Farmington Observer

Opinion

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

New purpose

EDC changes with the times

The Economic Development Corporation in Farmington Hills has played a key part in much of the city's emphasis on high-tech development.

IT'S TRYING to solve problems it unwittingly helped create.

It's now dedicated to not only resolving concerns spurred by rapid municipal growth but also preserving the city's quality of life.

The Economic Development Corporation in Farmington Hills has played a key part in much of the city's emphasis on high-tech development.

The 9-year-old group has added $3½ million in municipal tax revenues and created 5,000 permanent jobs in the city by issuing $120 million in tax-free industrial revenue bonds.

But that bonding tool was erased from the federal tax code in 1987-88.

So the EDC has changed, too.

For starters, it took $40,000 from its $500,000 bank account, built through bond application fees, to develop improvement plans for three of the city's gateways: Northwestern Highway, 12 Mile and Grand River.

The intent: to forge a communitywide coalition that helps convince businesses to not only stay in Farmington Hills, but also take pride in it.

THE EDC hopes the visual improvement study it commissioned for the median and road edges of Northwestern Highway inspires property owners to pay for actual beautification work.

The EDC hopes businesses along Grand River, north of Eight Mile — in the city's oldest business district — react to its lead in sprucing up the median by beautifying their properties.

And the EDC hopes the conceptual design study it commissioned hastens the widening of 12 Mile, west of Farmington Road, into a boulevard.

That computer-aided design study broke new technical ground in developing road improvement plans. It also means the financially strapped Oakland County Road Commission has one less hurdle to clear before improving 12 Mile.

The Michigan Department of Transportation is committed to at least two more I-696 interchanges in western Oakland County. But none will come until the western reaches of 12 Mile, a major feeder road, are widened.

The EDC's effort should keep planning fires for the new interchanges burning by intensifying pressure on both the state and the county.

CHANGES IN purpose also prompted the EDC to commission a 12-year demographic and economic forecast — a sort of long-range community profile.

The $35,000 forecast projects the city's economic outlook in the year 2000 based on three different levels of economic growth.

It includes a microcomputer-based model to simplify future economic forecasting. A framework for evaluating municipal needs, costs and revenue is available at the touch of a keyboard.

"The idea is that if you need a projection of what will happen to employment in the city if car sales drop off, you'll be able to get some feel for what will happen, rather than guessing at it," says EDC chairman Robert McConnell, one of the city's brightest economic minds.

The forecast will be invaluable for Farmington Hills' Year 2000 steering committee. The newly appointed committee's charge is to develop a plan for the 1990s to achieve the quality of life that residents desire.

Only in time will we know the real worth of the EDC's ambitious new directions.

But hey: give the EDC credit for adopting a new role as a civic catalyst instead of folding up after achieving a much-desired, non-residential tax base of 35-40 percent — which should help keep homeowner taxes down.

Dr. King

Cherish his unifying dream

We are heartened to see that some communities and educational institutions are getting behind the effort to make Dr. King a national hero in the hearts of coming generations.

CELEBRATING the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. is essential to all suburban residents — black and white.

And while the civil rights leader's birthday on Jan. 16 has been proclaimed a national holiday, many suburban communities quietly balk at the idea.

That's a shame.

Many ask why they should celebrate. After all, some say, we don't outwardly celebrate national holidays dedicated to other leaders. Others see Dr. King as a leader solely for the black community and leave the commemoration to them.

Hence a tradition is developing that sees racially mixed municipalities like Southfield honoring Dr. King with major events, and most other suburban communities doing little, if anything. Of course, exceptions do exist. Each year Birmingham dedicates more time and resources to the event.

Some of the neglect, we are sure, is based simply on an absent-minded tendency. But we are just as sure that others refuse to honor Dr. King because of racist attitudes.

PREJUDICE is an ever-lingering danger in our society. It feeds on itself like a dirty wound, poisoning more and more of the body-politic.

Left to fester, it will destroy us.

It is good medicine to remind ourselves that people do exist who have the courage to actively fight against the sickness that continually threatens us.

