

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

10A(F) O&E Thursday, March 22, 1989

Bailout Late tax break hoists red flag

IT'S A tough call. Should Farmington Hills bail out a private venture in danger of failing? Only in unusual cases, we concluded after much soul-searching.

In that spirit, we're not happy with how readily the city approved a yearly tax break of more than two-thirds to help the ailing Carrington Place Apartments, which opened last August.

We're not opposed to helping business succeed. But this deal raises a red flag.

By December, just 29 of Carrington's 100 units, dedicated by covenant for senior housing, had been leased at market rents of \$550 to \$600.

The tax break will make Carrington home to low- and moderate-income senior adults, who will pay shelter rents of \$401-\$457.

It clears the way for Carrington owners to seek a 35-year, low-interest mortgage through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority and, in turn, drop rents for 1990 by \$150-\$200. Thereafter, rents will be set by formula. MHSDA will subsidize tenants who pay more than 40 percent of income on shelter.

CARRINGTON'S ANNUAL payment in lieu of taxes will be 4 percent of its net revenue from shelter rents (rent receipts after utility costs).

This year's payout will be \$17,589. Compare that to a property tax of \$61,000, based on a state equalized value of \$1.2 million!

The city's share of the \$17,589 will be roughly \$3,500 — which may not even cover the cost of public services.

Councilmen Larry Lichtman and Ben Marks defended the tax break, saying it didn't matter how much Carrington benefits — the city owns senior adults affordable housing.

Let there be no mistake: Farmington Hills doesn't have enough senior housing. The waiting list at Detroit Baptist Manor, which will manage Carrington, has 400 names for its 13 Mille campus.

But what bothers us most about the tax break is that Carrington owners sought it at the 11th hour — after they couldn't fill the units at market rents.

We'd be more understanding if the deal had

We're not opposed to helping business succeed. But this deal smacks of too much too late.

come at the start, not only after a stab for more profit obviously failed.

WE DON'T doubt the integrity of partner Sam Yaker, who maintains that receipts and outflow won't balance until the fifth year of full occupancy at shelter rents.

He admits he expected "the market to be something different than it turned out to be." But his integrity isn't the issue. Changing the tax rules mid-game is.

Still, we don't want Carrington Place to fail. It's something worth saving. A tax break seems the right tonic.

But we're not "ready to stand up and cheer," as councilwoman Nancy Bates suggested.

We agree with councilmen Terry Sever and Aldo Vagnozzi, who suggested a higher annual payment as a good-faith gesture. That could show rents back up, however.

Sever was on the right track in asking Yaker to do more for the city's seniors in exchange for the hefty break in taxes.

Unfortunately, any such commitment isn't binding on MHSDA financing. Regardless, we trust Yaker fulfills his pledge to do something more to support local seniors.

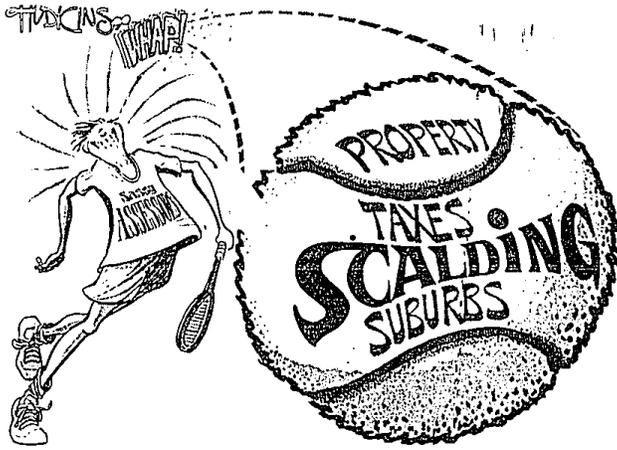
BLUNTLY PUT, the tax break opened a Pandora's box. It invites every other senior housing project that runs short of cash to come begging at the council table.

Like it or not, the city and Yaker unwittingly have put Farmington Hills into a no-win posture.

A future "yes" on a similar request could be considered yet another taxpayer subsidy of private enterprise. A future "no" could incur charges of favoritism toward Carrington.

Keep in mind the similar payment in lieu of taxes that Tapiola Village Apartments I and II enjoy came before construction.

The city erred in not telling Carrington before ground was broken, "Ask for relief now; don't expect a bailout later."



