

# Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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## Council pay Maintain spirit of city charter

**F**ARMINGTON HILLS city councilman Ben Marks views it as democracy personified. But we view it as another unnecessary bureaucratic layer.

Bluntly put, there's no need for a compensation commission to set pay adjustments for Farmington Hills City Council members.

Since it would be appointed by the mayor, the seven-member commission, no matter how independent-minded, inevitably would trigger the perception that it was mirroring the city council's desires.

The city's 1973 charter sets council pay at \$1,800. The mayor earns 150 percent of that amount, or \$2,700.

Monday night, the city council learned that an earlier 4-3 vote to put a charter amendment on the ballot empowering the council to create, by ordinance, a compensation commission fell short of the required three-fifths majority. The council should take advantage of that and forget about such a commission.

A compensation commission could adjust pay up or down — but don't count on a reduction. What's more, it's the rare exception for a governmental unit to overturn pay set by such a commission.

JOE ALKATEEB, a councilman for 8 1/2 of the 15 years since the charter was adopted, supports a compensation commission.

He thinks the council could boast the same pay scale for another 20 years "and still attract good people." But he doesn't think "the people of Farmington Hills want charity from anybody. If they want you to serve them and honor a budget, of \$25 million and do a good job, I think you ought to be compensated accordingly for the time you put in."

"The city has grown, the council's job is much more demanding, the mayor's job is awfully demanding," he added. "And it is not fair to have these people put all this time and effort without proper compensation."

We don't buy Alkateeb's reasoning because council pay, by charter intent, is supposed to be a

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token of appreciation and to cover any out-of-pocket costs. It's not supposed to be a lure for seeking a city council seat.

What's "proper compensation" anyway — \$1,800, \$2,200, \$22,000? How do you factor in the public exposure given to a council member who's also a business person?

We agree with councilman Aldo Vagnozzi, who says: "If I felt there was need for an increase, but on the ballot directly and take our chances that way."

A FIXED amount was put in the charter to keep decision-making over pay — a certain controversy if there ever was one — in the hands of voters, not the council.

The resolution to put the now-withdrawn charter amendment on the ballot stemmed from a desire to draw "active, interested and qualified citizens to the office of the city council."

But a review of past council hopefuls doesn't reflect a shortfall of active, interested or qualified candidates. All knew the responsibility, workload and pay going in. Frankly, if you can't afford to contribute your time to the city, or if you think it's too much of a sacrifice, don't run.

Meanwhile, if more pay is merited, the council should calculate a specific percentage increase that's in line with the spirit of the city's charter and budget and present it to voters at the next city election. A survey of council pay in nearby cities of similar size should be part of the process.

We see a compensation commission sparking more problems with council pay than it solves.

## Rouge River Cleanup cost can't be ignored

**I**T'S GOING to cost hundreds of millions of dollars over the next 20 years — including hundreds of dollars out of our own pockets — to clean the Rouge River.

While the cost is high, we simply cannot afford not to clean the Rouge.

Decades of neglect have turned this once-beautiful river into nothing more than an open sewer that cuts across the heart of our communities.

For too long, we've ignored the environmental time bomb that is the Rouge. Once, it flowed freely. Now, a variety of pollutants, including PCBs and human waste, choke the life out of our river.

We can't blame for off industrial polluters, either. Not this time. This time, the problem rests at our own door steps. The bulk of material clogging the Rouge, experts say, is household waste.

Certainly, we'd like to see the federal and state government assist with the estimated \$900 million cleanup cost.

It's not as if they don't have a stake in this, too. After all, the Rouge isn't just Michigan's problem. It empties into the Detroit river, which empties into the Great Lakes, which carry Rouge

pollution as far south as Ohio and as far east as New York State. That alone should prompt the federal government to release the \$133 million Rouge Act monies say is owed for preliminary improvements.

As for state responsibility — nearly one-fifth of Michigan's population, including most of its biggest residential and corporate taxpayers make their homes within the Rouge basin.

