

Opinion

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

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City council Yes to incumbents, McShane

FARMINGTON MAY be fully developed. But don't be lulled into thinking there's nothing for the city council to do.

The city's top policy-making board still faces many quality-of-life concerns: downtown redevelopment, traffic, the environment, sewer improvements, neighborhood needs, taxes, substance abuse, historic preservation, small business incentives, ethnic harmony.

Given this backdrop, the Nov. 7 city council election indeed will be significant. Heck, the seven candidates make up the largest field in 10 years.

In the past two years, the five-member council not only has responded to constituent demands (creating a traffic and safety board), but also asserted leadership (teaming up to create a solid waste disposal consortium).

But with the challenges of a new decade at hand, we see room on the council for a new voice. For that reason, we endorse incumbents Shirley Richardson, Richard Tupper and Arnold Campbell and zoning board of appeals vice chair JoAnne McShane. We urge Farmington voters to fill the three council seats up for grabs from among these four.

RICHARDSON, NAMED three years ago to fill a vacancy, is the council's first woman. Intimidated she's not. She's not afraid to question recommendations and take the lead in tough decisions.

Cool under fire and fair-minded, she weighs the pros and cons, considers the city as a whole and truly has a finger on the community's pulse.

Her strong stands on zoning and signs sometimes are misconstrued as anti-business. Her background in planning and beautification underscore her belief that there's more to running a business than financial investment.

The 29-year resident is a civic leader as well. Both the Goodfellows and the Community Center bear the fruits of her support. She played a key role in bringing a second gazebo downtown.

TUPPER'S FINEST hours as a veteran councilman have come while mayor the past two

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years. He not only has ably represented the city at community events, but also sensitively reacted to the recent march against racial injustice. The 53-year resident has worked hard to enforce zoning laws, put matters into focus and be fair to folks who come before the council.

A stickler for detail, he doesn't shy away from disagreeing with the city manager nor suggesting new, more efficient ways to run the city.

He's not gregarious, but he is compassionate, as evidenced by his leadership roles with both the Goodfellows and Neighborhood House.

CAMPBELL, MAYOR pro tem and completing his first four-year term, is not as outspoken nor as quick to offer solutions. Still, he's inquisitive, a good listener and approachable. Council liaison to the planning commission, he shows a sound understanding of unexciting but key issues: sewer separation, solid waste, budgeting.

He's also an enthusiastic goodwill ambassador who has a real feel for what gives a small town like Farmington its historic charm.

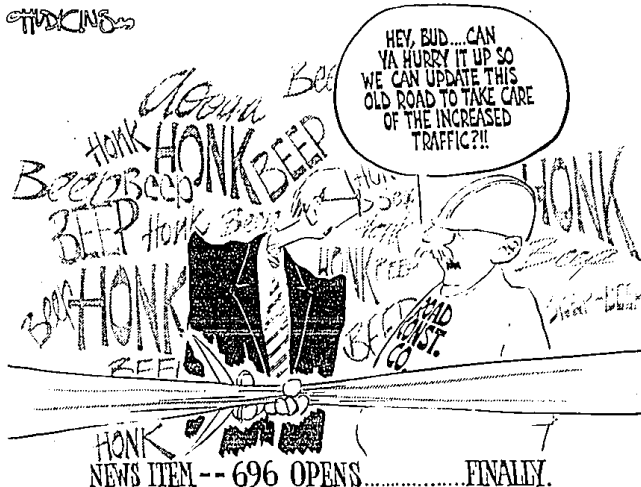
If re-elected, we'd urge him to be more aggressive in challenging the administration and serving up solutions.

MCSHANE BRINGS a fresh outlook, leadership traits and city government involvement. Nobody's puppet, she's not swayed by politics of the moment.

The 10-year ZBA member understands cost containment and the value of our neighborhoods. She'd fight overtaxation and overdevelopment. She'd be a torchbearer for the little guy.

She's the only candidate to play up the city council's responsibility to be a leader in the war against substance abuse.

One of the most pivotal city elections in years, Farmington residents should make it their business to vote on Tuesday, Nov. 7.



