

Monday's Commentary

Old myths die hard in housing controversy

I know it has been said in the Farmington Observer editorial pages. Some may think we've bantered the issue about too much. If you are one of those people, bear with me while I wave a flag in favor of senior citizen and low-income housing.

Every week, it seems a new group in Farmington or Farmington Hills surfaces to oppose the proposed Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) plan. The project would be a combination-senior citizen-low-income family housing mid-rise built on Drake and Freedom roads.

Opposition is mounting to the point where the city manager of Farmington was instructed last week by his city council to write a letter to MSHDA opposing the height of the proposed building (six stories) that borders with Farmington.

Excuses come in many forms. The big issue here is not so much giving a break to senior citizens, though I'm sure there are enough groups out there who would oppose that issue alone. The catch comes with proposed low- and moderate-income family housing — a HUD regulation in all senior housing money allocations.

People are afraid of the unknown. Who are these low- and moderate-income people who may filter into the community? They'll probably come from Detroit's inner city in droves.

Maybe it's also a fear of the known. They've seen first-hand or heard of housing projects that failed,



Mélange

by
Mary Gniewek



like Herman Gardens. Its boarded windows across row upon row of cell-like buildings between Jay and Tireman off the Southfield Freeway stand as testimony to that failure.

But it's time to be rid of the 1950s mentality. It will be the 1980s by the time the Farmington Hills project becomes a reality (if ever). The government deserves a little credit for learning from its mistakes.

Take Westland. People there screamed, too, about low-income housing attached to proposed senior citizen housing. The proposal just squeaked by city council. The result is Greenwood Villa, a 12 building complex set in Holiday Park, which looks

no different than any other commercial housing project.

Behind the senior citizen high-rise, there are townhouses set back near the park. They are attractive units occupied by families who qualified for governmental assistance.

The project has been going strong for longer than a year now. Senior citizens and young families from all ethnic backgrounds live across the road from one another. Some of the elderly women babysit in single-parent households where mothers work.

There are definite boundaries enforced by management in case senior citizens don't want kids around all the time. The kids stay on their side of the street, which includes two tot lots, a playground,

and plenty of park space.

"If we have problems with a tenant, we have the option not to renew their lease," says Judy Tosoian, of Formidable, the management group that oversees 19 housing projects in metropolitan Detroit.

Ten percent of the 300 units in Greenwood Villa are occupied by low-income families to comply with government regulations.

"They're happy to be here," Tosoian said. "Everyone is neighborly."

Where are the folks who complained loudly when the project was still in the planning stages?

"We don't hear from them anymore," said one city official.

Maybe the only people hurt by the Westland project were city council members who supported it despite its unpopularity. It was part of the reason three of them lost re-election bids, according to the city official.

"The project is still a sore issue when it crops up every once in a while," one city hall watcher said.

I hope the Farmington Hills City Council will be able to weather the storm ahead of them. I hope they listen to the people who won't be screaming — the senior citizens and others who sincerely need a place to live.

With or without government subsidized housing, the lives of the opposition won't be much affected. But the other side has a real stake in the issue. They should get prime consideration.

Tinkering Around

by LOUISE OKRUTSKY

She's determined to work

When Laura Pappas graduated from Western Michigan University in December 1977, she received a BA in music and was a qualified music therapist. She is also qualified to teach music to children from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Her leader dog, Flame, was the first canine to go through commencement exercises at WMU. He was given a degree in guidance and leadership and graduated cum laude.

From that triumphant moment, the duo have faced 1½ years searching for a job that will offer Ms. Pappas, 34, as much independence as possible.

"By now, I'm ready to take just about anything," she said.

Sitting on the yellow sofa in her Farmington Hills home, she's the picture of steadfast ambition.

She's applied for federal and state civil service positions. Jobs as switchboard operators and receptionists are equally appealing as jobs with psychiatric institutions.

She wants to work but won't believe she has a job until she reports for her second day.

Her hunt has led her to the Farmington Hills Police Department. They asked her to take their patrol officer's exam.

SHE WASN'T aware she was applying to be a patrol officer when she heard about the department's ad in the Western Michigan University job bulletin.