Local campaign trail begins to take shape

A PEEK ahead to Election '90 in Farmington and Farmington Hills:

● **U.S. House**
Only a political bombshell would unseat U.S. Rep. Bill Broomfield, R-Birmingham.

The ranking Republican on the House Foreign Relations Committee, the 67-year-old lawmaker hasn't lost a congressional race in 30 years.

His district is a GOP stronghold. He steamrolled over Democrat Gary Kohut of Troy in the past two elections, drawing more than 70 percent of the vote.

Kohut no doubt will run again. In 1988, he told me he'll run till Broomfield retires, if not to score a major upset then to build name recognition.

That'll put him a leg up, he figures, when Broomfield — interestingly a descendant of one of Oakland County's pioneers, Joshua Taylor of Rochester — finally tries of the Washington merry-go-round.

Meanwhile, Walter Briggs IV, a Birmingham Democrat and part of an old-line Detroit family, is off and running.

And he plans to sprint the distance, hopeful of raising the \$500,000 he thinks he'll need to beat Broomfield.

Neither Kohut nor Briggs, both business professionals in their 30s, would concede anything to Broomfield in a head-to-head battle —



Bob Sklar

which at least should make for a lively fall.

● **State Senate**
In a somewhat startling development, state Sen. Jack Faxon's opponent could be either of two Farmington Hills councilmen, Ben Marks or Terry Sever.

Both are testing the political waters and their fund-raising savvy before taking on the veteran senator.

Faxon, a Farmington Hills Democrat, is no stranger around Lansing. The Senate has been his second home for 20 years. And his gift for gab and guffaws is legendary.

But neither Marks nor Sever has ever been called bashful or introverted. So there'd be no shortage of campaign chatter in a squareoff between Faxon and either councilman.

Meanwhile, a primary showdown between Sever and Marks could prove divisive enough to assure victory for Faxon.

● **State House**
Will John Dolan run again? The Bingham Farms Democrat hasn't said.

But besides forcing Farmington Hills Republican Jan Dolan, who is no relation, to scramble because of the name similarity, he didn't put up much of a fight in 1988.

A freshman lawmaker, Jan would face more of a fight if challenged in the primary, given the largely Republican makeup of her district.

● **County Commission**
Incumbents Donn Wolf, R-Farmington Hills, David Muffitt, R-Farmington Hills, and Lillian Jaffe-Oaks, D-Southfield, will be in the driver's seat if they choose to run again.

It takes a near-act of God to oust incumbent county commissioners.

● **District Court**
No one is rushing to run against Gov. James Blanchard appointee Fred Harris, who replaced the retiring Mike Hand on the 47th District Court bench in Farmington.

Sitting judges also are tough to beat — one reason Hand, on Harris' campaign committee, probably stepped aside last year. This way, Harris is an incumbent.

We'll know more about these contests on D-Day, May 15. That's when 1990 candidates for federal, state, county and judicial offices must file nominating petitions declaring their candidacy.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Get counted Census affects our communities

GETTING EACH of us counted as of April 1 adds up to more than just another survey.

The facts and figures developed by the 1990 U.S. Census affect every community across the entire nation.

Political representation, federal, state and regional economic assistance plans, business and marketing projections, educational improvement programs and regional growth analyses all hinge on statistics the census generates.

But let's bring it right to our doorsteps.

Michigan is poised to lose two Congressional seats if Detroit's count goes below a million, as Detroit's districts are expanded to take in the suburbs. Mentioned as possible losses to consolidation: 2nd District (Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth), the 14th (Dennis Hertel, D-Detroit) and the 18th (William Broomfield, R-Birmingham).

Dollars for the problems that know no suburban borders — drug education and rehabilitation, mental health assistance, food and shelter for the

homeless — relate to each of us answering the census.

Lastly, the person heading all of this is one of us. Barbara Everett Bryant, appointed as director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census in December by President Bush, lived and raised her children in Oakland County from 1956-78, before moving to Ann Arbor and commuting to Detroit.

WE ARE IMPRESSED that for the first time she has sent enumerators to the streets and abandoned buildings to count the homeless. She has formulated elaborate plans to reach the many non-English speaking immigrants.

Most of our households will receive the short (14-question) form. One of six will receive the long (59-question) form. By law any identifiable personal and household information collected is confidential.

