

Opinion

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Municipal ethics

Let public help develop code

WE'RE STRONG believers in a municipal code of ethics for Farmington Hills.

But after Mayor-elect Terry Sever, councilman Aldo Vagnozzi and councilman-elect Phillip Arnold propose a code based on city manager William Costick's sample, the proposal should be made public and a hearing set.

We've long held that a code of ethics — bolstered by reasonable ways to investigate complaints, publicize indiscretions and discipline violators — would give all city officials and employees a clear-cut code of standards to work by.

But without public feedback and involvement, a code, no matter how conscientiously developed, would be suspect.

Questions would naturally arise about the city manager and city council setting ethical standards for themselves and city workers.

As we stressed in supporting a code of ethics Dec. 8, public officials and employees are endowed with a trust that must be held to the highest possible standard.

COSTICK'S SAMPLE code aptly drives home the point that public officials and employees earn such trust through the quality of their integrity and conduct.

The sample code highlights such key areas as gratuities, use of information, financial disclosure, business dealings, suppression of public information and use of city property.

It generalizes about the kinds of actions public servants should skirt: using public employment

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for private gain, giving preferential treatment to any group or person, losing independence or impartiality, and tarnishing the confidence of the public or the integrity of city government.

For the sake of emphasis, we repeat what we have urged the code development committee to address: business relationships between council members, planning commissioners and zoning board members and private industry; election practices, especially as they relate to city employees; council members' responsibilities before, during and after spending public money for seminars and conventions; and the practice of conducting council business over the telephone.

We also have called for a mechanism to insulate the city manager and city administration from council politics. Public servants should have the right to seek advisory opinions.

State law already forbids public servants from soliciting or being party to a contract with the public entity they serve.

A code drawn up by the people it's intended to serve — without public inquiry — is really no code at all. It lacks a vital element: the view of voters.



Focusing the spotlight on some of what's nice

WITH THANKSGIVING just past and New Year's just ahead, the interlude is a fitting time to spotlight some of what's nice about Farmington and Farmington Hills:

- Farmington Hills' Heritage Park — a nature lover's haven any time, it's a wintertime treat, what with sleighing, strolling, skating and snowshoeing.

- The Farmington Historical Museum — spruced up for the holidays, it's a special delight for local history buffs this time of year.

- Farmington booster Walt Sundquist — a Keep Michigan Beautiful Hall of Famer, his historic home on Grand River, just east of the Downtown Farmington Center, looks great in its holiday finest.

- Farmington Mayor Dick Tupper — a Goodfellow who, as general chairman the past 17 years, has helped make Christmas a true reflection of the Farmington Area Goodfellows' motto: "A Time to Share — A Time to Care."

- The Council of Homeowners of Farmington Hills — which ran into credibility problems over exactly who it represented shortly after it was revived in 1988 but which has



Bob Sklar

since blossomed into an effective liaison to city government.

- City clerk Kathy Dorman — who despite becoming Farmington Hills' new clerk just three months before the fall election, always sported a friendly hello no matter how often a reporter called for a pre-election update.

- Farmington Public Schools deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan — who, despite a technical background, is able to publicly discuss the complexities of school financing in easy-to-grasp terms.

- Downtown Development Authority executive director Wendy Strip Sittsamer — who has inspirationally championed Farmington's central business district while overseeing the first phase of the DDA's \$1.4-million streetscape improvement project.

- Farmington resident Kay Briggs — a terrific little lady who is well deserving of her latest accolade: the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce Citizen of the Year Award.

- Massie Kurzoja and George Roberts — for making the rest of Farmington Hills realize Section 38, now Old Town, is indeed a vital part of the city.

- Farmington Hills council watcher Vernon Klepinski — who not only has heightened awareness about the tragedy of child abuse and the plight of the homeless but has kept public attention trained on these gripping concerns.

- The St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center — the Daughters of Charity center in Farmington Hills is celebrating "60 years of celebrating the child." Orphans, abused kids and unwed teenage mothers have all benefited.

- Farmington Hills residents Liz and Bill LaKritz — who cared enough about the less fortunate to enlist the support of friends and family in testing a Thanksgiving eve party for 80 needy guests identified through the Salvation Army.

Too extreme

Tree proposal is overbearing

BLUNTLY PUT, Farmington Hills' proposed tree protection ordinance would have done more good a decade ago — before the building boom of the mid-'80s.

The city is now 85 percent developed. But the proposal, which requires a city permit to remove many kinds of trees, could still help save landmark or mature trees on remaining land slated for development.

If such an ordinance saved even one mature or landmark tree from indiscriminate removal, it will have served its purpose.

But we agree with homeowners who object to extending the ordinance to occupied single-family lots. Non-occupied single-family lots are another matter.

We're all for tree protection. But we don't think the city should be in the business of infringing on homeowner rights.

Besides, an ordinance regulating how many trees that homeowners can remove in a given year without a permit is unenforceable. How

many homeowners would be apt to turn in neighbors? The ordinance also lacks an appeal process.

MOST LANDMARK or valued mature trees are in older developed sections of the city where homeowners know the fine points of wood-lot management. Except in rare instances, most homeowners who have mature trees aren't apt to irresponsibly strip their land.

Even city manager William Costick acknowledged that the ordinance's intent is to alert developers up front, at site plan submission, "that they ought to save trees, that we want trees saved."

We agree with councilman Aldo Vagnozzi that the ordinance should cover utility easements and rights of way. We agree with resident Martin Krohmer that violators not only pay a fine of up to \$500 per tree removed but replace each tree with one of equal value.

A tree protection ordinance is overdue in Farmington Hills. But it should be practical.

In school

Peace, goodwill worth celebrating

FOR DECADES, Christians have bemoaned the secularization of Christmas. But the trend continues and maybe it should — at least for part of the holiday.

