

Council watching is a serious business

Watchers keep an eye on city

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

It's Monday night. Some of the Farmington Hills City Council members are already in position at the half-moon-shaped table. Others are just arriving, stopping to say a few hellos as they make their way up to their seats.

The door to the city council chamber opens and closes slowly as spectators — some there for the first time — cautiously enter, stop for a second and spot an empty seat. Once seated, they gaze at the night's agenda with most hoping the topic they have come to listen to or grumble about will be near the top so their evening won't be totally consumed.

These spectators wait for their topic to be discussed, say a few words only when they are turning and leave.

But there's a small group of spectators, who despite the topic or long-winded council discussions, remain until the end and return every week to

catch the latest in council happenings.

Unlike spectators, these council watchers keep an eye on the council, can rattle off the details of most issues, often present a different perspective on an issue and, for the most part, speak their mind.

Council members and city administrators know who the council watchers are and often take heed of their comments. Unlike other spectators, the council watchers are always referred to by their first name without the usual formality given to those who are spectators.

Aldo Vagnozzi, Massie Kurzeja, Carol Boyd and William Liba are four of the well-known council watchers who can be found, with agenda in hand, at just about every Monday's council meeting.

The Observer interviewed all four to ask why they give up their Monday nights, what is their impression of the local political scene and what advice they have for their city officials.



Aldo Vagnozzi (left) and Bill Liba are regulars at the Farmington Hills city council meetings.

photos by RANDY BORST/Asian photographer

She's a regular!

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

After eight years of council watching, Massie Kurzeja says she still attends almost every Monday council meeting to "make sure things are done up front."

What began her council watching career was a remark made to her years ago. Involved with a particular issue at the time, Kurzeja was told if she had "kept her mouth shut," the issue could have "gone through the back door" with the citizens of Farmington Hills not being the wiser.

That did it. Kurzeja now sits aside her Monday evenings for serious council watching.

Please turn to Page 13



Massie Kurzeja

Vagnozzi leads pack with humor

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Anyone familiar with Farmington Hills government knows Aldo Vagnozzi is more than a council watcher. He has been labeled by those on council and in the audience as the "senior council watcher."

To that same familiar group, Vagnozzi is known for his bluntness, humor, and his never-failing reminder to council that he is watching, listening and willing to speak his mind.

"What I find is that a little humor helps," said Vagnozzi, a former Farmington Township watcher and school board member. "Sometimes they are too serious up there."

Despite his years as a council watcher, Vagnozzi always follows protocol dictated by council rules for public comment. Just like any other member of the public, Vagnozzi gives his name

and spells out his address — which most council members must know as well as their own — with a preface that he is "still living at . . ."

If Vagnozzi's repetitive introduction to his address of almost 25 years doesn't draw a chuckle, his comments laced with irony, pun or sarcasm will.

"I do try to appeal somewhat to their consciences," Vagnozzi said. "I'm just hoping that I can get through to them on some issue for which there is no lobby or organized support."

And that's what sets apart a council watcher from a spectator, according to Vagnozzi.

"There are some regulars who come out every Monday. But they aren't necessarily council watchers. A spectator never says anything or participates. A council watcher talks."

AS ONE WHO speaks publicly almost without fail at each meeting, Vag-

nozzi holds the 1976 Open Meetings Act, which prevents public bodies from conducting most public business in private, dear to his heart.

"It's the magna carta for council watchers because it provides a reasonable system for letting the public talk," he said.

Sometimes council members "believe there are certain things that shouldn't be open (to the public)," he said. "They are paranoid. Concern about what the press says about them is an indication."

But Vagnozzi holds little back when he requests to speak to the council about an issue or about his feelings on what they should or should not have done.

The type or sensitivity of an issue never seems to faze Vagnozzi. Whether it's a zoning issue, taxes, talk of cutting the library's budget, or senior citizen housing, Vagnozzi will speak if he feels

the need.

"I'm there to call their attention to an area I think they should be interested in or comment on something they have done at a previous meeting."

And now and then he applauds council's actions or ideas.

Whatever the topic he speaks to, Vagnozzi says he hopes his opinions as well as those of other council watchers and spectators have an influence.

"Governmental units tend to respond with a little more responsibility when people are in the audience watching them, other than the press which is detached. People in the audience are the voters, and hopefully they will have some influence. If others would speak out more often there would be more reaction," Vagnozzi said.

WHETHER HE or other members of

Please turn to Page 4

Boyd hooked to fanfare

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Carol Boyd is one of the quieter council watchers who turn out most Monday evenings at the Farm-



Carol Boyd

ington Hills council chambers. But ask her about a council decision, the reasoning behind it, and she'll fire off the answers.

