

Board doesn't communicate, candidates claim

First of 2 parts
By Karen Sue Hermes
staff writer

Communication, or lack of it, appears to be the most talked about issue in the race for two seats on the Bloomfield Hills Board of Education.

All six candidates, vying June 8 for the two seats, said they think communication between the board and public needs improvement. Some think it needs improvement more than others.

During recent deliberations on what to do with Traub School, scheduled for closing in June, candidate Gerald M. Lawrence said the board basically told residents, "We're going to let you talk, but when the bottom line comes, we're going to make the decision."

LAWRENCE said the board did not "sufficiently" invite the community to speak out, give opinions and ask questions.

The board agreed to lease Traub, closed because of declining enrollment in the district, to Kensington Academy, a private Bloomfield Hills school.

Some residents favored raising the building and selling the property, reverting it back to the district's tax base. Others wanted the building retained for other public uses such as a district court.

Some objected to leasing the school, built with public money, to a private institution. And some objected to the rate at which it was leased — \$2 a square foot.

CANDIDATE JOHN A. Voorheis agreed communication between the board and public over Traub "was not as it could be."

"The board, as I see it, made the decision before these people really expected it," he said.

Said candidate Sean Peppard, "Some of the present board members have paid only lip service to the concept of responsiveness to the public."

"Board members have to listen to people and pay attention to what they say."

However, Eugene I. Owens, the only incumbent among the six candidates, said he doesn't know of any member on

the board who doesn't listen to residents.

"BUT IF THERE'S a perceived lack of it (listening), the board has to do a better job and spend more time explaining the reasons for its decisions."

He said the board considers all residents in making a decision, and many times it seems to special interest groups that the board is not listening to them.

The board could spend more time in meetings, allowing people to voice their opinions, he said.

Candidate Eileen G. McKenney faulted residents somewhat for a communication breakdown between them and the board.

"People don't go to board meetings until they have a specific concern," she said. "If they took more time to know what's going on, that itself would open up communication."

HOWEVER, WHEN a school is closed, the public should decide what it should be used for, Mrs. McKenney said. "They voted in the money to erect the building, they should have the chance to decide what happens to it."

In deciding which school to close in the future, candidate William S. Stowey said the board should notify by mail all

residents living near the schools under consideration.

These residents, he said, should be involved early on in the decision process and an objective consultant should be enlisted to make recommendations.

Lawrence, who also favors community involvement in such decisions, believes the board should meet with residents in the schools under consideration for closing, rather than in a centralized building like Andover High School.

IN OPENING up communication between the board and public in general, Peppard suggests the board "actively solicit public opinion" and, for seeking

recommendations, use "public committees" that are comprised solely of residents in the community.

Past committees, he said, have consisted of only a couple of community residents.

Peppard also favors the formation of a liaison committee between the board and public.

Voorheis said the board should send letters to presidents of all PTAs and homeowners associations in the district, inviting them to attend its meetings so they may report back to their members.

Walk scheduled to benefit starving people

Some of Birmingham's streets are expected to be crowded with people between 2 and 5 p.m. Sunday. Participants in a walk-a-thon will be raising money to help fight the world hunger problem.

The walk-a-thon is sponsored by several Birmingham-Bloomfield area churches. Money collected will be sent to an organization called Church World

Service and used by the service's hunger relief arm called CROP.

The money that is raised will be used both on a world-wide basis and also in southeast Michigan.

About 55 percent of the funds raised will be used by the African nation of Somalia. The nation is on the edge of the Sahara desert and each year loses more fertile land to the desert. CROP'S

aim is to help reclaim some of the lost land and help people become self-sufficient again.

Supporters say 25 percent of the money will remain in the area. It will be used by the Southeast Michigan Food Coalition, an organization which aids the hungry in Michigan.

The remaining 10 percent will be used for education and administration. The chairman of the walk is the Rev. Douglas Vernon of First United Methodist Church in Birmingham.

Those interested in walking or sponsoring a walker should contact Rev. Vernon, 646-1200.

The walk begins at 2 p.m. Sunday in a parking lot at the church, 1585 W. Maple. There will be five checkpoints along the seven-mile route and rides will be available to those who do not wish to continue to the finish at First Presbyterian Church, Maple and Chesterfield.

The route will be patrolled and crossing guards will be at busy intersections, according to organizers.

Streets on the route include Pleasant, Lincoln, Southfield, Fourteen Mile, Pierce, Lakepark, Oak, Harmon, Lake-side, Redding and Chesterfield.

DNR to close Orchard site

The DNR public access site on Orchard Lake was closed indefinitely Tuesday.

The move reportedly was due to the state's financial crunch, although the DNR collects money from operating the site.

"I'm sorry about it. We don't know how long it'll last. It's due to the governor's ban on hiring seasonal people," reports Dan McClarty, Michigan Department of Natural Resources district manager.

"They will close it until the state has funds to man it," Orchard Lake City Clerk Janet Overholt confirmed. Orchard Lake Police will be patrolling the site like any other city area, she said.

The launch site at the corner of Orchard Lake Road and Pontiac Trail is one of a handful of places where the public may put a boat into local waters.

The charge of \$1 per car or \$1 per trailer was due to be raised this summer to \$1.25.

"I can't see any logic in doing it," McClarty acknowledges. He suggests

politics could be involved centering around Proposal A, coming up on next Tuesday's ballot.

"THE IRONIC PART of it is that the site realizes an annual \$5,000-\$6,000 profit. They're not going to save anything (by closing it)," he claims.

The Orchard Lake access site "has always made money," McClarty reports. It is the only one of 16 sites in Oakland County to be shut down, he says, because it is the only one which requires attendants on duty for 16 hours each day.

The rest of the county sites will remain open, but unmanned, he adds.

Although Orchard Lake residents have complained about traffic and behavior problems at the access sites in the past, McClarty says most of the trouble was "pretty much under control" last year.

He says a number of lake residents use the access sites to launch their boats, along with the general public.

He feels the city along with the public at large will miss the launch site.

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