

Opinion

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Listen up Housing needs genuine

THE IMAGE is unshakable. Mention Farmington Hills and subdivisions of highly priced homes quickly come to mind.

Despite this perception, not everyone who calls Farmington Hills home can afford keeping their house in good repair.

The reasons vary — layoff, illness, fire, fixed income, divorce. No matter. Other more pressing needs — food, clothing, medical bills — always seem to gobble up available cash.

So no one should be surprised there's a pent-up demand for federally financed home repair dollars in Farmington Hills, particularly the south end.

The city hasn't received its 1987-88 Community Development Block Grant of \$272,000 — 15 percent less than last year — but there's already a waiting list for the \$115,000 earmarked for housing improvements.

THESE PRECIOUS improvement dollars benefit eligible seniors, single mothers and families through loans, deferred loans and grants. Despite the vagaries of funding the past five years, Farmington Hills' Housing Rehabilitation Loan Board hasn't abandoned its mission. About \$450,000 has been loaned to 153 homeowners for periods of three to 15 years.

The city plans to sweeten the '87-88 lending pot with \$30,000 in loan repayments. With a lending pot of \$151,000 next year, 30 homeowners — at \$5,000 a pop — stand to improve their houses, the same number as this year. Make no mistake about it: Improvements not only brighten the marketability of individual houses, but also the citywide housing picture.

The remainder of next year's block grant — \$118,000 — has been targeted for south-end drainage problems along gravel roads slated to be paved — problems seemingly ignored in the rush to develop the tax-rich north end.

Combining special assessment-financed road paving and block grant-funded drainage improvements makes south more affordable to south enders, city officials say.

THE CITY pays for drainage improvements designated in the master



Bob Sklar

storm drain plan. It doesn't pay for local drainage improvements unless there's a health or safety hazard.

Still, a groundswell of public support just might convince city leaders to budget for selected non-emergency local drainage improvements.

As for recycling repayments to the lending pot, that practice may be well-intentioned. But George Roberts, the feisty loan board spokesman, makes a strong pitch for channeling some to a reserve fund as a hedge against delinquent loans, housing emergencies, cost overruns and the elimination of block grants.

Meanwhile, Farmington Hills — with an operating budget of \$19.5 million — stands a good chance of finding dollars no longer committed because of a discontinued program or overbudgeting. The housing rehab program should have first crack at any uncommitted greenbacks.

STRANGELY, THE housing rehab program — designed to benefit lower-to-moderate-income folks — is expected to be self-sufficient. The city provides no administrative money even though it takes in money through building and inspection fees generated by repair work.

Next year's administrative costs will be \$39,000. It seems fairer to divide that cost — the city paying half, the program paying half. The upshot: adding \$20,000 to the lending pot to help another four homeowners.

At his swearing in, Mayor Ben Marks made a big splash about making this the year of enhancing the quality of life in Farmington Hills.

What better way to begin than by acknowledging that Farmington Hills indeed has neighborhoods where fixing leaky roofs and frayed wiring are more pressing than adding a redwood deck or a sun room.

Meaningful targets of Unicorn Hunters

ON THE BULLETIN board at the office where I work is a poster of words and phrases banished by the Unicorn Hunters, serious-minded people who are ever alert for spoken and written words that should bring frowns to those who speak English.

The chief Unicorn Hunter is William Rabe who doubles as college relations director at Lake Superior State college in Sault Ste. Marie.

The targets of the Hunters are often funny, although it is uncomfortable to find a phrase you have often butchered and, worse, to study an example because you can't clear why it so affronts the hunters.

What atrocities do they find? They started with such buzzwords as "meaningful," "input" and "essence." If you can imagine the scenario in which these words have meaningful input, then Unicorn Hunters have no reason to prioritize your parameters, at this particular point in time.

"It wasn't just that they were reversed," Rabe says of these words in the March 30 issue of *Insight*, a magazine published by the Washington Times. "It was that they had come to mean nothing, if indeed they had ever meant anything."

"They were stuff that was being repeated simply because people were too lazy to invent phrases that meant something."

ARE SUCH language gaffes mere imperfections that are being exploited by the likes of Rabe? Hardly. The danger is that a language that becomes trivial becomes useless. It also becomes a tool for the powerful to say nothing — or to lie — while sounding profound. "If you don't nip bad language in the



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bud, it leads to something worse," said Rabe, who says he has seen a mortician's work described as "the final step in the health care delivery system."

"Health care delivery" is on this year's list of banished words. It sounds, says one Unicorn Hunter, as though health care is delivered to your doorstep in the way milk no longer is.

Rabe's example reminds me of the CIA's "health alteration committee," which was a nifty term for an assassin team. Other hunters of ruined language note that the nuclear power industry invented "energetic disassembly" so the less pleasant "explosion" could be avoided.

IT GETS worse. In 1975, according to the *Insight* article, Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization reportedly said, "We do not want to destroy any people. It is precisely because we have been advocating coexistence that we have shed so much blood."

That comment is so Orwellian that it won the annual Doublepeak Award, sponsored by that National Council of Teachers of English.

Unfortunately, the English language is also prey for terrorists who wish to coexist with the spoken and written word until it disappears from, um, meaningful dialogue.