"You have to go to council enough. You have to be bored enough. And you have to know the stuff they're talking about. Then you know the criteria that they make decisions on," said Boyd, a 22-year Farmington Hills resident.

A council watcher for the last eight years, Boyd was encouraged to start attending by her friend and fellow council watcher Massie Kurzeja. Although she doesn't attend as often as Kurzeja, Boyd says she's hooked on the Monday night fanfare.

"Once you start going and start learning, you're hooked," she said. "I want to keep my hand in it. Government has gotten better. It's more open. Perhaps we've helped."

When Boyd first started as a council watcher, she wasn't too sure how to get information about issues confronting the city. That's when "we started going and investigating," she adds.

"It used to be that they didn't like to explain things," Boyd said. "But over the years they have tried to give explanations when they realize there are people in the audience who don't know what's going on."

THE EXTENT to which council explains itself depends on who the mayor is, she added.

Boyd doesn't put all the responsibility on council for informing the public or getting them involved. She wholeheartedly believes more residents should get involved whether or not an issue directly affects their neighborhood.

"I realized you have to be involved and know what's going on. I wish more people would come up and participate," she said. "It's a two-way street between the public and the council. It's not just the

Please turn to Page 4

Liba eyes council's work

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Bill Liba has always been interested in government. But he didn't start his official council watching career until he offered to drive to city hall a friend who always attended council meetings.

"I started to go in May (1982) the first time they had the big budget hassle," said Liba, a 30-year Farmington resident.

"I saw how interesting it would be. I started to sort out the council people that were doing a good job, in my impression."

Watching each council member's work is one of the major draws for Liba, who spends a lot of his retirement time supporting and campaigning for candidates. Before he lends his support, though, it's imperative to Liba that he sees the council member of his choice in action.

"I try to pick a candidate that will get to the issue and make a motion. I try to sort out which candidate I would support."

LIBA DOES not limit himself to the Farmington Hills council when watching potential candidates.

Every now and then he goes to his hometown council of Farmington. But he admits Farmington Hills is where the action is.

Because he's a Farmington resident Liba just sits back in the Farmington Hills council chamber, never publicly uttering a word. But every now and then a sigh of relief or indignation can be heard from the last row of chairs. It's Liba, losing patience with long discussions.

"Instead of getting to the issues they spend too much time philosophizing," Liba said. "They are not issue minded. You can't be going from 7:30 p.m. until 11 and midnight every council meeting. If they were organized properly, they would have no need to go to 11 and midnight."

That's the difference, as far as Liba is concerned, between how the Farmington and Farmington Hills councils operate. In Farmington, he said, the city manager runs the city. In Farmington Hills, the city manager "is trying to run the city but the city council wants to manage it."

"Let the city manager run the city. You hired

Please turn to Page 12

save 20% to 40%
ON CUSTOM
WINDOW TREATMENTS

HOME
SHOW & SALE



Save 20% to 30% on selected decorative fabrics for custom draperies, and selected lining fabrics. We have an extensive collection of styles, colors and treatments, all custom made to your needs in our drapery workshop.

Save 40% on Decora's entire collection of made-to-measure window, bed and table treatments. Choose from over 400 decorative fabrics.

Save 40% on Cortley's entire collection of made-to-length window and bed treatments. Choose from over 400 decorative fabrics.

Save 30% on Riviera's custom horizontal blinds by Lavalor. 1" aluminum mini-blinds are available in more than 250 colors and finishes and there's no charge for the unique vague valance option. Or choose 1/2" aluminum mini-blinds in 70 colors and finishes.

Save 30% on Hudson's own custom 2" and 3/4" vertical blinds.

Save 30% on Kirsch custom window shades, valances and trims.

Save 30% on Kirsch custom woven woods. Choose from over 80 styles.

Save 20% on Nanik custom wood mini-blinds, in a variety of stains and slat sizes.

Save 20% on Mastercraft custom wood shutters, in a variety of stains and styles.

Save 20% on wallcovering (except Ralph Lauren). Complete your room with wallcovering ordered through our Studio of Interior Design.

Save 25% on Graber custom drapery hardware.

Bring your window measurements in to Made-to-Measure Draperies or Alternate Window Treatments, at all metro Detroit stores plus Ann Arbor, Pontiac, Flint and Toledo, Or, for all custom and made-to-measure treatments, take advantage of our convenient Shop-At-Home measuring and consultation services, by calling 223-1970, day or night, seven days a week. No charge or obligation. Consult with an interior designer by calling 569-3232, ext. 2524, Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., for an appointment. Expert installation service is also available. Sale ends February 28.

hudson's

USE YOUR HUDSON'S CREDIT CARD, a Visa MasterCard or the American Express Card