Hills council election key to future for city

HOW BIG is this year's Farmington Hills City Council election?

It is. Five of the seven council seats up for grabs, it's the biggest election ever in the city's 16-year history.

Twelve days before the Nov. 7 vote, 13 candidates are duking it out on the campaign trail amid an agenda full of issues.

As a council watcher, voter and chronicler of city activity, I'd like to share four of my top concerns:

ETHICS
Farmington Hills shouldn't need a municipal code of ethics. Ideally, voters should elect ethical council members, who appoint ethical board and commission members.

But time has proven that doesn't always happen. So a clear-cut set of standards to live by becomes pivotal in keeping the public trust.

Enough has been said and written about the 13 hopefuls campaigning for a city council seat to give voters a fix on candidates whose ethics are uncompromising.

DRUGS
Amazingly, the war against substance abuse hasn't generated very much debate this election season. As far as I'm concerned, the city council should be at the forefront in



Bob Sklar

the war, not just giving money and encouragement to the crime fighters.

Plenty put, substance abuse not only provides the spur for most of our armed robberies but also for screwing up so many young, impressionable lives.

The city council should move to the front line by not only speaking out against this community scourge, but also playing a more aggressive role in coordinating the various groups committed to eradicating it.

Council members can start by inviting Police Chief William Dwyer to bring them up to date on law enforcement battles.

FLOODING
Nobody who calls Farmington Hills home should have to cringe when the skies cloud up — fearing creek waters in their yard and sewage backup in their basement. If the council chalks up few other

achievements in the next two years, it can feel a sense of accomplishment by making lasting inroads into the city's \$18 million-plus storm drainage improvement plan.

ENVIRONMENT
Curbside recycling, trash disposal, riverway cleanup — all key quality-of-life topics that'll demand plenty of dedication, forethought and cash.

Candidates with the savvy to dodge bureaucratic landmines in the quest to save our natural resources should be high on any voter's wish list.

MEETINGS
Three hours should be ample time to work through a typical city council agenda.

Unfortunately, tradition calls for every council member to debate virtually every discussion item — regardless of whether they have anything insightful, new or pertinent to say.

The only thing past-midnight meetings tend to do is produce more work for the city clerk, who's the minutes.

Let's hope the 90-minute meeting on Monday — the last time the council meets before election day — is a sign of what's to come. Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Proposal A It will improve school funding

PROPOSAL A, on the Nov. 7 ballot, will not itself solve the terrible problems in Michigan's K-12 schools. But in fixing some of the financing problems that have affected our schools for years, it sets the stage for the wholesale restructuring that must come.

For this reason we urge a yes vote. Essentially, Proposal A would raise the state sales tax by half-a-cent, to 4.5 percent, and pump the resulting \$390 million per year into K-12 schools.

This shifts school financing away from taxes on property values and toward sales taxes. That makes sense. Taxing property is a poor way of equalizing the burden of taxes, as the retired person on a fixed income who owns a nice house knows all too well.

FOR TAXPAYERS, this very well could reduce the need for future millage increases.

The plan would also create a constitutionally protected fund devoted to school financing, secure from raids by the Department of Education bureaucracy. It would also siphon a quarter of the old 4 percent sales tax off into this fund.

All of this will smooth out the funding basis for our schools, which has ridden a roller coaster from pre-recession 1980 high (\$845 million in state aid) to mid-recession 1983 low (\$360 million) to current semi-recovery (\$600 million). Predictability of funding is an important precondition for sensible, businesslike management of our schools.

It is certainly true that Proposal A itself will do little to improve school quality. A package of legislation, now bottled up in the state Senate, is supposedly going to address quality.

We shall see. More importantly, by clearing up the financing problems that have plagued our schools for years, Proposal A lays the groundwork for the real task: reforming our schools so our children are actually taught something and made ready to face the competitive world of the next century.

