

Opinion

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

18A(F) O&E Thursday, December 14, 1989

'90s agenda Farmington at key crossroads

IT'S A small town with some big-city pressures. The 63-year-old city of Farmington has lost little of its historic charm. But the Main Street community is at a turning point as it tries to maintain a small-town flavor while sandwiched between fast-growing Farmington Hills and Livonia.

From our impartial perch, we see the city's agenda for the 1990s including:

- **Downtown redevelopment** — The Downtown Development Authority is well into its \$1.4-million, 7-year plan for streetscape and parking lot renovations. The hope is that public improvement spurs private investment. And that tack seems to be working. The rat-a-tat-tat of hammers — the sound of a city on the move — is commonplace. Teamwork — involving the city, DDA, and merchants — is pivotal to showcasing downtown, not only as place to shop but also a community hub. The dark days of the '70s, when vacancies rivaled rentals on Grand River, are a foretold reminder of what apathy can bring.
- **Solid waste** — In the forefront in mapping a solid waste disposal plan for southwest Oakland County, Farmington must settle on a waste-to-energy program that combines landfilling, incinerating, recycling and composting. Trash may be dullsville, but coming up with a new way to dispose of it is shaping up as the crisis of the '90s.
- **Sewer separation** — The city is embarking on a \$9.6 million sewer system upgrade to separate sanitary and storm sewers and to build a retention tank to temporarily hold sewer and storm water. The work is needed to meet government mandates for clean water. A state loan is expected to keep the cost for each household to about \$125 a year for 20 years. Though the costliest project in the city's history, it's sorely needed.
- **Traffic congestion** — Widening Orchard Lake Road will ease north-south traffic flow in the city, but rush-hour gridlock at Grand River and Farmington Road will only be avoided if the

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new traffic and safety board succeeds in promoting existing downtown bypasses. Cut-through traffic on residential streets along Grand River must be discouraged by better identifying alternate routes.

• **Neighborhood needs** — The city has done a good job meeting neighborhood needs, but it can't slacken off in that area as demands downtown, the city's centerpiece, intensify. Tree trimming, sidewalk repair, leaf pickup, street patching and police patrols are as much a part of the community as pedestrian lighting on Grand River.

• **Substance abuse** — The public safety department is doing what it can to fight alcohol sales to minors and drug sales to addicts. But the city council must share the spotlight in the war on drugs. It can start by inviting Public Safety Director Frank Lauhoff to provide a State of the War update. Is crack common at Farmington High? Are drug sales prevalent downtown? What percentage of robberies stem from a need to feed a habit? Is the detective bureau adequately staffed and trained for drug investigations?

• **Historic preservation** — Farmington's historic signposts must never be compromised in the name of so-called progress. The historic district is as much a part of the city as the retail sector. The city must do whatever is necessary to protect property values in Old Village, a historical gem with few equals in Oakland County.

• **Tax rate** — City leaders must never lose sight of Farmington's makeup, which includes many seniors on fixed incomes and many families just starting out. The city's conservative budgeting has kept the tax rate affordable, but a rugged challenge lies ahead as a new decade casts new priorities.

Yea, I-696! East side, west side merge

BACK IN THE 1920s there was a little ditty that ran, "East side, west side, all around the town..." The young man singing proceeded to croon his love for all to hear.

Well, the concept for I-696 may not have been around as long as that song, but you're going to love the new freeway when officials join in a chorus of praise to herald today's opening.

The freeway, named the Walter P. Reuther after a UAW president who died in a plane crash in 1970, is significant both for its engineering and for the sociological changes it is bound to forge in southeastern Michigan.

When the freeway opens today, the 28.2-mile artery will pump traffic quickly along its course from I-94 on the east to I-275 on the west. Thus "East Meets West," as the Michigan Department of Transportation puts it.

BUT EAST won't collide with west at the old, traditional boundary of Woodward Avenue. Rather, cultural exchanges are likely to occur as travelers from both directions merge to shop at major malls, travel to lakes Michigan and St. Clair or visit cross-town friends more frequently.

The significance of the freeway goes well beyond linking east and west. As the final 9.1-mile chunk of I-696 opens, a beltway loops around the tri-county area.

That provides easy travel all around town. For those who live or work in Wayne County, easy access is assured as far as Port Huron. For Southfield community development director Don Gross, travel all the way to Florida is possible "without stopping for a traffic light."

While some offices buildings, such as the high-rises in Southfield, were built in anticipation of the new freeway, other communities are carefully watching what effect the freeway will have on economic development and office occupancy rates.

WHILE IT'S TOO early to tell, predictions are that the freeway will bolster development or at

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least hold steady what already exists. That's good news when there's a forecast of a downturn in the economy coming.

Wider market areas will favor both larger developments as well as smaller shopping areas seen in Royal Oak.

Certain housing areas could see a revival, as previously some people would avoid living in an area due to traffic congestion, according to a state official. That's also good for property values.

Further, some reduction in traffic is projected for heavily traveled mile roads — only 3.7 percent for Eight Mile east of Southfield, but 33.2 percent for 12 Mile east of Southfield.

WITH ALL THE good news, there are a couple of cautions: We hope that the new freeway doesn't become just another excuse to avoid Detroit, further isolating the central city from the suburbs.

Both Wayne and Oakland counties also will have to pay continued attention to their mile roads, particularly the beleaguered Eight Mile, to maintain the quality of the rest of bordering cities.

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Mike Brokenshire, 12, of Troy, reads his sister Kathy's school project, "My Gift to You," at MADD's candlelight vigil Monday in Farmington Hills. Kathy died at age 17 in 1986.

It's too simple to buy alcohol, stings reveal

STILL THE debate rages.