Many religions celebrate holidays this time of year. The original celebration was the winter solstice, which marked the point at which the sun was lowest on the horizon.

Now Jews celebrate a winter festival and Christians a holy day in December. Hanukkah commemorates a military victory, while Christmas marks the birth of a savior for Christians.

There is a difference, however, between a religious holy day and a secular holiday. The holy day implies certain obligations, and its public observance in an increasingly pluralistic society becomes difficult.

SENSITIVITY TO the issue has caused some school districts, such as Livonia, to limit celebrations to secular recognition of figures like Santa Claus. In other districts, from Bloomfield Hills to Rochester schools, the use or non-use of Christmas symbols is stirring up vehement protests.

Parents are projecting fantasies of what they think the holiday should be like. Their unrealistic expectations are a cause for concern.

About 100 supporters of a campaign to put "Christmas back into Bloomfield Hills Schools" met last week, calling for the school board to allow Christmas celebrations in grades K-12. They also asked for a more responsible board and a "God-centered curriculum," a thought that ought to strike fear in any freedom-loving heart.

Toby Jones, a co-founder of the protest group NORCH (Taxpayers Organization to Restore Cultural Heritage), even had the audacity to pro-

claim that "Christmas is the most important holiday in America and in the world." By whose standard, we wonder.

IN ROCHESTER, the debate is every bit as spirited but less dogmatic. In one instance, 150 staff members signed a petition asking that Christmas activities not be taken out of the schools.

"It's far richer to add than to take away," said Madeleine Adamec, an elementary school teacher who started the petition. "The changing community provides us with an opportunity to grow and to respect one another's cultural experiences."

How do we resolve the status of Christmas, with its significance as a national and religious holiday, and its observance in the schools? Perhaps the answer lies partially in realizing that there are many reasons to celebrate Christmas, both as a holiday and as a holy day.

THE JEWISH Community Council has examples of what are appropriate observances. They include education about religious freedom, intercultural programs focusing on the development of society, use of religious symbols as models of self-expression, religious music appreciation and an excused absence for religious holidays.

Inappropriate observances include organized prayer, public display or presentation of religious symbols in school, religious plays or programs and singing religious songs or carols.

Certainly holy day services and commemorations belong at home and in church. But there is plenty of room in school for teaching the secular values of peace and goodwill on which this earth must revolve.

That is a trend to foster.

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.

Coverage was appreciated

To the editor:
What a wonderful surprise to see the full-page article about the American House Music Makers (Nov. 24). I was away when the paper came out, but several sources supplied me with the article. It was much more than we might have expected.
Betty Houghton, Southfield

Keeping folks well informed

To the editor:
Congratulations to the Enterprise-Observer on its 100th anniversary. You asked for "Memories." I remember, oh yes, I remember.
From my childhood on, through school days, married years, teaching career, and now in retirement activities, the Enterprise, and now the Observer, has been, and is, my lifeline to the community.
The "old Enterprise" — yes, it chronicled, in detail, the happenings of this Little Pond. Columns, written by local residents, told of the local activities of various parts of the area: Westpoint (Seven Mile and Farmington roads), Clarenceville, North Farmington, Farmington Hill, etc.
"Miss Helen Bradley is spending this week in Detroit." "Mr. S.D. Harger returned Saturday from a 10-day vacation trip to Chicago, his old home." "Walter Switzer is enjoying a Chevrolet car." "Mr. Carl Cox

is confined to her bed with the flu." Church schedules and activities were listed.

The "High School Tattler" was a paper-within-a-paper. High school volunteer students gathered, wrote about and brought to the Enterprise news of each grade, class happenings and athletic and social news.

"Third Grade: Most of the pupils have their multiplication tables learned up to the furs." "Fifth Grade: Miss Steele's invitation to the students to see the pictures of Yellowstone National Park at her home was appreciated by them."

Programs and assemblies were given and written up. News of the rural school districts were not consolidated until 1944.

The town library, which was one small room at the side of the Town Hall (now the Masonic Temple), really kept track of books — "Persons being the following books, please turn them to the library: 'Rivers End,' 'Grandpa's Little Girl,' 'Giri from Montana.'"

Headlines told of the important things: "New wringer mains a pressing need." "Memorial erected to our soldiers." "Fruit show big feature." Professional cards took up a column: attorney-at-law, doctors, auctioneer, Perkins' Orchestra, Interior Tile Co., monuments, painting and paper hanging, etc.

The Detroit United Lines printed its timetables — to Detroit, to Pontiac, to Northville and then on to Plymouth and Wayne and Ann Arbor.

Vital statistics were always noted: births, deaths, marriages. My own wedding, 30 years ago last summer, was lovingly detailed in great detail, as was my mother and father's back in 1902.

The Observer has carried on this great tradition, but has broadened its scope, and appears twice a week rather than keeping to the former weekly publication.

It still keeps the residents of the area well informed, and may it continue to do so for at least another century.

Kathryn Rubert Briggs, Farmington Hills

Rates are not available to all

To the editor:
Recently, there was a misrepresentation in Sid Mitra's column in your publication which I would like to correct.

Mr. Mitra reported, in a column on writing as a hobby-turned-business, that the American Society of Journalists and Authors is able to furnish, on request, rates paid for articles submitted to specific publications. This is untrue.

The ASJA is the nationwide organization of independent nonfiction writers. Members report current book advances and article and other fees in our monthly newsletter; however, this information is confidential — for ASJA members' use only — and is not available to the general public. Access to such timely and accurate information is one of the major benefits of membership in the ASJA.

We have been getting many requests for a "rate sheet" as a result of this article. We would appreciate your setting the record straight.

Alexandra Cantor, executive director ASJA, New York

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