Answer the census. "It counts for more than you think."

County board Do the right thing; endorse center

SHAME ON YOU, Oakland County Board of Commissioners, for not endorsing the new Oakland County Center for Open Housing.

Two weeks ago, you failed to pass a resolution endorsing the center, a non-profit agency hoping to promote integrated housing throughout Oakland County.

You maintained you lacked information, despite these facts:

● Your General Government Committee heard a presentation from the center's directors and recommended endorsement.

● Stories on the center have appeared in various newspapers.

● The co-directors of the center attended your meeting, presented information and answered your questions.

Since the General Government Committee had already endorsed the group, you looked for another avenue — and found it. You sent it to the Public Services Committee for additional review.

On March 13, that committee adopted a resolution endorsing the principle of fair housing, but refused to stand up for the center itself.

That's like practicing for a boxing match and then being afraid to go into the ring.

Shame on the Oakland County Board of Commissioners for not endorsing the new Oakland County Center for Open Housing, a non-profit agency hoping to promote integrated housing throughout Oakland County.

practice — to translate rhetoric into action. It has been endorsed by Birmingham, Southfield, Farmington Hills, Beverly Hills, Lathrup Village and Royal Oak.

It has received a year's financing from the city of Southfield and the Southfield Board of Education.

Center directors Barbara Talley of Southfield and Ann Wettlaufer of Birmingham need the endorsements to go after continuing financing from private foundations and to know which communities stand for affirmative action.

So far, each community they have gone to has come through. The county hasn't.

The resolution comes back before the full board of commissioners at today's meeting.

You have one more opportunity to do the right thing. Do the right thing.

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, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

Latin a key to success

To the editor:

It was with great nostalgia that I enjoyed the recent column regarding Dr. Edith Kovach and the subject of Latin (March 15), as I am a graduate of Boston Latin School as are several other judges and attorneys, etc. that reside in this area.

The Boston Latin School is the oldest high school in America, having been founded in 1635 and claiming among its graduates seven signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Prominent names that come to my mind quickly among the graduates are Benjamin Franklin, Cotton Mather, Theodore White, Joseph Kennedy Sr., Leonard Bernstein and many, many other persons of prominence in American history, past and present.

Latin, of course, is a major requirement and "Caesar in hither Gaul" is the password to success. Entrance and graduation requirements are very rigid and only the most perseverant succeed.

I am retired but pursuing a new career as an automotive arbitrator and was a recent unsuccessful candidate for the Farmington Hills City Council.

Herbert P. Linder, Farmington Hills

Take note of Earth Day

To the editor:

On April 22, residents of Michigan, other states and nations around the globe will observe the 20th anniversary of Earth Day.

In Michigan, Gov. Blanchard has asked the Council on Environmental Quality to provide an informational clearinghouse on local and statewide Earth Day observances to enable citizens to participate more readily in these events.

CEQ will release a State of the Environment report that will analyze Michigan's efforts to improve environmental quality since the first Earth Day and make recommendations on how to provide the cleanest, healthiest environment by the year 2000.

CEQ encourages your readers to write us at the Michigan Council on Environmental Quality, Department of Public Health, P.O. Box 30189, Lansing, Mich. 48909 to obtain facts about how they can contribute directly to improved environmental quality in their household or community through energy and water conservation and recycling.

Elizabeth Harris, chair, Council on Environmental Quality, State of Michigan

Story was beautiful

To the editor:

I wish to express my appreciation for the beautiful story (March 5) you wrote on Jim and Donna Fackler, foster parents with the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center.

As with many of the people who have the capacity for total giving, the Facklers have long gone unrecognized.

It is so rewarding for us to see them gain recognition through their award as Foster Parents of the Year by the Michigan Federation of Private Child and Family Agencies. They are surely a blessing to our agency and to the children for whom they have provided a loving home and family.

It seems to be more difficult today to recruit foster parents due to the necessity of two incomes for many families.

We must surely value those who make the decision to take these children into their homes and provide them with love and care until a time when they may be reunited with their natural family.

Mary Lantabell, executive director, St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center, Farmington Hills

Observer & Eccentric® Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Judith Doner Berne assistant managing editor
Dick Isham general manager
Richard Brady director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Aglian president

THE CENTER is there to turn theory into