

# New ethics code undergoes fine-tuning

By Joanne Mallezewski  
staff writer

Farmington Hills resident Luella Hempel wants a citizens committee to develop a financial disclosure form and campaign ethics code to accompany the city's first municipal code of ethics.

And Mayor-Elect Jean Fox doesn't think that's a bad idea for the new year.

"Let them (residents) have the input and have it brought into us for our input or fine-tuning," Fox said.

"Take the council out of this thing," Hempel was one of a handful of residents who served as watchdogs as the city's first code of ethics was drafted by a committee of city officials.

This issue should not be swept under the rug as other issues have been," Hempel said in a letter read publicly Monday night.

She urged residents' participation before a campaign ethics code is developed, not when the code is almost completed as was done with the code of ethics.

But some council members disagreed.

"I think there are times when it's wise to get citizens involved in committees," said councilman Lawrence Lichtman. Unfortunately, he continued, it's "fashionable to have the city council punt and abdicate authority on things."

THE ELECTION pits are the best means for the public to "deal" with a council member or candidate they believe is not behaving ethically in a campaign.

The adoption of the ethics code was not without debate Monday. The first complaint came from resident Masha Silver, also a committee watchdog. She urged the council to delay the code's adoption, pending

completion of a financial disclosure form and campaign ethics code to accompany the document.

"We feel you haven't got before you a completed document. I see no reason to rush. I see no reason to hurry up and enact a code now," Silver said, who agreed with creation of a citizens committee to complete the additional material.

But council members preferred to adopt the code Monday and amend the code later to include a financial disclosure form.

"If we wait until we get all these approved or adopted, we won't have the basic code," councilman Aldo Vagnozzi said.

The proposed code addresses the need for full financial disclosure but

without reference to a disclosure form. City officials and employees also are required to file a complete disclosure statement on an annual basis for doing business with the city.

The ethics code committee last week agreed to have City Manager William Costick draft a financial disclosure form and present it to the city council later at a study session.

THE NEW code applies to elected officials, city employees, board and commission members and consultants. It is designed to be preventive in nature rather than punitive.

The code addresses gratuities, preferential treatment, use of information, disclosure, outside business

dealings, doing business with the city, suppression of public information and use of city property.

Concerns or violations regarding elected and appointed officials will be taken to the mayor, city council and city attorney. Employee issues will be taken to the city manager and city attorney.

At least five courses of action are listed in the ethics code when there is a complaint, request for information or matter concerning conflict of interest. One of the listed actions is taking appropriate disciplinary action, including removal from office or employment in accordance with the city charter, city code, state law or city regulations and policies.

Lichtman, however, suggested re-

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moving the provision, calling it "poor legal drafting."

Vagnozzi and Silver argued to keep it in the code. Keeping it in, Vagnozzi said, gives "the impetus to do something." Silver said: "It certainly would be totally watered

down without it."  
The accompanying integrity report addresses the need for integrity in city government, why it's important, personal reputations, the city's reputation and standards of behavior.

## Ethics code won't cover campaign contributions

By Joanne Mallezewski  
staff writer

The new Farmington Hills ethics code will not apply to contributions made to candidates' political campaigns.

"I don't want any exemptions on the conflict of interest," said councilman Aldo Vagnozzi, who unsuccessfully tried to have an exemption for political contributions in the code deleted.

Contributions from developers are escalating with each city council election and possibly can have an effect on how a council member votes. "I think this is a large loophole," Vagnozzi added.

Incoming Mayor Jean Fox agreed.

"This is one of the things the public is most interested in us taking a strong stand on."

Both council members were concerned that by exempting political contributions, there is no way to monitor the amount of influence a contributor, such as a developer, has on a council member.

"It means you cannot question a possible conflict of interest," Vagnozzi said. "If you leave it in, we have no recourse on that kind of influence buying."

WHEN CANDIDATES fall to file state required pre-election campaign reports, the public and other city council members have no idea the amount of contributions and the

possibility of being under the influence of a heavy contributor.

But Vagnozzi and Fox stood alone. Councilman Lawrence Lichtman preferred leaving the exemption in the ethics code to serve as "legislative history." The exemption clarifies the parameters of the code, he said.

Councilman Ben Marks, who failed to file the pre-election campaign finance statement, admitted he received contributions from developers/builders, many of whom he's known during his career as a builder. He said he did not file the pre-election statement because his committee treasurer was out of town and missed the deadline.

## Study team mulls future of library

In the wake of voter defeat of bonding and millage proposals Nov. 7, the Farmington Community Library set up a study committee to discuss acute overcrowding and space shortage at the Farmington Hills branch.

The committee met for the first time Friday.

Earlier, the library board — represented by president Charlotte Yaverski, vice president Robert Plummer and trustee Ernest Sauter — requested that the committee include city officials in the two-branch library district.

Representing Farmington were Mayor Shirley Richardson, Mayor Pro Tem Ralph Yoder and city manager Robert Deadman.

Farmington Hills officials included Mayor Terry Sever, Mayor Pro Tem Jean Fox, councilman Jonathan Grant and city manager William Costick.

Grant and Jody Soronen represented the Citizens to Support the Library Campaign Committee.

"While the study committee had frank discussions about the continuing spatial problems experienced by the library, no decisions were reached," Yaverski said.

Library trustees will be examining both short- and long-term options to resolve space needs at the main branch on 12 Mile Road.

On Nov. 7 voters defeated a bond issue to build a new, larger main branch and a library operating tax of up to 1.5 mills.

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