

Hills council hopefuls debate code of ethics

By Noreen Flack
staff writer

Council candidates agree a code of ethics should be adopted in Farmington Hills to set parameters of right and wrong for city officials and employees.

But some candidates say a written code may not keep the bad guys out of city government.

Candidates were asked if the city should adopt a code of ethics during a candidates night Oct. 11. The League of Women Voters of the West Bloomfield-Farmington Area hosted the forum in the city council chambers.

Ten candidates are seeking four regular council terms: incumbents Philip Arnold, Ben Marks and Aldo Vagozzi and challengers Jonathan Grant, Vernon Klepinski, Lawrence Lickman, Ronald Oliverio, Albert Rosen, George Sarkisian and Bettye Stines.

Incumbent Paul Sowerby and challengers Nancy Ryan and Herbert Liner are seeking a special term to fill the remaining two years of former councilman Joe Alkateb's four-year term.

A four-member committee — Mayor Terry Sever, city manager William Costick, Vagozzi and Arnold — gathered in August to write the first draft of a code of ethics.

THE DRAFT frowns on city officials and employees accepting substantial gifts, either in-kind or money; stresses the importance of appearances relating to preferential treatment; and warns employees and board members to take care not to adversely affect the confidence of the public or the integrity of city government.

"I believe the code of ethics is a good idea so that everyone knows the boundaries for the behavior expected of them as a representative of the

community," Grant said. "It is up to the residents to make sure we are electing ethical people and to know who they are voting for."

"A code of ethics is necessary now and it was necessary two years ago when the city turned it down," Klepinski said. "The problems the city has experienced since that time would not have happened and some of the people in office would not be here."

The code of ethics is written to meet the same purpose as the Ten Commandments, Rosen said, but because it is written does not mean it will be followed.

"A personal code of conduct based upon a Judeo-Christian morality can assure an ethical behavior, which will benefit the body politic," he said.

"A CODE of ethics does not warrant good conduct," said Stines.

"Residents can use neighborhood involvement (by an elected official) as a form of checking on their ethics. Accountability should set precedent."

Litchman agreed the code doesn't guarantee ethical conduct.

"Residents have to look at the candidates' record and make sure they are electing the best-qualified people to serve," he said. "There is no better proof of ethical conduct than by looking at someone's record."

"I support the code of ethics as a guideline, but I also agree that you can analyze a person by their record," Marks said. "Look at their record and what they have contributed to the community in the past."

"I don't think you can look at someone's record and decide that they are an ethical person," Sarkisian said. "If a city council member has broken the code of ethics or broken the law, they should be dismissed or replaced."

There's no reason not to support a code of ethics, especially in light of past ethical cases that have stirred controversy, Oliverio said.

"Recently, members of city council have been accused of certain cozying up to developers and there are several other situations that I feel can be riddled with unethical behavior," he said.

Arnold supports a code of ethics but questions the ethical behavior of some members of the public.

"Certain members of the public seem to infer that there is unethical behavior by members of the council, but have offered no proof of it," he said. "I suggest that that is perhaps unethical."

"I support a code of ethics," Vagozzi said. "That is why I have sponsored, and am pushing hard, for adoption of a code of ethics to be effective by the time the new council takes office. The code must include penalty provisions, including removal

from office for flagrant violations."

THE THREE candidates for the special two-year term had this to say about a code of ethics:

• Bates — "An office holder, in order to successfully lead, must be beyond question of misconduct. Honor, integrity, ethical behavior have been, and will be, the hallmarks of my service to this community."

• Liner — "I perceive ethics as it applies to me as a city council member to be absolutely above reproach. To ensure proper ethics by elected and appointed officials, we should appoint an ethics committee as is applied in the U.S. Congress."

• Sowerby — "I support a code of ethics, but I believe an individual either knows the difference between right and wrong or doesn't. I believe that when you hold public office, you are held to a higher standard."

Clarenceville group told to drop recall strategy

By Marie Chestney
staff writer

The Wayne County Elections Commission Wednesday repeatedly told three members of a group trying to recall five Clarenceville school trustees that they should pursue other options than a recall if their goal is to do away with the Clarenceville School District.

For the second time, the commissioners rejected sample petitions presented for approval by the Community to Dissolve Clarenceville.

The commissioners said they rejected the second set of petitions for the same reason they rejected the first set submitted by the group in September. The commissioners said the petitions were vague and lacked clarity.

"We're dealing with clarity here," said Wayne County clerk James Kilien, who served as commission chairman. "To ask the board to answer for something that has a complete legal relief in another area —

and not explain those reasons clearly to voters — makes the petitions so vague as to be meaningless."

JOHN SHANTZ, attorney representing the school district, outlined two routes the group could take to do away with the district: consolidation and annexation.

After the hearing, group members Susan Gonzales, Tammy Iaconelli and Renee Wallace said they will follow Shantz's advice and begin the process of annexation. They said

they also will talk to an attorney. Undaunted by their two rejections, they also said they would rewrite the petitions and resubmit them to the commission, thus pursuing their goal of doing away with the district on two fronts.

The group wants to recall five of the seven school trustees and elect a school board that would be willing, despite their own personal views, to put the issue of dissolving the district on the ballot.

The women said the current board

has refused to pass such a resolution. Their ultimate goal is to see the Clarenceville school district annexed by both the Livonia and Farmington Hills school district, with Eight Mile Road the dividing line.

Under this annexation, students north of Eight Mile would go to Farmington Public Schools, students south of Eight Mile in Livonia and Redford would go to Livonia Public Schools.

Group members said they seek annexation because they believe the

education students receive in Clarenceville is inferior to that received by students in Livonia and Farmington.

AT THE hearing, Shantz said the school board does not have to put the issue on the ballot.

He also said it unfair for the district to pay the bill for a frivolous election.

"It's their duty not to spend public funds if there is no proper basis for the election," Shantz said.

While the board does not have to

hold an election, the board does have the authority to do it, Iaconelli said.

If a recall election is held and the board is not recalled, Gonzales said the group would give up its quest.

County corporate counsel William McIntyre said the recall had nothing to do with either tactic, annexation or consolidation.

"There's only one question to be considered here, whether it's clear or not," McIntyre said. "It's not whether it is true or not, or accomplishable or not."

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