

Opinion

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O&E Thursday, October 5, 1989

Code of ethics

It'll play key community role

PUBLIC TRUST is the lifeblood of public officials.

Public servants with total disregard for that trust should shed the charade and resign. That's the right thing to do in a representative democracy because loss of credibility is the mark of failure.

So you're darn right we consider ethics a high priority in this year's local city council races, particularly in Farmington Hills.

Hardly a month seems to pass in the Hills, a political briar patch, without some question about a potential conflict arising.

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

Despite some rough edges, Farmington Hills' proposed municipal code of ethics ably expands on that starting point.

The proposal underscores that public servants must earn and honor the public trust by their integrity and conduct in all official duties and actions.

GRANTED. THE city charter empowers the city council to judge the actions of its members. But that broadly defined power isn't far-reaching or specific enough, given government's growing encroachment into the private sector.

Our concerns with the proposed code include:

• GRATUITIES

We don't think public servants should accept any gift, in any form, except maybe an occasional lunch to discuss legitimate business. Remove the gray areas and you remove the need to interpret if a gift was intended to influence or reward an official duty or action.

• SUPPRESSION

No public servant should suppress any public report out of fear it will adversely affect a political, financial or personal motive. City servants are in the business of sharing public information, not hiding it.

• INTENTION

Indeed, city decisions should not be made "outside official channels." But we'd specify that no

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council business should be conducted by telephone, except in a true emergency. Why have an Open Meetings Act if circumvention is going to be condoned?

THE PROPOSAL bans "impeding city efficiency." But that should be expanded to bar city officials from recruiting city employees to work on election campaigns.

The proposal states that its intention is preventive, not punitive. Why? We think it should be both. Having a code won't prevent unethical behavior.

When city employees are involved, the job of passing judgment should fall to the city manager or city attorney, as the proposal states.

But when elected or appointed officials are involved, the code needs tougher language than just referral to the mayor, city council and city attorney for "appropriate action."

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The city charter gives the council power to remove members who lack prescribed qualifications, who violate the charter, who are convicted of a crime involving "moral turpitude" or who log six unexcused absences.

Such weak language needs strengthening in the form of a charter amendment so the council has a mandated, measurable basis to remove a member. Such power should emanate from the charter, not the ethics code, to better withstand a legal challenge.

Few municipal codes of ethics exist. But Thomas Paine recognized the theory on which they're based 200 years ago in his "The American Crisis" when he wrote: "Character is much easier kept than recovered."

Mega-mall

Both sides are missing the point

HERE IT IS early October and everybody seems to be getting worked up over a shopping mall. We thought that kind of fervor was reserved for the holiday retail season, which nowadays doesn't begin until at least Oct. 15.

All kidding aside, residents and leaders in several suburban communities are up in arms over a proposed mega-mall for Auburn Hills. While their concerns over the project, dubbed Auburn Mills, show some validity, it seems like everyone involved in this battle — pro and con — is missing the point.

The proposed 2.3 million square-foot mall, off I-75 near Joslyn Road, would be substantially larger than Oakland Mall and the other major malls in western Wayne and Oakland Counties. Its Washington D.C.-based developers envision a kind of theme park for shoppers that will provide adventure as well as hundreds of retail outlets under one roof.

Auburn Mills is expected to cost about \$300 million and be ready for occupancy as early as 1992.

AMONG ITS BENEFITS, the mall would create an additional \$4-\$5 million in annual tax revenue for the financially-strapped Pontiac Public School district, which includes the city of Auburn Hills. It would also provide an estimated 5,000 jobs in an region that, despite recent good times, could use them.

All that has city fathers in Rochester Hills and Southfield reaching for the aspirin bottle — for different reasons.

Officials in Rochester Hills (along with those in the small community of Lake Argos) oppose the mall on the grounds that traffic congestion would overwhelm their towns, which border the proposed site. They hope to convince the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEM-COG) to order an unprecedented study of the project's impact on the region, although SEM-COG has gone ahead and OK'd federal money for the necessary roads.

Southfield officials are worried that the mega-mall will draw business and people away from its retail centers.

But these towns — and the mall's proponents — have taken a very shortsighted view of the project.

FIRST, LET'S TAKE Southfield. The concern

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over a shrinking retail base as developers expand further north, east and west of Detroit is valid, but awfully hypocritical. One community losing business to another wasn't too hard to stomach three decades ago when you wooed developers of Northland and all but assured the decline of shopping in downtown Detroit.

Also, access to Rochester Hills and other communities surrounding the proposed mall is bound to be more difficult if the project goes as planned. Of course many residents in those towns commute to other areas for work, shopping and entertainment, increasing congestion in their destinations. And officials in one city simply don't have the right to call the shots on development in others.

But the mega-mall developers — along with developers of the Palace of Auburn Hills, the Oakland Hills Technology Park and other major projects — have perhaps been even more shortsighted than those opposed to the mall.

Instead of building their Mastercard Mecca out in some undeveloped cornfield, why couldn't they plug it down inside the Pontiac city limits, where there is still plenty of usable space with road and sewer connections already in place? That way, we might be talking about an economic resurgence for an entire city, not just a few million bucks for its schools.

A TAD UNREALISTIC, you say. Nobody in his right mind is going to build a shopping mall in a deteriorating city beset by crime and drug problems.

Maybe. But think about this: Somewhere along the line, we've got to rid ourselves of the mentality that we develop an area and then abandon it when things begin to sour.

If not, 50 years from now we might still be talking about how to cope with urban decay and attract growth to such deteriorating communities as Livonia, Southfield and Farmington Hills.