Dr. King showed us the way. Without his efforts yesterday, we would be living in a very different world today.

We must foster the values he taught us so that others will have the courage to continue the battle which, when won, will set all of us free.

We need to commemorate his activities so those of us who lived through that stormy era never forget the struggle we endured. We need to honor Dr. King so those who were born after his death can learn from the courageous example he set.

Since his assassination, Dr. King has been nearly forgotten by an entire generation now verging on adulthood.

They don't know about the force of the firehoses unleashed against unarmed demonstrators, who fought only for their basic civil rights.

They are unaware that before Dr. King's crusade, thousands were tortured and lynched because they were born black.

They have been cheated out of learning about an era when a majority of America was finally brought together to stamp out racism.

They have been kept in ignorance about the dream that Dr. King so eloquently outlined that day long ago before the Lincoln Memorial.

WE ARE heartened to see that some communities and educational institutions are getting behind the effort to make Dr. King a national hero in the hearts of coming generations.

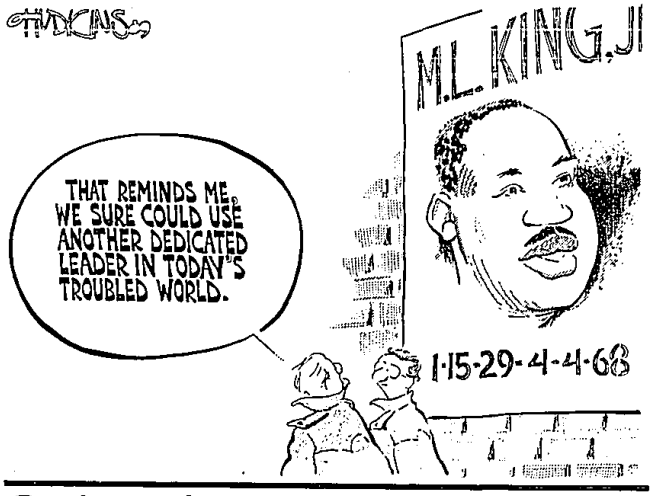
In February, Black Awareness Month, Rochester's Oakland University has outlined an ambitious program to help all of us learn more about blacks' contribution to our culture.

And the University of Michigan has an entire slate of programs during Dr. King's birthday to help all of us remember.

We believe it crucial that even more educational centers and municipalities kick in to honor this great American.

Engendering the spirit of Dr. King in the very young is probably the most important effort of all. If we can bring up a new generation with a better understanding of racial prejudice, we have a winning chance for a new society.

Honoring Dr. King once again gives us all a chance to learn more about each other's cultures, to erase the stereotypes that hinder our efforts for a unified society.



Schools, trees, seniors all make 1989 wish list

PART OF what's on my wish list for 1989:

- Classroom enrichment spurred by Farmington Public Schools' plans to expand computer use in instruction.
- A tough tree protection ordinance in Farmington Hills, but not one so restrictive it encroaches on homeowner rights when occupied single-family lots are involved.
- A telling answer from the Farmington area's senior adults activities study committee to the age-old question: "Just how adequate is Mercy Center — home to the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services Senior Adults Program — in availability, accessibility, floor design, square footage and parking space?"
- City council resolutions honoring Chuck Schulkins, ailing now but who has ably served the Farmington Area Goodfellows for half a century.
- An administrative update on plans to bring sidewalks to more main roads in Farmington Hills.
- A Farmington Hills Year 2000 Plan that's an enterprising means to achieving the quality of life residents envision in the 1990s.
- Stronger community support for the Cultural Awareness Committee, doing its darnedest to show the world our community is rooted in ethnic harmony, not hostility.
- Driver adherence to the 25 mph speed limit along the winding, scenic, newly paved stretch of Drake Road, north of 11 Mile.
- A solution to the problem identified by many teenagers that the Farmington area boasts few places for them to gather with friends on weekends.
- Revived discussion of an advisory traffic commission in Farmington, one aimed at anticipating traffic problems and providing research and analytical support, not at undercutting the city administration and public safety department.
- A truly effective municipal code of ethics in Farmington Hills.
- Smooth orientation periods for newly elected state Rep. Jan Dolan and county commissioner Donn Wolf, and evidence of their commitment to being open and accessible.
- A commitment to assuring our community provides affordable housing for all income and age levels, not just yuppies.
- Success for Farmington Hills' committee to increase voter awareness and participation.
- Developing a municipal park in southern Farmington Hills and renovating the Spicer Estate House into a visitors center at Heritage Park.
- A communitywide crackdown against drug and alcohol misuse and abuse, in light of the Farmington Hills Police Department's yearlong Say No to Drugs campaign.
- A practical, affordable solution to our community's fast-approaching solid waste disposal problems.
- Continued increases in funding for Farmington Hills' housing rehab program, which helps lower-income families keep their homes habitable.
- Reasonable spending limits in this fall's city council elections in Farmington and Farmington Hills.

