

Opinion

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Quality of life

New main library still needed

IF GIVEN another chance this year, voters just might say yes to a bond issue to build a new main library serving Farmington and Farmington Hills.

But even though land and construction costs are sure to be higher in 1991, Farmington Public Library trustees probably made the right decision in backing off from a 1990 vote.

Too much confusion and concern persists following the November defeat of two library-related ballot proposals: a \$14.5 million bond issue to build a larger main library and a 1.5-mill property tax levy to operate the two-branch library system.

To a turnout topping 40 percent, voters shot down the operating levy by almost 5,000 votes.

But the bond issue, which also would have generated money to renovate the smaller downtown Farmington branch, lost by only 215 votes.

We supported both funding bids because we felt they would assure local library needs are met for the next 25 years.

Ironically, the library's very popularity has propelled use far beyond design capacity. In the past 10 years, reference use has jumped 150 percent and circulation of materials has grown 30 percent. Shelf space is at a premium.

BUT IT'S clear to us why the ballot proposals fell.

We think voters understood the need for a larger main library on a larger new site, given the cramped conditions and lack of adjacent land at the existing site at 12 Mile and Kendallwood.

But the bond issue, as proposed, left unresolved a key concern: the fate of the 18-year-old, 38,000-square-foot main library building.

If the bond issue had passed, the library board would have offered to deed the site to the two cities for another public use. If they declined, the site would have been sold and the cash applied to retire the bonds. The site is appraised at about \$2.5 million.

It seems to us voters preferred a more definitive future plan. We think the building should be sold and the bond total reduced.

It's also possible the site of the proposed new 80,000-square-foot library, 12 acres at 12 Mile

and Halsted, turned off many folks who live east of Orchard Lake Road.

AS FOR the tax request, we've long felt the two cities shouldn't be forced to weigh library needs against other budget line items. The library board should have autonomous taxing authority.

But voters may have misread the tax request as an automatic tax increase.

If the request had passed, the city councils would have rolled back their operating budgets in the amount earmarked for the library, 75 mill — \$1.5 million in Farmington Hills and \$169,500 in Farmington.

That, of course, didn't mean the cities couldn't have turned around and re-levied their share of the millage to meet other needs.

Nor did it mean the library board would only levy 75 mill, although it probably wouldn't have levied more until the new branch opened in 1992. Then, the tax rate was expected to be 1.2 mills to cover higher operating costs.

A PATCHWORK response to increasingly intolerable conditions at the existing main library, by trying to reconfigure shelf space that's already overflowing, is hardly the solution.

So voters can expect to revisit the bond issue, and probably the tax issue, in 1991 — the same year Farmington Hills' .05-mill park tax will be up for renewal and voting for voter support.

Meanwhile, we'd urge the library board and the Farmington Hills City Council to consider for a new main library part of 26 acres near 1696 and Farmington Road that the city recently acquired for community sports.

We acknowledge that the impact of a library on nearby homes is a crucial unknown. But the land is centrally located and abuts 45 state-owned acres the city is negotiating to buy, presumably also for community sports.

Sure, Farmington Hills needs new park land. But the library serves a wider cross-section of residents.

From a quality-of-life perspective, building strong minds is as important as building strong bodies.



Councilwoman Jean Fox (right) was elected to Farmington Hills at the Nov. 20 city council meeting. She will replace councilman Terry Sever as mayor of the city.

Sever leaves a varied imprint as Hills mayor

TERRY SEVER passed the mayoral gavel to Jean Fox at the Farmington Hills City Council's first meeting of 1990 Monday, ending his determined bid for an unprecedented two-year term as mayor.

"Humor was going around he liked his gavel and didn't really want to part with it," Fox joked in presenting a gavel plaque to Sever in honor of "a year's valiant and dedicated service."

From his vantage point as a council watcher, the four-year councilman at times seemed obsessed with power as he tried to elevate the mayor's position beyond the ceremonial role spelled out in the city charter.

I also thought he was way off base in trying to move public comment lower on each council agenda instead of only on public hearing night. It took an outcry for him to back off.

DURING COUNCIL discussions, I don't know why Sever felt obligated to call on council members by name so each could comment.

By doing so, he all but forced them to comment even if they had nothing salient to say — thus making long



Bob Sklar

meetings interminably long.

Why not simply call for a motion and a second, then ask for discussion? Once these who want to comment do so, then call for a vote.

Sever also was more deeply involved in ground-floor discussions involving some sensitive issues, namely the Boys Republic property and the Peltz parkland purchase, than even his fellow council members realized.

Despite omnipotent tendencies, Sever deserves a public salute for helping lead the way in many key areas: liquor law enforcement, youth recreation, park development, storm drainage improvements and the Year 2000 plan.

His vigor was infectious, his concern genuine and his love for Farmington Hills unquestioned.

I HAD a few run-ins with Sever

about the content of our coverage of local government.

But despite our differences, I was impressed he was able to keep our lines of communication open.

I think he came to realize the Observer is a vital conduit between city hall and Farmington Hills residents. So it behooved him, as the city's titular head, to cooperate with us.

What bothered me most is how Sever, elected on a platform as the people's councilman, grew adversarial as the year wore on.

He may not acknowledge it, but he became defensive to almost every complaint raised under public comment instead of accepting criticism as constructive feedback.

Still, I share his "sense of optimism" and agree that the '90s "are going to be progressive and exciting for the community of Farmington Hills."

