

# Farmington Observer

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## Mercy launches senior survey for housing

By Craig Plechura  
staff writer

More than 5,000 persons age 65 or over living in and around Farmington Hills will receive a questionnaire sometime next week sent by the Sisters of Mercy asking them what services and facilities they'd like to see offered at the Mercy Center.

The religious order is already planning to renovate and add on to an existing structure on the site designated as the retirement home for retired Our Lady of Mercy nuns.

To complement the contingent of retired sisters, the order plans to expand its ministry work with senior citizens

on the 92-acre property on 11 Mile Road, east of Middlebelt in Farmington Hills.

The proposed project is a joint effort involving St. Joseph Mercy Hospital of Pontiac, Mount Carmel Mercy Hospital of Detroit and the Sisters of Mercy Province of Detroit.

No plans other than the one to consolidate all retired Mercy nuns now living in Dubuque, Iowa and Grand Rapids into one retirement facility in Farmington Hills were announced at a meeting Thursday night at Mercy Center. Project directors said no further plans were announced because the public should decide what services for the elderly are needed at the center.

"WE RECOGNIZE the population of the aging is increasing," said Michael Schwartz, president of St. Joseph Mercy Hospital. "In excess of one-third of those in both hospitals are dedicated to persons over 65 years of age. It seems to us a logical alternative to launch a study of services to the aged and efforts to collaborate and to join activities in meeting their needs."

Senior housing has long been a controversial issue in Farmington Hills and project directors seem determined to involve politicians and representatives from neighborhood groups and social service agencies in any plans. Representatives from both Farmington and Farmington Hills city government were in attendance along with homeowner association representatives.

Farmington Hills Mayor Jack Burwell, an opponent of federally-subsidized senior housing plans in the past, said at the meeting "I've had my eye-balls on this site for a long time for senior housing."

He cautioned, however, that senior citizen housing isn't the only option being considered for the site and said he's "got lots of ideas but I don't want to embarrass anybody."

In his "wildest dream," Burwell said, he'd like to see a hospital offering senior care built on the site.

Any senior housing, said the Hills mayor, must be financed from federal financing that usurps local control or goes beyond "taking care of your own people but (begins) importing people to fill up the place."

IF HOUSING for the elderly is built on the grounds of Mercy Center, Burwell said it shouldn't be a high-rise structure.

"Our people are super-sensitive to the height of a building and the kind of financing you use," Burwell said.

Farmington Hills Councilwoman Jan Dolan called the project a "super possibility." She runs the Oakland Hills Adult Day Center for elderly who aren't institutionalized.

"The Mercy center is so under-utilized," Dolan said. "They have a beautiful pool that is rarely used. They have a lot of property here that could be a much more intensive development."



## Jimmy's back!

Never in 27 years of gardening on her five acres in Farmington Hills has Edna Arrington seen an eggplant the likes of this little fella. Nor has her son-in-law Leonard Beninati who became so enthused about the Jimmy Durante look-alike "that I had to get some eyes. It's a masterpiece by Mother Nature," he said. Arrington is considering sending Jimmy's picture to the TV show "That's Incredible." "I've grown 22-inch string beans and 14-foot sunflowers with 30 blooms but I never did grow anything like this." *Ink a dink a do, a dink a dink, a dink a do . . .*

RANDY BORST/fatal photograph

## State probe terminated at Franklin

By Alice Collins  
staff writer

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources concluded late last week that Franklin residents living near the Franklin Hills County Club have nothing to fear from chemical waste buried 3 1/2 years on the private club grounds.

DNR Investigator Tom Laird said tests of samples taken from four barrels dug from a burial pit Aug. 11 revealed a high concentration of only one suspected substance — a herbicide commonly used on lawns to control dandelions.

Laird identified it as 2,4-Dichlorophenoxyacetic acid, commonly called 2,4-D. It is also used as a basic material for a lot of other herbicides, he said. "It was found in just one of the barrels," said Laird. "And it appears it was not lost into the ground water."

The 2,4-D and traces of zinc, arsenic

and two other herbicides also found in the excavated barrels are "loosely bound up by clay soil," and would probably not have gotten into the nearby private water wells in Franklin.

THE DNR also decided Friday that it would not press any criminal charges against the country club.

Since it appears there was no actual discharge into the ground water, the state would not prosecute under the water resources commission act, Laird said.

The state could not proceed under the hazardous waste management act because it was not in effect when the barrels were buried, he said.