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.

Recycling: It's a must

To the editor:

Have you ever passed a dump and wondered where the next dump will be? Whenever I pass a dump, trucks are piling more garbage into the hole.

Americans have disposable plates, disposable diapers, disposable pens, disposable this, disposable that. Soon, there will be no more space for American disposables.

Once our areas are filled up, then what? Should we transport it to some other place and ruin more of the world's land? Or maybe outer space has room for our disposables? Or better yet, the world's oceans.

I think, in the long run, recycling would make more sense. Is it really that much trouble? Our ancestors fought for America. Why should we ruin it? Let's recycle!

Jodi Hoadley,
Farmington Hills

Public forum change — bad

To the editor:

In March 1988, Farmington Hills residents from three affected areas presented petitions to the city council during the public comments and question portion of the meeting. Later that week, after meeting with Mr. Sever and a city official, we finally had hope that the council would act.

Six weeks previous, we first appeared at the public comment part of the meeting and were placed at the end of the agenda. We had apologies, but no positive action until the March 21 council meeting with Mr. Sever presiding.

Since that time, residents have anticipated and even experienced improved communication with the city in 1989. Publicly and privately, Mr. Sever has expressed his desired goal for open communication in the city for all residents. However, since his December statement about moving the public question and comment portion of the agenda, some are questioning the new mayor's "open communication" policy.

Other cities, and even the Farmington Board of Education, have the public comment portion before public hearings. There is a three-minute time limit per person and, in most cases where it could be involved, the speaker has requested to be placed at the end of the agenda. (Often it was very late, but residents patiently waited). To place it after other agenda items will discourage some citizens from actively participating with the city council, who are their elected representatives.

The following data have been gathered by examining all the approved council minutes of the 35 meetings held from January through November 1988. During the 35 council meetings, 34 different people spoke; some were not residents of Farmington Hills. There were no comments made at 10 of the meetings.

Only 34 individuals out of a population of 58,000 were concerned enough during these 11 months to participate in the forum provided for the public. We don't need more apathy among our city's residents; we need to overcome some of it.

During the past nine months, we have mentioned Mr. Sever's desire for better and more communication between the city and its residents. This had given us hope in our situation and when residents from various areas (not just the southeastern section) contacted me with their particular problem, we, in turn, encourage them to communicate with their local representatives, or appropriate city staff.

Mayor Soronen ably handled the public comments and questions at the beginning of council meetings in 1988. Mr. Sever, your proposed change for this on the agenda is causing doubts and distrust to resurface.

Use the other side of your gavel and limit the comments. (Most times comments are over briefly, and when this isn't the case, it gets on the agenda in the next week or so.)

Luella Hempel,
Farmington Hills

Comments on racism lauded

To the editor:

I just read with interest Catherine Trainor's article Dec. 29 on bigotry as she told of the incident at Livonia Mall in which she was reminded just how much racism can be found in the routine daily events.

It is important for us in the suburbs to be reminded that racism is indeed "alive and well" in our society, though it is usually more subtle and hopefully less frequent than in former years.

The only way to bring an end to it is to be outraged and then, speak up as Ms. Trainor did. Bravo!

Ana Evans Moloney,
Farmington Hills

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