Sure, the city faces some rugged challenges, but none that can't be met if tackled with the city's best interest at heart. I, for one, am proud to call Farmington Hills home.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Good work

Drivers heed MADD's message

THE MESSAGE, it seems, is finally getting through.

We're talking about drinking and driving. Tougher law enforcement and the Mothers Against Drunk Driving-sponsored media blitz have been credited with helping to reduce the number of fatal accidents in Michigan during the New Year's holiday weekend.

Three people died this year, down from 14 a year ago, according to the Michigan State Police. There were no traffic-related deaths in either Oakland or Wayne County.

Plymouth Police Chief Richard Myers last week said hazardous roads may have kept some people inside. But Myers also gave MADD and other organizations their due, saying they "raised the public's consciousness to some degree."

Also, stricter state laws now mean people convicted of driving under the influence can be sentenced to as much as 90 days in jail on a first offense; one year for a second offense; and 10 years thereafter. Judges are beginning to heed the call for stiffer sentences, police officials said.

WHILE WE CAN'T cite any comforting statistics, it does at least look like the driving population has become more aware of the problem and is beginning to do something about it.

We noticed, for instance, a large increase in the number of red ribbons tied to car antennas and door handles this year. At some intersections, nearly every car waiting for the signal to change was wearing the MADD ornament. The "Te One On" campaign was introduced by MADD last year as a way for drivers to show solidarity.

In Garden City, police were disappointed that only four people took advantage of the department's offer of free rides home for intoxicated party-goers. Still, it wasn't too long ago that such a program would have been neglected altogether.

The MADD holiday campaign is a good start. But drunk drivers are a year-round problem. Continued efforts by civic groups, law enforcement agencies and the courts are needed in the battle to make our highways safer.

Hands off!

Leave our state aid alone

LIKE A bad penny, a tired old ploy to rob Peter's school district to pay Paul's has come around again.

And who is the proponent of this plan? Why it's Gov. James J. Blanchard, who's standing for re-election this year.

State support of schools is sure to be an important issue in the upcoming gubernatorial campaign, and our governor no doubt wants to look good by dishing out some dollars to districts that need them.

Blanchard said in a recent newspaper article that he will support taking part of the state aid that wealthier districts get for retirement payments and giving it to needy districts.

A similar proposal to shift aid from wealthy districts to poor ones was shouted down by educational lobbyists last year.

NOW, THIS mischievous move is not to be taken as an anti-Blanchard diatribe, but his (or anyone else's) hands should stay off the so-called "categorical" funding that out-of-formula (most of our districts in Oakland and western Wayne

What our governor should be looking at are methods to secure more funds for all public education. We should be using a greater part of the state budget for education.

counties are OF) districts use for things like retirement payments.

In the guise of helping schools, Blanchard would be simply taking from one school and giving to another. That's no way to solve the education funding crisis. There's no net addition in such a plan; no new money for education.

What our governor should be looking at are methods to secure more funds for all public education. We should be using a greater part of the state budget for education.

Right now, education accounts for 36 percent of the budget, by Blanchard's admission. By our own reckoning, it was something like 52 percent in William Milliken's early years.

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.

Decision is a real cripper

To the editor:

I am disturbed by a recent Farmington Hills Planning Commission decision concerning the Community Center, a decision that will cripple one of the center's major functions: high-quality performances, during early hours, appropriate for families.

Marcia Miller,
Farmington Hills

Enforcement of the current edict of the commission may well result in the center closing its doors. The general public will be the loser. We are confident that the center can accommodate realistic mandates but renewed effort is needed to find "the" solution.

Dan and Julie Jakson,
Farmington Hills

Senior's life brightened

To the editor:

As a senior citizen who has been privileged to live in the Farmington area for a number of years, I want to publicly express my thanks to the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills for their strong support of the senior center at the Mercy Conference Center.

This center is much more than just a nutrition site. Through the efforts of a great staff of regulars and volunteers, it is also a place of love and caring, entertainment and exercise, joy (and sometimes sorrow), a place to learn and a place to develop deep and lasting friendships.

Meal times have been particularly enjoyable, but it must take a lot of work and coordination to send out 145 Meals-on-Wheels every day and also feed 100 in the hall, and at times, as many as 500 meals total.

My life, as well as those of many others, has been brightened by my contacts at the center.

Elaine Niles,
Farmington

Cable control surely needed

To the editor:

In reference to your article in your Dec. 28 issue, "Council backs tighter controls over cable TV," I must agree with the council that re-regulation is needed.

Since deregulation, basic cable rates nationwide have skyrocketed and "effective competition" has not occurred.

In an accounting survey by Broadcasting Magazine, it was found that basic rates rose 26 percent during the first two years of deregulation.

This is a far cry from Mr. Bjorklund's (Metrovision regional manager's) reasoning that "cable rates are going up at a lower rate — one half what the cost of living is going up."

The cable TV industry, as of yet, does not promote fair competition. One must look at cable's siphoning of sports coverages and pay-per-programming.

Hence, without some form of re-regulation, a two-tier access to programming will develop: television available to the general public and television available to consumers who have the ability to pay to receive it.

Finally, I request Metrovision's (Mr. Bjorklund's) cooperation by publishing their rates since deregulation.

This is in order for subscribers to measure the changes in rates, if any.

Michael Eisinger,
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