It was close to her Farmington Hills home, and she might even be able to walk to work. So she applied.

Afterwards, she received a letter telling her that only top applicants would be sent test information.

To the Farmington Hills police department, she was just another name on a list. They didn't realize she was blind, she said.

"The test was really simple," she said. But she wasn't sure if she would have time to complete the test after someone read the test to her.

That was one of the more humorous incidents in her search for a job. Others have been more unsettling.

There was the time she applied for a job in a psychiatric hospital. The position was similar to one she filled as an intern, so she was confident she could do it well.

"Can you drive a van?" they asked her over the phone.

"No," she answered and explained her situation.

"HAVE YOU EVER been hit over the head with a cane?" was the next question.

Ms. Pappas said she understood the question was asked because some psychiatric patients can't con-

tain their anger. Some patients try to lash out at someone else in anger.

She hasn't been hit over the head with a cane in her experience working in hospitals.

The next comment from the personnel employee was, "I'll tell you right now, you won't get the job."

She convinced him that the Civil Rights Act insures she has a job interview. She must have been fairly convincing because the man did talk to her for three hours and even tried to find transportation for her.

"I'm sure that if he meets another blind person, he'll give him a chance," she said.

Working to give the blind a chance influences her attitude toward the job rejections she's faced. She is poised and articulate and insists on independence.

It was that insistence that got her into gym classes at East Junior High.

"They weren't sure what to do with me," she said.

FINALLY, the school's administration allowed her into gym class. She couldn't play volleyball with the rest of the group, but she enjoyed running with others. She participated in activities where she could use her hearing.

It was a question of making the most of what she can do. That's the attitude she carries on her job hunt.

She can't take an interim job as a waitress in a restaurant or clerk in a fast food joint, she said.

But there are many things she can do, either on her own or with the help of gadgets.

Her best "gadget" is her dog, Flame. Flame's ears always are pointed upward, but when someone in the room talks about him, those ears stand up even straighter.

Like a child, he has perfected the art of eavesdropping.

But Flame is also the reason one company turned her down for a job. The firm explained to Ms. Pappas that there wasn't any place in the area for Flame to exercise.

"My parents were there as shoppers, and they found a place for me to take Flame," she said.

Another problem she faces in finding a job is the lack of transportation in many areas. Taxis are too expensive. Many dial-a-ride services go only to certain destinations.

FINDING A JOB takes on the appearance of attacking Normandy at times. But in the meantime, Ms. Pappas has become a certified Braille inscriber and gives classes.

She spent last year as the White Cane Queen for the Lions, a position that required stamina, traveling and the ability to think fast during an interview. It gave her a chance to play the piano and guitar for audiences, too.

Now, she wants a chance to put her abilities to use on the job.

The Flip Side

by craig piechura



Oh, to catch a foul ball

With this column I salute my journalistic colleague, Eddie Edgar, 82-year-old columnist for the Observer & Eccentric newspapers, on the anniversary of his 56th consecutive appearance at the Detroit Tigers' Opening Day.

We write about Eddie every year because every year the record is more impressive. Eddie's grounds for the record too and his stature as the senior statesman of baseball in Detroit.

Eddie not only has a baseball writer's press pass, he has a gold press pass to admit him in the press box every spring.

Edgar spent 25 years at the Detroit Free Press as a sports writer. Now in his golden years, he keeps hunting and pecking for the Observer & Eccentric newspapers. He hangs his hat at the Plymouth Observer offices, working 20 hours a week.

The Detroit News showed some class this week by inviting Eddie to write a long reflective piece on what Opening Day has meant to him and Detroit for the past 56 years. Normally newspapers scrupulously avoid mentioning any other paper by name. They let Eddie mention the Detroit Free Press and the Observer & Eccentric.

The editorial page editor did a double-take, Eddie said, when he heard Eddie is still gainfully employed on a newspaper at his age.

Edgar said the man he'd be glad to write an article if he could get permission from the Observer & Eccentric front office.

"YOU MEAN you're still working?" the guy asked incredulously.

