

# Opinion

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## Hills' charter — Tread cautiously when amending it

A CITY charter doesn't carry the same weight as a state constitution. Whereas a constitution addresses rights indicative of a representative democracy, a charter lists government policies often patterned after those in established nearby cities.

Despite the difference, a city charter isn't something that should be changed by whim. Amendments should come only after scrutiny by city officials and evaluation by city voters.

Tuesday, Nov. 5, Farmington Hills voters will be asked to consider amending their city charter for only the second time since Farmington Township incorporated in 1973.

The minimal number of proposed amendments signals the city council's understanding that the charter isn't a script to be recast at will.

WHILE SIZING up charter amendments may not seem as exciting as sizing up council candidates, they nonetheless deserve every voter's attention.

Passing up the chance to cast a vote on such amendments leaves the decision to others, some of whom may have a vested interest and some of whom may not have the slightest idea what they're voting on.

So come Election Day, Farmington Hills voters should make it their business to vote on each of the five charter amendments. They also should make sure they know exactly what passage and denial of each amendment would bring.

After a studied analysis of each of the five ballot propositions, we encourage voters to say yes to A, B, D and E. At this time, we don't see the merits of passing Proposition C.

### PROPOSITION A

"A" would allow newly elected council members to take office at the first regular meeting following certification of the election rather than the following Jan. 1.

We like the proposed change because it would remove the lame-duck period.

That would prevent defeated or retiring council members from steering a vote — voting on an issue in a way they wouldn't have voted had they again had to face the electorate.

The proposal also would prevent a lame duck from influencing city policy while bringing aboard voter favorites as quickly as possible.

### PROPOSITION B

"B" calls for council appointments to run at the next odd-year general election rather than at the next November general election.

This proposal would give all council contenders equal footing at election time. It also would probably produce a better council because voters would have more opportunity to consider contenders.

At present, candidates during an even-year

general election face having their race overshadowed by presidential, state and county battles.

It makes sense to have all council contenders run during odd-year general elections, when the ballot isn't as crowded and the issues aren't spread so thin.

### PROPOSITION C

"C" would eliminate the need for a primary election to nominate city council candidates.

There are good arguments for doing away with primaries. For example, the city could face having to spend at least \$10,000 to eliminate one candidate. The charter calls for a primary if there are nine or more candidates.

In the city's 12-year history, however, there have been only two primaries — 1976, when there were 10 candidates, and 1977, when 11 candidates turned out. In either case, it probably wouldn't have been a big deal to add two or three more names to the general election ballot.

The danger of eliminating the primary lies in the years ahead. In the wake of Farmington Hills' booming growth — and as zoning, planning and other hot issues take root — it's possible more and more people will want to vie for a seat on the city's governing board. Without a primary, could you imagine the nightmare that voters would face if 15 or 20 candidates surfaced?

Granted, that's not likely to happen. But we'd feel much more at ease about doing away with the primary after a few more city elections go by — and a truer pattern of candidate interest is established.

### PROPOSITION D

"D" would let members of city boards and commissions become council candidates without first having to resign.

Currently, prospective council candidates must give up their seats on other city panels before Election Day. That, we think, is wrong.

The original thinking might have been that a council candidate couldn't devote sufficient time to another board or commission. Or it might have been that serving on such board or commission gave a council candidate an unfair advantage.

Those arguments are merely speculative. What's more, they're marginal when compared to a board or commission losing perhaps one of its best members only because he or she cares enough about the city to seek a seat on the city's governing board.

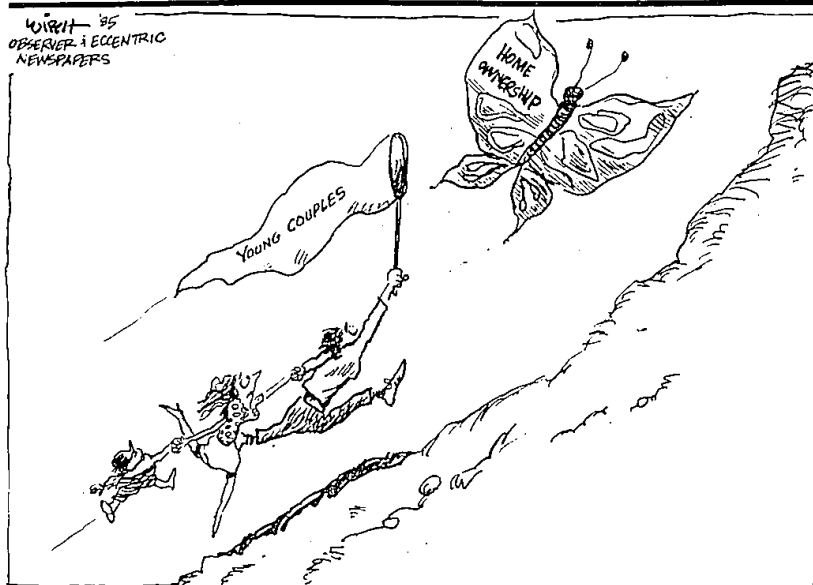
### PROPOSITION E

"E" would give the assessor's board of review more time to hear questions from property owners and complete necessary paperwork. It also would require the assessor to notify property owners of any assessment increase — not just if it's 5 percent or more.

The changes would bring city assessment policy in conformance with state law. We don't see the changes doing anything but benefiting local taxpayers.