Substances suspected of being herbicides, fungicides and pesticides were dug up near the maintenance building of the exclusive club on the northeast

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## Flooding data is sought

A questionnaire will be sent later this week to about 200 Farmington residents living in a district with combined sanitary and storm sewers that is experiencing flooding and drainage problems.

City Manager Robert Deadman says city officials want accurate information about the extent of the flooding and won't use the information to determine which homeowners will be assessed for renovation costs.

"If homes are being flooded that we're not aware of, we'd like to evaluate the cause of that flooding," Deadman said Thursday.

Farmington City Council members will meet at 8 p.m. Tuesday Sept. 7 and are expected to discuss an engineering recommendation to separate the currently combined sanitary and storm sewer lines. Because the flow in heavy rains overtaxes the combined system, flooded basements are a frequent problem in an area around Alta Loma, west of Farmington Road.

Deadman says it isn't fair to only assess homeowners living on the low end who suffer the brunt of the problem when residents living upstream contribute to the problem and should pay for any solution.

COUNCIL MEMBERS are expected to evaluate a number of costly engineering options Tuesday night. One plan calls for the installation of separate and larger sewer pipes in the lowest part of the sewer district while other plans call for separation of the flow throughout the entire district. *DF*

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## Money in the sock girds schools against cut in state funding

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

The \$72.3 million in cuts for K-12 education proposed by Gov. William Milliken portends trying times for the Farmington School District.

If passed by the Legislature, the governor's package would slash state aid to Farmington schools by \$580,000, according to Farmington School Superintendent Lewis Schulman.

The district's budget this year is \$42,199,930, up from \$39,536,168 in the 1981-82 school year. Schulman expects expenditures to surpass revenue by an estimated \$1 million in 1982-83.

A CUT in state funding would come on the heels of the loss of \$70,000 in reduced Title I aid to economically-disadvantaged students and the halving of state "categorical" aid for transportation, bilingual and special education to \$600,000.

In his six years as superintendent, Schulman and state cutbacks have become old friends.

From 1971-81, state aid for K-12 education shrunk from 40.4 percent of the state's total budget to 29.2 percent. Social services have realized the bulk of the difference.

Enabling the district to keep its head above water is its fund equity of \$2.5 million, Schulman said.

The sum represents the "left-over"

10 percent of the budget set aside upon the advice of district auditors.

"WE'VE BEEN NURSING that money for several years. If the governor's cut is approved, we'll be forced to utilize that fund equity," he added.

The future of education in Farmington however, doesn't appear all that bleak.

Block grants — federal funding earmarked for libraries and audio visual equipment — increased from \$20 to \$3,000.

"Farmington schools have been fortunate because the last few years have seen a strong building boom which has increased the property tax base substantially," Schulman said.

"The community has supported us. The estimated SEV state equalized valuation for 1982-83 is \$1,107,243,374 which has enabled the district to reduce the present millage from a high of 39.68 mills in 1977-78 to 33.7 mills for 1982-83, and still live within its budget."

"THE DISTRICT is now in excellent shape as far as the number of ongoing programs and educational personnel. In this district, we try to operate like a business — with restraint and prudence," added Schulman.

Schulman's \$62,100 salary was increased to \$65,000 for the 1982-83 school year. His Livonia counterpart,

George Garver, earns \$70,000 annually, while Southfield Schools superintendent Carl W. Hesse is paid nearly \$80,000.

Average salary for school superintendents in the Great Lakes region is \$44,636. Most are provided with a car by their districts, according to the Michigan Association of School Administrators.

Enrollment for the coming school year has declined districtwide by 550 necessitating 25 teacher layoffs and the closing of an as-yet-undesignated elementary school prior to the 1983-84 academic year.

"By closing one elementary school, we will save \$200,000 — money that will go into the total educational program," said Schulman, who estimates the district has saved \$1 million by closing seven schools.

Farmington school buildings are valued at \$70 million.

LOSS OF FEDERAL support coupled with the decline in enrollment will create red ink again this year for the school lunch program, as well as increased costs for students.

"It's no longer a self-sufficient program," Schulman said.

"The state has been carrying it — last year there was a \$10,000 deficit. We've raised prices of elementary school lunches from 95 cents to \$1, and middle- and high school lunches from \$1.15 to \$1.25.

"Milk will stay the same at 20 cents."