He should see Eddie crank out the copy, although the seasoned veteran is having a little trouble adjusting to electronic news terminals that look more like TV sets than typewriters.

We often joke about how we'd like to kidnap Eddie one Opening Day to break his streak. But it'd take the crack kidnap crews of the Ayatollah and Yasser Arafat combined to keep Eddie from the ballpark on Opening Day. He's like the fire horse that races into action at the sound of the bell.

Eddie started his streak way back in 1924 when the ballpark only seated 24,000 and home plate was where right field is now. He talks about the giddy thrill he got crawling up a catwalk that led to the old open-air seat in the press box at Navin Field. Nothing ever matched that initial thrill of "rubbing shoulders with big-time sports writers," Eddie said. Sports writers like H.G. Salsinger of the Detroit News and E.A. Batchelor of the Detroit Free Press.

Without much prodding, Eddie will reach into his treasure trove of newspaper stories to entertain people in the newsroom or the Rotary Club.

HELL TELL about the time Jack Manning, an editor at Detroit Times and later the Detroit Free Press, disappeared for four days when he was scheduled to work.

The people at the paper set out to find Manning and finally located him in a Chicago hotel room.

When they reached him by phone, the missing-in-action journalist was nonplussed, according to Edgar.

"They asked him 'Where the hell have you been? We've been looking for you for days.'"

"Manning answered: 'That's just the way I thought it would be. The office should seek the man, the man shouldn't seek the office.'"

Listening to Eddie you get an earful of baseball's amazing nomenclature legacy. Damon Runyon-ish names like Topper Rigney, Hookie Daus, Lu Blue and Hughey Jennings roll off his tongue like a well-placed punt.

Go on keeping on, Eddie. And may you stay forever young.

MET I KNOCKED off early so I can attend my first Opening Day. I went with my father, Jolin Joe Piechura.

I think the last time we went to the ballpark together, I got chewed out for spending more time watching the path of the hot dog vendor than the base runners.

My father just retired from Dodge Truck after 40 consecutive years, a record that almost rivals Eddie's.

This time I didn't bring my mitt along to snag any foul balls hit my way. But that doesn't mean I wouldn't break my neck trying to get one if they had hit one in my section.

From our readers

Resident supports senior, low income housing

Editor:

The recent recall attempt of the Farmington Hills City Council members failed miserably and now it's time for the concerned residents of the city to bring the pieces back together.

At a recent meeting, state Representative Wilbur Brotherton said that leaders of the recall effort went with Councilwoman Joanne Smith and some other people to look at some of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHA)-funded senior citizen and low-income housing.

He said that Mrs. Smith was really pleased that they really liked the building and were ready to support it. Mrs. Smith was really happy that the very people who started the recall against her because of low-income housing were ready to support the site for Freedom and Drake and the housing for it.

I'm sure that now there is such good agreement between different factions in the City of Farmington Hills that the city will be able to move forward in its effort to provide our people with the senior and low-income housing they have fought so ceaselessly for.

Hats off to Joanne Smith. She is a great politician.

The city must work as a group and they have to forget their individual rights for the rights of the whole. If there were more people like Mrs. Smith and Massie Kurjeja who are willing to forgive and forget and work together the city would be a lot better.

It's too bad that those people who live where they are putting the building

have to keep trying to stir up trouble by all their newspaper articles. What about the rising population? Sooner or later they are going to have to have six- or eight-story buildings. We can't stop people from moving here. They ought to take a lesson from Massie — if you can't beat them, join them.

DANYALE TRIPLENDY,
Farmington Hills

Keep blacks out, resident says

Editor:

Referring to the article by Steve Barnaby on March 22, my neighbors and I don't like what he wrote about low-income housing making sense.

We don't like especially the last paragraph encouraging blacks to move in.

Most of my neighbors and I have gone through this before from the neighborhoods we came from. We lost our shirt.

It's a proven fact that where they

move in, it's only a matter of time that the area goes down hill.

He must be a young man that was brainwashed in school. He has to grow up yet and learn more history.

He said they will add more culture. What culture? Bow and arrows and spears.

Please don't have him write articles like that again. We don't need it.

BOB KEMP,
Farmington Hills

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