Remember. Regardless of how you feel about the propositions, make sure you vote Tuesday, Nov. 5.

— FARMINGTON OBSERVER



## Pursuing impossible dream

WE'RE KILLING the middle class and that's a danger to the freedom that we have known in this country for so long.

"The \$24,000 lot is on its way out," said the newspaper clipping.

This bit of alarming news had passed my way via a concerned and obviously alarmed resident. More people should know, he noted.

"Sure enough," I thought rather cynically, "and so has the \$3,000 car and the \$20,000 home."

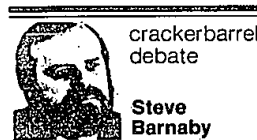
BUT A FEW weeks back I was mentally shocked out of my price stupor and reminded of how alarming the housing situation is for many. Once again, a newspaper article did the trick.

"Homenrama '86: Builders showcase their best."

This article featured the annual housing event of the year in southeast Michigan where several developers featured models they hope will entice consumers to buy. A natural-born browser, I dug right in to see what was new.

Sticker shock was too mild a word to describe the feeling. Those 14 models were priced anywhere between \$400,000 and \$600,000.

My mind skipped back to a few conversations I had with someone who lived in a place called Levittown.



LEVITTOWN (actually there were three) was the brainchild of Abraham Levitt and sons Alfred and William. Their concept was to build an affordable house with all the amenities for a small, middle-income family. They primarily were built for GIs just home from World War II.

Sociologist Herbert Gans told us about it in his book, "The Levittowners."

His description sounds like something out of a fantasy land:

"The houses were designed with young children in mind, with bedrooms just large enough to serve as playrooms as well, an extra bathroom for them and the kitchen located so mothers could watch their children play outside."

But the dream just begins there.

The builder supplied all the kitchen appliances and absorbed the 5 percent settlement costs, built and donated the schools, subsidized its operation and still

managed to price the homes so a GI and his wife could afford it.

BUT YOU'VE got to hear someone talk about Levittown to understand what it did for America.

My contact and her husband bought into the New Jersey development in 1949. They put down \$400, paid \$65-a-month house payments and \$10 a year for water. She just kind of laughs when she talks about her \$8,400 home. True it hadn't a basement or garage. But "each section had a village green and stores and very good schools," she says.

Each year we build larger and more expensive homes that shut out more middle class families. Certainly a market exists for the half million dollar home. In every society since the beginning of time, rich people have been around.

But we must preserve the middle class. We must preserve a system that allows young persons to get a start on life — a chance to become part of the middle class.

If we continue on the road to more and more expensive housing, we could very well kill the goose that lays the golden eggs.

## What price public office?

STATE TREASURER Robert Bowman is under fire for his role in helping solicit campaign contributions for the next re-election campaign of Gov. James Blanchard.

Some critics have suggested that he did more than make lists of New York-based bonding attorneys and financial houses who "might" possibly contribute to the governor's re-election.

One critic has implied that Bowman's role amounted to coercion. The implication being that if you don't cough up you won't get any of the considerable bonding business that the state of Michigan awards to New York firms.

Bowman has refused to take such a rap claiming that all he did was prepare the lists of possible contributors.

IT IS probable that Bowman is no more guilty of arm twisting than any of hundreds of government and party officials engaged in soliciting campaign funds for a variety of national, state, county and local offices.

One of the problems with electing officials to any job is that the election process has become big business engaging the talents of a variety of arm-twisters, fundraisers, image-builders and assorted dream-weavers.

There is a serious race going on in Virginia for governor, which one expert estimates will cost various donors \$7 million.

DETROIT MAYOR Coleman Young



has \$1.5 million in his political campaign fund and is still intent on raising more, to beat a candidate who has only a ghost of a chance of defeating him in November.

Politicians in Wayne County are gearing up to run for Wayne County executive. The experts say a legitimate contender should plan on spending \$400,000.

Even races for local office are horrendously expensive. In Livonia, some council candidates have already reported spending \$15,000 in the primary and the general election isn't until November.

The problem with such extravagant election spending is that office-seekers and office-holders have to rely too much on large contributors to ensure any tenure in office.

Unfortunately, the average John Q. Citizen is not interested enough in providing funding for political campaigns and the politicians have to turn to businesses, which as often as not wish to curry favor of government for some business advantage.

THE OFFICE-SEEKERS think they have to spend just as much as the next guy, the cost of campaigning escalates

and the campaigners look desperately for additional cash.

It all works to create an atmosphere where the office seekers and holders feel more of an obligation to the big political contributors than to the average citizen.

What is needed is a thorough scrutiny of the kinds of expenses being piled up and a decision to set limits on what will be spent in any given campaign.

Most of the spending on political campaigns is useless — primarily for TV or radio ads that repeat endlessly inane messages the creators hope will do nothing more than firmly implant the name of their candidate in the minds of voters, or for home-delivered literature, which is barely or rarely read.

THERE HAVE been some efforts to hold down the costs of campaigns. In Michigan, the Legislature has limited spending on gubernatorial races — to \$1 million in the general election — if candidates take the matching funds, which can be applied for by candidates who raise a minimum of \$50,000.

But there is still a long way to go to keep the political process from becoming an overspending political headache, which keeps government officials beholden to the big contributors.

The Legislature should look into limiting spending in races for state, county and local offices so that the costs are reasonably related to the importance of the office.

### Charter

### City of Farmington Hills, Michigan

Effective Date of Charter—July 1, 1973