Salaries for Farmington teachers, whose two-year contract expires in August 1983, increase 9.5 percent across the board this year. Pay for substitute teachers remain at \$45 a day, but rises from \$55-60 after 10 days.

DECREASING ENROLLMENT and revenue have spelled older ages for Farmington educators. Laid-off teachers average 10 years in seniority, tran-

slating to an average age of 45 for male teachers and 49 for their female counterparts.

Lay-offs excepted, virtually no change exists among this year's teaching staff.

"Everybody is back in place from last year," Schulman said.

"You hope for some turnover — we have an aging staff. But there was no turnover at all."

## Man drowns after van crashes

The death of a 25-year-old Farmington Hills man who drove his van into the Detroit River Thursday evening was ruled a suicide by the Wayne County Medical Examiner's office Friday.

John Dombecke drove his black 1971 Dodge van off a boat launching ramp into the river on Detroit's southeast side about 5:30 p.m., police said.

According to witnesses, Dombecke's van was traveling 30-40 m.p.h. when it passed a guard shack at the launch, turned right and into water deep enough to submerge the vehicle.

"He did get out of the van and may have attempted to swim to shore, but the autopsy was just completed and the death has been ruled a suicide," said Sgt. E. Gunderson from the county morgue in a telephone interview Friday morning.

The van's brakes were in good working order, the sergeant added.

Dombecke's body was found about 25 feet from his van and pulled from the water about 6 p.m.

Gunderson could not say whether Dombecke was employed.

## Ellison bids adieu

## Blight was inspector's beat

By Craig Plechura  
staff writer

In the nine years Bill Ellison spent working as a zoning inspector for the city of Farmington Hills he saw a lot of code violations.

But he'll never forget the man who kept 22 spider monkeys in a room of his house.

"He was a collector, an old circus man, and he had 22 monkeys, spider monkeys, between his kitchen and his dining room," Ellison recalled Monday, on the eve of his last day of work before retiring. "And he also had a chimp for panzee about 4 foot tall that weighed 90 pounds."

The zoning department investigated the grounds of the home on Eldridge Street, near Oxford, because they observed a slew of junked cars, old magazines and "books by the ton" stacked in the old man's back yard.

Zoning officials would ask him to remove items which violated the city's blight ordinance, but the man never complied. "He was always going to do it next week," Ellison said.

Ellison said the case was eventually and unfortunately solved by a fire which nearly trapped the man in his home.

Ordinances Ellison was required to enforce during his year of duty included such things as the Noxious Weed Ordinance, which requires residents to keep their property cut for health and aesthetic reasons.

Another ordinance code enforcement officers like Ellison are paid to enforce is the sign ordinance which regulates the size and type of signs businesses are allowed to use in advertising.

THE MOST FREQUENT violation, Ellison said, is an infraction of the blight ordinance — particularly the provision which makes it illegal for Farmington Hills residents to park an inoperable or unlicensed motor vehicle or their boat or trailer or commercial truck in plain view in a residential neighborhood.

Ellison said the city operates under a belief that "no one wins in court because it's so time-consuming and costly."

"But, Ellison added, it usually takes the issuance of a ticket before most residents take steps to correct a code violation such as blight.

"You write a ticket to a couple (of persons), and the word travels right up the street," said Ellison. "It's very effective, but it really takes the ticket in most cases."



Bill Ellison

He called the approach used by Farmington Hills inspectors "the velvet vice method — you put 'em in the hopper, turn it occasionally till you get compliance."

Persons usually are willing to obey city laws if they find officials are firm but fair.

"WE TRY to keep them out of court," Ellison said. "It may take a little longer than the higher-ups expect, but with proper handling we're usually able to get things resolved."

Upon retirement, Ellison said he'll be able to devote more time to his serious hobby, playing tenor sax and clarinet in the Villagaires quartet based in Franklin Village, where Ellison lives.

He's also considering bidding on the weed-cutting job of the city of Farmington Hills. He'll probably take his first out-of-state vacation in years, he said, visiting his hometown of Meadville, Pa.

Another project that should keep Ellison busy is one his wife, Charlotte, is involved in — the Four Corners Press, which prints local history accounts. The couple have one daughter, also named Charlotte, who works in the publishing field in Grand Rapids.

If Ellison travels during his retirement, he'll go in style. Co-workers presented him with matched luggage on his last day and an engraved tablet. To demonstrate his gratitude to the city, Ellison and his band performed at a testimonial dinner held Tuesday morning in Ellison's honor.

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