

# Hills council candidates share the podium

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THE CANDIDATES were asked whether they would be willing to devote more of the city's allocation to the housing rehabilitation program.

Of the city's \$383,586 in CDBG funds for 1985-86, council members allocated \$50,000 for administrative costs, \$130,896 for housing rehabilitation and \$182,700 for capital improvements.

Despite acknowledging the need for the housing rehabilitation program the city provides grants and low-interest loans to low-to-moderate-income residents for housing repairs and improvements, the candidates agreed that allocating more money for capital improvements benefits many more people.

"I think we get a bigger buy for the buck for the capital needs of the infrastructure," said Soronen, also Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce executive director.

The rehabilitation program loans are repaid at low interest. Repayment of the loans helps continue the program. Yet the capital improvements provide "long-term benefits," Soronen added.

BOTH DOLAN and Marks echoed similar sentiments.

Much of the CDBG money allocated for capital improvements has been used for paving and drainage projects in Section 35, a low-to-moderate-income area — said Dolan, current mayor and an 11-year council veteran. The CDBG money has helped reduce residents' paving assessments.

Uncertain whether the federal government will continue providing CDBG's, Marks said he prefers taking a greater portion of the funds for capital improvements, such as drainage projects, because "it facilitates an improvement for more people."

Grant, former Farmington Community Library Board of Trustees vice president, said he was unfamiliar with the CDBG program.

TALK OF the federal program continued with another audience question. Candidates were asked if they would allocate money from the city's general fund budget for housing rehabilitation and capital improvements for low-to-moderate-income residents in the event the federal government stopped providing CDBG money.

"At the moment, I don't know," Soronen said. "That would be a tough decision because there aren't many spare dollars (in the city budget)."

Providing local tax dollars for federally funded programs means other programs or services the city offers would have to be dropped or reduced, she added.

Before council decides how the CDBG money will be spent, public hearings are scheduled for residents to offer their suggestions. And other than the true-blue council watchers, the media and council members, few attend the hearings. "There is no hue and cry out there to see what we are doing with these funds," Dolan said.

The CDBG money has not been "frustrated away," Dolan continued. But with the money it has, council would complete improvements that have the most permanent benefit to residents, she added.

MARKS SUGGESTED that council would have to look at the budget before any decision was made about using local dollars to support programs paid for with federal funds. "To make any kind of unilateral promise would be facetious," he said.

Grant agreed with other candidates. "I don't know. I personally can't determine the benefit of the program," he said. But, he added, programs such as housing rehabilitation would have to be compared with other programs now funded by local dollars.

Whether the city would continue to help low-to-moderate-income residents if the federal government stopped providing CDBG money also was a topic of debate.

"I can't conceive of any city turning its back on a citizen in need," Marks said. "Where it would come from, I am not prepared to say."

SINCE it is only a matter of time before the CDBG funds will no longer be provided, the city "to some extent, will have to become the safety net. If it gets to no other choice, the city will have to step in," Dolan said.

A supporter of helping residents — especially the elderly — remain in their own houses, Dolan said the city will have to cooperate with the school district and other governmental agencies as well as civic groups to help residents in need.

Philosophically, it should be the city's responsibility to help residents in need, Grant said. "That's an idealistic point of view, though. And I am a realist."

Regardless of whether money could be allocated from the city's budget for programs such as housing rehabilitation, council would still be restricted by the voters. The voters are the ones who decide what services are to be provided. But if money was available in the budget, he would help residents in need, Grant said.

Soronen suggested that residents could be helped through a program similar to the housing rehabilitation

program. The city could offer loans that would be repaid and continue the program without creating a burden on taxpayers.

IN RESPONSE to a question about why Farmington Hills — considered by most as a prosperous community — takes CDBG money when other cities such as Detroit are in more need, Dolan angrily defended the city's use of the federal grants.

"I have no problem accepting these grants," he said. "We have every right to get some of our tax dollars back."

Dolan added that CDBG funds are divided among communities and states fairly. The city is not taking something that doesn't belong to it.

Grant agreed. "I would never turn away those dollars," he said. Although Farmington Hills is considered prosperous, a lot of residents are still in need of help, he said.

# Silky Sullivan set to talk about books

Elementary school age children are invited to meet and talk with author Silky Sullivan — known for the "Henry and Melinda" series of stories — 7-9 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 12, at the Farmington Hills branch of the Farmington Community Library, 32377 W. 12 Mile.

The library is sponsoring the evening in recognition of Children's Book Week, Nov. 11-17.

Sullivan will discuss her books, how to get a book published and how she selects an illustrator for her stories.

Her book's include, "Mystery at the Basketball Game," "Henry and Melinda Enroll," "Roller-skates," and "B Street Five."

Enrollment is limited to 50 children. Parents may register their children beginning Oct. 29 by calling the Hills branch at 553-0300.

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