HERE IS HOW Proposal A can improve the situation:

- All of the new tax revenue is dedicated to a constitutionally protected school fund.
- Not only are lottery proceeds earmarked constitutionally for schools, but Proposal A dedicates even the interest of \$7 million-plus that the lottery fund earns to schools.
- Higher education retirement costs are moved out of the school aid fund, making another \$7 million-\$10 million available for the K-12 level.

Proposal A

A proposal to increase the sales/use tax from 4 cents to 4.5 cents per dollar and constitutionally dedicate funds for local schools.

YES NO

Proposal B

A proposal to increase the sales/use tax from 4 cents to 6 cents per dollar, reduce school property taxes, and set permanent school operating millages not subject to voter renewal, and constitutionally dedicate funds for local schools.

YES NO

• Twenty-five percent of the existing 4 percent sales tax is dedicated to the protected school fund.

• Portions of the existing use, industrial facilities, commercial facilities and tech park facilities taxes are dedicated to the protected school fund.

• The state Department of Education would be unable to siphon off any big portion of the new money because its share is capped at 5 percent.

WE ALSO recommend that voters reject Proposal B.

In this election, voters will be able to vote on both proposals. The one garnering the highest vote total will win.

Proposal B would raise sales and use tax to 6 percent. It would redistribute the industrial tax base by collecting it statewide. It would be patently unfair to communities that have made sacrifices to attract industry and put up with the inconvenience that malls and high-tech plants bring.

The complex Proposal B would result in two tiers of property tax rates, one for business, one for homes. Proposal B would violate Michigan's principles of uniform tax rates and local control.

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. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Letter writer way off base

To the editor:
As a middle school teacher in the Farmington school district, and an aggressive anti-drug campaigner, I must reply to a letter recently printed in the Observer.

I was extremely upset by the statement a reader made that the Farmington school system denied teens the opportunity to hear the president's message on drug abuse. Also, that the educators in Farmington are not "flexible" enough to adjust their schedules to be a part of this message.

All of our sixth grade students, at Warner Middle School listened to and discussed the message on drug abuse by President Bush. Many other classrooms in our school also were "flexible" enough to see the importance of this address. The seventh and eighth grade students saw the tape during their social classes.

Roger Casali, the assistant principal, had taped the president's message and the tape was circulated around our building. Watching something of this importance, in a small group setting, is often more advantageous than having a large assembly. Students feel freer to express themselves and discussions flow easier.

Our principal, Walt Scoble, made and sent a copy of the tape to the three other middle schools to use with their students.

I've had the privilege of working in the Farmington schools for 18 years. During this time, I have gotten to know many administrators and teachers. I am proud to be associated with such a caring and innovative group of people.

Before such accusations are made, I suggest that "homework" be done first. We all want any message about drug abuse to reach our kids. It is up to every individual to do his/her part whenever possible. Farmington educators do not have tunnel vision or lack of communication skills. I hope this letter demystifies both.

Bette Backler, teacher,
Warner Middle School
Farmington Hills

OLSHA has given me hope. It has given me back my pride. One phone call to 858-3180 can help you, too.

Christiane and Clifford Baker,
Pontiac

Area helps oppressed

To the editor:
May I take this occasion to commend Farmington's mayor, Dick Tupper, on his forthright statement on Sunday, Oct. 15, on the occasion of the march through his city?

As he so ably stated, Farmington has long been a forerunner in causes of the oppressed. Founded by Quakers in 1824, this area became a refuge on the Underground Railroad during the 1840s and '50s. The historic marker for Freedom Acres on 11 Mile delineates one small portion of that struggle.

Newcomers to this area may be unaware of this illustrious record for our people and of the facts to which he alluded.

Our school system daily works to integrate children of 41 nationalities into the benefits of an American school system, one of the better systems in the state; we should all stand proud in the achievements of this community.

Jan M. Fox, mayor pro tem,
Farmington Hills

Self-help is championed

To the editor:
The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency has implemented many self-help programs throughout its 25 years of service.

Its programs were designed to have an impact on poverty by providing services to the low-income and economically disadvantaged, and to help these people become self-sustaining.

OLSHA's anti-poverty program has helped me combat homelessness, hunger and the agony of being stripped of self-dignity.

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