But we cannot close our eyes to our own responsibility. Even with federal and state help, some 60 percent of cleanup costs must be borne locally. If we aren't willing to protect ourselves, if we just don't care, how can we expect government to contribute its share?

**GOOD INTENTIONS** alone aren't enough. We support Rouge Rescue '88, the third annual volunteer cleanup. But let's be honest, a thousand Rouge Rescues wouldn't alone be enough to clean this river.

That is going to take new sewer lines and reduction of spillovers from combined sewer overflows, outmoded municipal pipes that dump human and industrial waste into the river when they back up.

SEMOG, the Southeast Michigan Council of governments, has drafted a 20-year action plan to reduce the Rouge's potential environmental danger. It calls for new sewers, including giant "super sewers" to eliminate backups and minimize overflows.

It's a prudent plan, one that encourages communities to use flexible and cost-effective methods rather than imposing an iron will.

Already, it has gained much heavyweight backing. Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara is a supporter. So are SEMOG leaders. That kind of local backing doesn't happen overnight. It may never happen again.

Nor is there time to waste in gathering federal support. After the 1990 census, it's a near-guarantee Michigan will lose at least one Congressional seat. That makes it essential we begin lobbying those representatives we do have — men like John Dingell, D-Trenton, arguably the Midwest's most powerful congressman; Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, a strong advocate of a 1970s Rouge cleanup; and David Bonior, D-Mount Clemens, a champion of environmental causes among Michigan's delegations.

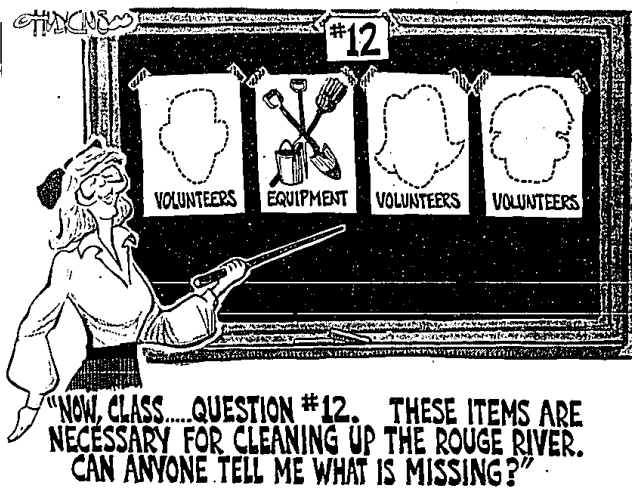
The momentum is there, but the clock is running.

Within the next 20 years, we can leave our children a river — or a sewer. It's our choice. If we wait, it could be too late.



File photo

John Covert (left) and Dave Fuller, science teachers at Churchill High School in Livonia, participated in last year's Rouge Rescue. Although the cleanup is an important and commendable effort, it's going to take more than volunteers to cleanup the Rouge River.



## Ethnic extravaganza: Make it a public event

**IT WAS** warm in the packed East Middle School gym that weeknight. Introductions for the ninth annual ethnic extravaganza seemed endless.

But the musical festival that followed, a co-production of Farmington Public Schools' bilingual department and its parent advisory council was well worth the wait.

Upwards of 100 preschoolers to senior high students, representing many of the 68 languages spoken in the district, donned native garb to perform on the makeshift stage May 10.

The audience of fellow students, parents, school officials and guests watched Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Italian, Albanian, Korean, Spanish, Greek and Middle Eastern students perform dances of their homeland.

Afterward, everyone was treated to an ethnic feast, prepared and served by bilingual department families.

The evening was intended "to bring the parents of the different cultures under one roof and have them meet each other and share in each other's culture," said Haroune Alameddine, bilingual department director.



Bob Sklar

Sporting an expansive smile, Alameddine took delight in watching parents break down language barriers to take part in the night's festivities.

**HE CALLED** it a "true community effort." But even though I admire his knack for acclimating foreign families to the American way without stripping them of their cultural identity, I can't agree entirely with Alameddine.

That's because, unfortunately, few residents outside of it know about the bilingual department's scope. Did you know that the department serves 400 students representing 17 different cultures?