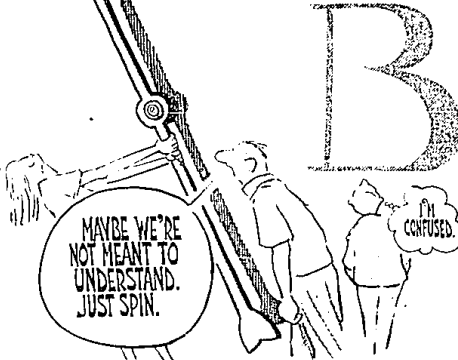
FARMINGTON

PROPOSAL



FARMINGTON

PROPOSAL



To fax or not to fax? Not a simple question

THE TIMING is bad — no question about that.

Equipping each Farmington school with a fax machine isn't what I'd call a crucial need.

Facsimile machines have both practical and instructional uses — as an everyday item, I can attest to that.

But the school board would have been wiser to acknowledge the machine's value, urge public feedback and plan a scaled-down purchase for next year.

I echo trustee James Abernethy's feeling that the research benefit for younger students won't justify equipping the elementary with fax machines.

Bluntly put, I'm stunned by the board's 4-3 vote to buy 27 fax machines at \$1,795 a pop now — within months of voter approval of a \$7.3-million bond issue to build a west-side elementary, board adoption of an \$85.5-million operating budget for 1989-90 and ratification of several new labor agreements.

Enough is enough!

FRANKLY, I think taxpayers — bombarded at almost every turn by tax requests of one sort or another — would be impressed by a show of restraint on the question of



Bob Sklar

to fax or not to fax, the technology advisory committee's good intentions notwithstanding.

It also bothers me that only two bids were submitted in a highly competitive technological field. Bidding shouldn't have been limited to a specific brand.

Trustee Jack Cotton is right: "I think there's a fax in our future. I'm just not sure it's now."

Fax machines aren't on the leading edge of new technology. They're today's technology — at work, at home, even in some cars.

I don't see the costs associated with security, telephone access and coated paper as insurmountable — provided they're tightly monitored.

A code lock to prevent unauthorized use would go a long way toward helping contain these costs.

But I do question \$165 per machine per year for a three-year

maintenance contract. That seems a bit excessive.

AS FOR the seemingly tenuous instructional value, there's more to operating a fax machine than pushing a few buttons.

After months of daily use, I still haven't mastered all of my fax machine's transmission features or tapped all of its communication capabilities.

I agree with Peggy Schmidt, the district's media resources coordinator. Fax machines will increase access to outside resource materials. But I sense that secondary students and staff will benefit most.

In projecting costs, it would be naive to think libraries, city halls, hospitals and other schools will fax unlimited materials without charge. That can't be forgotten!

Admittedly, there's a fax in Farmington Public Schools' future — but not now.

The "fax" of the matter is that the school board should first set the stage for such a purchase by demonstrating sensitivity to mounting demands on taxpayers.

A deliberate approach to nonessential purchases, like fax machines, would help the board do just that.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them.

Bob Rock commended

To the editor:
The Longacre PTA families would like to recognize Mr. Bob Rock, Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, for his generous contribution in the Drug Free T-Shirt Drive.

The education of our students is the responsibility of not only individual families but also the community.

Mr. Rock's care and concern for the students at Longacre and the entire school district is greatly appreciated. He is to be commended.

Debbie Corawell,
president,
Longacre PTA,
Farmington

or two subdivision associations, but four on the rezoning of property on Drake Road, north of Grand River, from office to industrial research office.

Blair Aigle,
Farmington Hills

Gas/oil bill — stepping stone

To the editor:
Gerald Law's bill to allow local regulation of gas and oil exploration and development is ready to be presented in the state House.

Although it is not the ultimate solution to the problem of gas/oil activities in residential areas, it is a first stepping stone.

Mr. Law's bill will endow all municipalities (cities, villages, townships) across the state with the same local controls over the gas and oil industry in their communities.

Public Act 61, the state law which regulates oil/gas activities, exempts any local controls over the industry and gives sole jurisdiction to the DNR's Supervisor of Wells.

The DNR regulates the industry with "rules," not laws. Therefore the ultimate goal is to have laws regulating the gas/oil industry in Michigan.

In allowing townships the same controls that cities and villages have, we will become unified. Unification will give us strength in reaching this ultimate goal.

Please write or call your local representative asking him/her to contact Gerald Law's office as soon as possible. Mr. Law, R-Plymouth, needs co-sponsors and support for this bill.

Carol Andrikides,
Northville

Walk needs extending

To the editor:

I often bike ride the 2 1/2 miles northward along Farmington Road to Heritage Park (one of our area's jewels).

It's a great ride except for the last quarter mile "where the sidewalk ends."

It then becomes a very dangerous journey along the curves of the road, which make it difficult for drivers to see bikers.

A stretch of sidewalk or widening of the asphalt from 10 Mile northward along Farmington Road to the entranceway of Heritage (and even beyond that eventually to connect with the projected sidewalk between 12 and 13 Mile) would make Heritage Park that much more accessible to bikers and walkers alike and, additionally, would make a scenic north/south bike route through our twin cities.

Pam Wright,
Farmington

Council vote irks voter

To the editor:

When the Observer published information on the candidates running for city council, I thought after reviewing the information that one of the candidates I would vote for would be Ben Marks.

After attending the Sept. 25 council meeting, I have changed my mind.

Mr. Marks completely ignored requests from many citizens — not one

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