Do you know where I'm coming from?



Sarah Goddard Power enjoyed a leadership role on the University of Michigan Board of Regents but she especially enjoyed the students. She's pictured here talking to students at the Ann Arbor campus during her campaign for the U-M board in August 1974.

A life devoted to others

WE NO DOUBT never will really know. But we are compelled to ask.

The answer is not likely to be found in circumstances surrounding her premature death, but rather in an examination of her life.

It was characteristic of her that Sarah Power could subordinate her own need for recognition to the goals for which she made personal and professional commitments.

She believed in involvement. For her this involvement led to support for international understanding in key functions at the United Nations and the State Department and later through her work at the University of Michigan.

Her strength and influence were exercised through her ability to analyze issues and formulate strategies, exemplified by her push for increased opportunities in all phases of employment at the university.

HER STYLE dictated that she not dominate gatherings and parties she hosted. These were occasions in which her guests were given the opportunity to explore new acquaintances in whom were embodied different ideas, different perspectives.

She created variable seating arrangements to assure guests would meet one another. She provided the es-

sential comment, the necessary phrase to open one personality to another.

Her charm, wit and intelligence forever seemed devoted not just to her family, but for those causes which her biography reveals she never abandoned.

But she could be necessarily blunt, penetrating.

"We're still second class citizens," she told a group of feminists in 1981. "We've come a long way, but we still have an enormously long way to go, and now we're at an impasse."

She persevered, building relationships and understanding.

She was not flamboyant. But she was not shy. She was incredibly strong of will and of heart.

She understood that if great things were to be achieved, they had to be constructed with strong bonds, clear principles, integrity and hard work.

HER WORK as a regent at the University of Michigan reflected her work ethic and her principles.

Examining her most recent concerns finds she was striving to maintain the university's impeccable academic and social credentials, which were being questioned as a result of allegations of racism and grievances of minority students.

She worked hard to resolve the situation.

Those who knew her also know she



John Reddy

worked tirelessly over her 12-year tenure to avoid such occurrences. That it happened at all had to be a disappointment to her. That it was resolved quickly has to be a statement to her quiet and effective way of using her enormous influence.

It was characteristic of her that after stressful resolution of the minority student controversy she should accompany a harried President Harold Shapiro across campus to his car. She would tell her husband, Philip, later of her elation in watching students approach the president and congratulate him on the university's handling of the matter.

If Sarah Power's life reflects a statement, it could well be that great things are accomplished by those who build platforms, not by those whose charismatic style is best suited for their use.

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Important issues go wanting as governor narrows focus

WHERE'S JAMIE?

Gov. James J. Blanchard advertises he "has shovel, will travel" to any industrial groundbreaking there is. Happily, he has made economic diversification the top priority of his administration, followed closely by more bucks for education and attention to toxic wastes. The list ends there. On other major issues, a governor who won 69 percent of the vote in his re-election bid is hardly visible.

EVEN REPUBLICANS are looking to him for leadership. Take the problem of roads, particularly in these suburbs, which have seen the bulk of Michigan's reindustrialization.

After weeks of work, meetings and negotiations, Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, has almost thrown up his hands in despair and produced a package of bills that will yield the state road fund a bare \$59 million more.

When you figure that the transportation fund is almost a \$1 billion item, Fessler's bills — even if passed — will produce only 6 percent more for the kitty.

Clearly, it will take an increase in the gasoline tax, which produces \$40 million per penny per gallon, to generate the kind of megabucks our battered roads need. But Blanchard says no to

any such tax increase. Not even a word of benign encouragement. Just no.

TAKE STATE funding of courts, an idea this writer considers foolish but which many officials consider necessary.

Dorothy Comstock Riley and G. Menen Williams, the current and past chief justices of the state Supreme Court, endorse it. Both parties are looking to Blanchard for leadership.

"It will take executive leadership," said Senate Judiciary chairman Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford.

"She'll have to get with the governor and (budget director) Bob Naftaly," said House Judiciary chairman Perry Bulard, D-Ann Arbor.

No endorsement from Blanchard. Nothing in his budget for it. This was the year it could have been done.

Price tags for full state funding of courts range from \$150 million to \$225 million. It so happens the state could get a \$170 million windfall because of federal tax reform.

State income tax revenue will rise about that much because of the new federal definition of taxable income. That windfall could pay the court tab.

Nope, says the governor. Instead, he is out-Republicanizing the Republicans by advocating lowering the income tax



Tim Richard

rate from 4.6 percent to 4.4.

Take the SEMTA reorganization and funding issue, where Blanchard has stood back and let others grapple with the problems.

ALTHOUGH VERY close in political ideology to his moderate Republican predecessor, William G. Milliken, Blanchard has been entirely different in style.

Milliken was audible on a host of issues, including all of the above plus school tax reform and preservation of older downtowns. Blanchard's style has been to concentrate on two or three, and this year he's down to one — job retraining.

I for one wish Blanchard would heed the words of another executive who refused to coast on his laurels after winning big: "The remembrance of triumphs achieved in the past is of use chiefly if it spurs us to fresh effort in the present." — Teddy Roosevelt.