Nice as it is, the ethnic extravaganza is one of the district's best-kept secrets because it's only open to

bilingual department parents and boosters.

If opened to the public, the event would greatly help the Farmington area's Cultural Awareness Committee in its quest to "raise the community's consciousness about the variety of cultures and traditions in our neighborhoods."

**IT'D LIKE** to see the extravaganza become a public event that's rotated among the three senior highs. Maybe a full-course meal couldn't be served then, but bite-sized ethnic delicacies certainly could.

Besides, some of the youngsters who take part in the program are so small, the audience has to crane to see them when they dance on the gym floor in front of the stage in the bleacher area at East.

How about it, Haroune? How about turning the public spotlight on your colorful little show?

Only then will it reach a real cross-section of the community. Only then will it help heal the social wounds inflicted by adults and kids driven by ignorance about the heritage of others whose roots happen to be different.

## Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

### Hills donation earns praise

**To the editor:**

Your May 5 story about a Farmington Hills businessman who donated \$1,000 to the reward fund to catch the Oakland County rapist demonstrates a citizen's genuine concern for the quality of life in Farmington Hills.

More important than the money itself, Mr. McNair's donation exemplifies the kind of initiative necessary to stop crime in our town.

Concerned citizens have a right and a duty to contribute to the safety and well-being of their community.

Police and city officials, on the other hand, have an obligation to keep lines of communication open between law enforcement agencies and residents.

Citizens should be kept informed, not only for their own protection but so that everyone will be cognizant of suspicious activities that could help police apprehend these offenders.

If more citizens voice their concern, stay aware, and work together with police, perhaps we could prevent any further harm and humiliation of our neighbors.

For my family and families like the McNairs, I hope so.

Marie Masters,  
Farmington Hills

### RFK's death remembered

**To the editor:**  
On the evening of June 6, 1968, the

assassin Sirhan Sirhan, with a gun in his hand, stood in the kitchen of the Los Angeles Ambassador Hotel and waited for Sen. Robert F. Kennedy.

Upon entry, the gun was fired and Bobby lay fallen in a pool of his blood on the floor, dying.

Eight weeks earlier, while campaigning for president in Indianapolis, Bobby gave his finest speech. He had heard about the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Those people that cried for Dr. King would cry again, along with many others, on June 6, the day Bobby died. Mourners lined the tracks of the funeral train and the church.

Men and women, blacks and whites, rich and poor, Democrats and Republicans all cried.

As we remember Bobby 20 years later, these are the things one remembers. Those that mourned his death still do today.

Vernon C. Klepinski,  
Farmington Hills

### Many do not share views

**To the editor:**

The citizens of Oakland County do not share your jubilation at the retirement of their advocate, Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson.

From his first day in office, Brooks Patterson set out to redefine the role of prosecutor as the victim's lawyer. He has steadfastly sought

justice on their behalf.

On their behalf he has abolished plea bargaining for drug dealers more than a decade before polite society had ever heard of "crack" cocaine. He sought to close those adult theaters and book stores peddling pornography that aided in the destruction of their neighborhoods.

He tripped the output of jury trials, demanded tougher sentences from judges, and fought early paroles.

And, yes, he demanded the restoration of capital punishment for the cold-blooded crime of murder (apparently to your chagrin).

Most recently (signed into law March 31), Mr. Patterson was instrumental in getting legislation enacted that allows victims of crime in this state to demand a jury trial — an important right that used to be solely within the option of the criminal.

Your editorial complaining that imprisoning felons creates undesirable overcrowding (which apparently you find more abhorrent than the victimization of our citizens) reflects a studied ignorance born of political partisanship rather than fact or reason.

Those of us who have labored with Brooks to restore balance to the criminal justice system know that he will be missed.

But Brooks Patterson leaves behind a legacy that cannot be denied. Crime victims in Oakland County have had a champion for their right.

We fight to protect the innocent, not make excuses for the guilty. If that is "quixotic idealism" as you charge, bring on the windmills.

Richard Thompson,  
chief assistant prosecutor  
Oakland County

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