor rich at an early age.

The mini-argument between Sego and Storch was easily resolved by a record book. All they were betting was how many times each team has won in the Super Bowl. It now stands: Green Bay, 2; Dallas, 2; Miami, 2; Pittsburgh, 2; New York Jets, Kansas City, Baltimore, and Oakland each 1. (Scores and losers upon request.)

Ah, but the Babe, the Bambino, the Sultan of Swat!

OUR FRIEND, REDFERN, had taken exception to the descriptive wording attached to a painting of "The Mighty Babe" from a series on "Great Moments in Baseball" by Robert Thom, commissioned by Chevrolet to commemorate organized baseball's centennial.

Everyone our age knows Ruth broke up that '32

through bifocals



ball game with a blast into the centerfield bleachers in the fifth inning at Chicago. Redfern, ever meticulous, sensed an error in the wording, "Ruth comes to bat with the score tied 4-4 with the count at 2 and 0."

Why, he properly reasoned, would anyone call his shot on a 2 and 0 count, taken to mean two balls and no strikes in the customary parlance of the game?

I COULD QUOTE many authorities, but I choose George Herman Ruth as told to that great friend and columnist of yore, John P. Carmichael, when John was sports editor of the Chicago Daily News and did his "My Greatest Day in Baseball" first-person interview series.

Said the Babe to John: "Nobody but a blankety-blank fool would-a done what I did that day. When I think of what a idiot I'd-a been if I'd struck out and I could-a, too, just as well as not because I was mad and I'd made up my mind to swing at the next pitch if I could reach it with a bat. Boy, when I think of the good breaks in my life, that was one of 'em."

"But right now I want to settle all arguments: I didn't exactly point to any spot, like the flagpole. Anyway, I didn't mean to. I just sort of waved at the whole fence, but that was foolish enough."

"All I wanted to do was give that thing a ride . . . outta the park . . . anywhere."

"I took two strikes and after each one I held up my finger and said: 'That's one' and 'That's two.' Ask Gabby (Cub catcher Gabby Hartnett). He could hear me. Then's when I waved to the fence!"

"Yeah, it was silly. I was a blankety-blank fool. But I got away with it and after Gehrig homered, behind me, their backs were broken. That was a day to talk about."

Please pardon the nostalgia. They don't make 'em like the Babe any more; nor like John Carmichael.

A great inflator

The postal

In the last week of May, the U.S. Postal Service raised the first class letter rate by 15.38 per cent. It raised the second class newspaper-magazine rate an average of 77 per cent.

If a private business raised its rates half this amount, it would have the federal government screaming because of an inflationary increase.

For these increased rates, the people of the United States are getting poorer and poorer postal service.

Because the Postal Service is a monopoly and there are federal laws prohibiting anyone from competing with it, the American people have no choice but to sit back and take it. There are few alternatives to the post office.

IN THE OLD days, a letter mailed to the next town would arrive the next day. Now it is routed through a third town for efficiency, and time is added. Mail between Birmingham and Livonia now takes three to five days for delivery. We have run tests on this.

Over Memorial Day weekend, a special delivery letter containing tickets to the Saturday night opera was mailed in Detroit Friday morning to a local resident. It arrived the next Wednesday morning with the regular mail even though it was postmarked locally Tuesday morning. No one seems to have an explanation for these service failures.

Several years ago, the U.S. Postal Service was created as an autonomous federal agency. Prior to that, it was a federal department. The purpose of the change was to take the post office out of politics and make it a self-sustaining, businesslike operation. I think the American people are now willing to



Tim Richard

Why locals like tax limit

All government officials and bureaucrats are supposed to be against limits on their powers. They should be to scared stiff of Taxpayers United for Tax Limitation proposal heading for the ballot. But we find Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and a long list of county commissioners endorsing it. What gives?

Dick Headlee's Taxpayers United organization is out to do more than limit taxes. It has figured out that the movement can't be successful if many local public officials are opposing it. So they tossed in something for local officials, too.

THE TAX LIMITATION proposal would add 10 sections to the Michigan Constitution and amend another. One of the new sections would go like this:

"The state is hereby prohibited from reducing the state financed portion of the necessary costs of any existing activity or service required of units of Local Government by state law. A new activity or service or an increase in the level of any activity or service beyond that required by existing law shall not be required by the legislature or any state agency of units of Local Government, unless a state appropriation is made and disbursed to pay the unit of Local Government for any necessary increased costs . . ."

In plain English, the state would not be able to tell local government to perform a service without coughing up the money.

The current issue bugging the county folks at 1200 N. Telegraph is how to pay for facilities, staffs and salaries of three new circuit judges. Oakland County had nothing to say about whether those judgeships are to be established. The legislature said, "Do it."

Municipal government feels much the same way. If you can remember back to the presidential primary, that plebiscite was conducted in June and constituted a big expense to cities and townships.

So the tax limitation amendment doesn't just pit taxpayers against government. It pits local government against state government.

AS I LOOK at the fine print, it indicates a program mandated by a state agency would also be subject to state financing.

One state agency that costs local government a lot of money is the Water Resources Commission. It can tell local government to build sewage treatment plants or to greatly improve the plants they have.

The tax limitation amendment wouldn't stop the WRC from ordering new sewage facilities. But it would seem to require the state to pay for them. Pretty nifty deal.

If the state requires new standards for sanitary landfills . . . if the state requires more schooling for assessors . . . if the state requires programs or facilities for the handicapped—the state would pay.

Counties, cities and townships can't appeal to local taxpayers to cough up more money by saying "it's for the kiddies," the way the schools can. The non-school local governments are, as often as not, at the limit of their tax resources. The tax limitation proposal looks good from their point of view.

The U.S. Constitution provides for three levels of government—federal, state and local—right? Wrong. It provides for only federal and state governments. Local governments are creatures of the state. They exist because state laws or constitutions create them. They must perform the services the state requires of them.

To local officials the tax limitation amendment could well be called the "state aid guarantee" amendment. One can well wonder if that's wise government.

bureaucracy



by HANK HOGAN

say the experiment is a failure because a monster was created that seems to be responsible to no one. At least in the old days, you could complain to your congressman.

THE NEW AGENCY hasn't worked because it didn't get a fresh start. It inherited all the old regulations of the postal department and lacked the flexibility of trying innovative systems to meet the challenges of moving the mails.

It never was able to break out of its bureaucratic nature.

It was run primarily by the same faces. Only the name seemed to be changed.

If only the people could look forward to better service with the increased rates, the hike wouldn't be so painful.

The postal service is an important national communications link. It is a national utility. We cannot do without it.

Our only alternatives are to encourage Congress to make it a federal department again with federal subsidization so that the mail will move efficiently again, or to repeal the laws prohibiting competition and let private industry take a crack at showing the job can be done at a profit if it's not hung up with bureaucracy.

The American people should not be asked to wait for improvements any longer.

A Division of Suburban Communications Corporation

Farmington Observer

"Successor of the Farmington Enterprise"

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