Three years after Farmington Hills first started using police cadets younger than 21 in liquor license checks at party stores, bars and restaurants, some licensees still think that tactic is tacky.

But the courts have upheld using the cadets, when accompanied by sworn officers, to determine if licensees are asking for proof of age.

Is use of the cadets practical? It's certainly more cost-effective than having patrol officers stake out the city's 84 licensed establishments in search of liquor law violators.

Those ticketed in the first two undercover stings criticized the police for using "older looking" cadets and allowing the cadets to lie, to say they're 22 when they're younger.

In conjunction with the first sting in 1986, the police came across as overzealous in their unannounced use of the cadets after less-than-rigorous enforcement of local liquor laws. That laxity in enforcement was as glaring as the 49 liquor licensees who served the cadets.

BEFORE the second sting the next spring, the police took a wiser tack. In a front-page story in the Observer, they told the world another liquor strike was in the wings.

At least one party store owner posted the story in a conspicuous place. Needless to say, he demanded ID but didn't get it when the 20-year-



Bob Sklar

old cadet came shopping for spirits.

Other store owners who read the story either ignored it or didn't believe the police would resort to the same controversial sting operation. The sting nailed 12 of 34 package liquor stores selling alcohol to an underage decoy.

Since then, the police have conducted four more stings. In the last one June 2, 11 of 33 package liquor outlets were caught selling alcohol to a minor. Amazingly, 10 were repeat offenders!

On Monday — the day of MADD's annual candlelight prayer vigil in Farmington Hills for families who lost loved ones in alcohol-related crashes — the police promised a seventh sting this holiday season. It'll target all 43 restaurants as well as the 10 package liquor stores cited at least twice in the past two years for illegal sales.

The stings have proven you can't be certain of a person's age. If a cadet who's 19 can appear to be 30, so can other teens. What would prevent a 19-year-old bent on impressing friends from dressing up

and ordering a bottle of wine in a fashionable restaurant? Farmington Hills is home to many teens with ready access to cars and cash.

Or what would prevent a mature looking 16-year-old from momentarily adopting an older sibling's style of dress and mannerisms, then walking into the corner party store for a six-pack?

THE SOLUTION? Don't serve people who refuse to show ID or say they don't have any. A 10-day license suspension and a \$850 fine, for example, is far harsher than an insulted patron. Besides, patrons will adapt when carding becomes routine.

No sale is worth the risk of matching potentially deadly shots of whiskey or six-packs of beer with an impressionable teen. Take it from Paul Senilli, owner of Mr. Sports One Of A Kind, a popular singles bar that scrutinizes IDs at the door: "We better stop the problem before it comes into our door."

Studies show a drunk is 100 times more likely to die in a car crash. The likelihood is even higher for teens, not only less experienced behind the wheel but also less aware of just how much alcohol they can safely drink.

That's the sobering reality behind the stings.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Farmington readers' forum

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Abortion logic is examined

To the editor:

The Iverson letter (Nov. 9) on the effects ("intolerable pain," "slow death") of drug use on the offspring of poor drug-dependent women does highlight a sad and distressing situation.

His argument in favor of providing the means for aborting the pregnancies of these women is also very compelling. Careful analysis of what he said is necessary, then, if one is to determine if his argument is valid.

Simply stated, he is arguing that if someone decides that the quality of life of another individual will be sufficiently substandard, then it would be appropriate to prevent the continuation of that life. The application of this line of reasoning, he believes, justifies abortion in the case of pregnancies of drug-using women.

There is nothing in this line of reasoning, however, that restricts its use to this particular situation. If we examine its use in some other situations, we may gain some appreciation for its acceptability. For instance, if this argument allows for abortions in first trimester pregnancies, it follows that abortions may also be performed during the second or third trimester.

Going a step further, it would allow for letting a child be born and then having the attending physicians decide if it is suffering in some way from the drug use of its mother. If so, this line of reasoning provides, the infant could quickly and mercifully be put to death.

fully be put to death.

We are aware from the Vietnam War just how horribly mutilated battle victims can be and yet still be saved from dying. Using this reasoning, we could let the medical decide if the life of a wounded soldier would be intolerable, and if so, the soldier could, again, be mercifully put to death on the spot.

At first glance, given the circumstances of the above situations, applying the logic of Iverson's argument appears to be the humane course of action. Ultimately, though, we must reject it for at least two reasons. The first is that no person can ever presume to know the value another individual places on the continuation of his own life.

No person can ever know how strongly another may want to live, even if life means intense suffering, whether through physical ailment, deprivation, or mental torment. No one, then, can ever presume to be acting in another's interest if he takes that person's life.

The second reason is that if we do not reject this argument in its form, then we must accept it in its more general form. That is, that we have a right to set criteria for the worthwhileness of individual lives, and that if a life does not meet the accepted standard, it can be ended. Unfortunately, the acceptance of this type of reasoning by some people allowed Hitler to perpetuate the Holocaust.

Unquestionably, the epidemic of babies born to drug-users is tragic, and the burden this is putting on our society is monumental. A solution to the problem must be found.

Iverson mentions some actions that can be taken to relieve the suffering somewhat — caring for the infants in the hospital and adoption — but he then asserts that Right to Life supporters are not assisting in these areas. That is not true.

Yes, more can be done, but then again, few of us can truthfully say that we are doing all that we could do to solve this or any of the other major problems of our times.

William N. Martz, Farmington Hills

Lockup pays big dividends

To the editor:

I had the pleasure of serving as general chairman for the March of Dimes "Jail and Ball" project that took place at four locations in the tri-county area.

On behalf of the March of Dimes, I want to thank all of the volunteers and citizens who "locked up" friends, neighbors and bosses for a good cause.

The four sites in the tri-county area collected more than \$140,000 in pledges.

L. Brooks Patterson, Troy

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