

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48336 Tom Baer editor/477-5450

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Get with program Recycling deserves support

SURE, CURBSIDE recycling will cost a few dollars more. And, yes, there's bound to be some inconvenience and confusion at first. But the green, 18-gallon bins have been distributed to homes across the Farmington area. Hopefully, the enclosed instructions about what to do with the glass, metal and paper have been read and understood.

Let's hope that our local curbside recycling program — which begins next week in Farmington and Farmington Hills — grows into a way of life for residents.

According to press reports, that's been the case with programs in communities in other metropolitan areas. There's no reason recycling can't be a success here, too.

This is truly the summer for curbside recycling around Detroit. New programs are popping up all over the metropolitan area, with July 1 the startup date for the Farmington area.

THE "WHY" of recycling should be obvious. The time has come when we all must think about what happens to the tons and tons of trash we generate in this throwaway society.

Gone are the days when we could simply bag (or can) it and have it hauled away without a thought in some snelly old truck.

Trash normally ends up in landfills (didn't we used to call them dumps?) or is incinerated. However, there are health concerns about both methods, and increasingly there's less and less room for more and more trash in dumps, which are expensive to operate.

Clearly, recycling is the method of choice when it comes to disposing of trash.

Now please understand: Recycling a few cans and bottles in Farmington and other suburbs won't turn the landfills into upscale shopping centers or douse the fires in the incinerators.

Recycling is an excellent start, however, and everyone should participate to the fullest. We're sure that once the program is up and running, people will be eager to support it.

One challenge facing this program is the problem of collecting recyclables from apartment

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buildings. At present, apartment dwellers are not included in the local curbside program.

One answer would be to set up more sites in the community where people could stash their recyclable trash.

And let's hope this bare-bones recycling project is just the beginning. As time goes by and more and more people get with the program, we'd like to see the list of items the recycler accepts grow longer.

IN ADDITION to newsprint, cans and glass and plastic bottles, the contractor should also recycle polystyrene, plastic rings that hold together six and 12 packs, aluminum foil and all mixed paper, including magazines, cardboard, computer printouts and of course . . . junk mail.

As long as we're thinking ultimate, let's think about a recycler who would make curbside pickups of old clothing and other items for charity.

Maybe someday the technology will exist to turn our trash into building blocks or paving stones or something useful to society.

Ah, but back to reality and the July 1 inauguration of curbside recycling in the Farmington area.

Lastly, let's hope that, as recycling develops, so does a market for products made of recyclables. Right now, we're told, such a market hardly exists, even though interest in the helping the environment and recycling seems to be very high.

Fair play Education among top needs

ISN'T IT ALWAYS the way: We know what we want, but we don't know how to get it.

Most everyone in Michigan believes all children should have access to the same set of sound, thorough educational opportunities.

It's simply a matter of fair play, we observe, that a student in Baldwin, one of Michigan's poorest school districts, be able to walk into class and receive the same instruction and encouragement as his counterpart in the Birmingham school system. Yet we seem unable to agree on how to make the goal a reality.

But the goal is a sound one, and we shouldn't lose sight of it, which is why the tax-sharing plan, already passed by the state Senate and now under consideration in the House, should be voted down.

This plan takes us off course by reminding the same set of halfway, half-hearted solutions that already, repeatedly, has failed the students of Michigan.

The reason this plan will fail like the rest is because it embraces the continued dependence on property taxes as the primary means of funding public schools.

People are getting squeezed by tax rates multiplied by ever-inflating property values. The elderly, who by today's standards are synonymous with the term "fixed incomes," find themselves in the uncomfortable position of supporting the ideal of a good education for all, at the personal cost of a steadily decreasing standard of living.

In addition, our dependence on local property taxes to fund education promotes the very idea we want to eradicate: that education is something we provide for our own . . . and forget the other guy. It's part of why the children of doctors and lawyers grow up to become doctors and lawyers while the children of the chronically unemployed grow up to become chronically unemployed.

THOSE ARE, IN FACT, the results we have

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achieved thus far by basing public school financing on property taxes.

We need, instead, to be innovative in our thinking, to try new things, now that we're positive the old solutions will provide inadequate support through this last decade of the century.

Residents should be willing to consider at least two other options for funding schools:

- a graduated income tax or;
- a state sales tax increase to 6 percent, which would merely make Michigan competitive with the rest of the nation.

Neither are perfect solutions. Residents will complain that they moved to Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Livonia or Plymouth so their children would benefit from the schools, and through equalization of this sort, the advantage will be neutralized. That's true.

Also true, though, is the fact that nothing would stop residents in wealthier districts from voting for additional funding, on top of the type of bases we're discussing here, for their school system.

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IT'S ALSO TIME to challenge our governmental system.

We must elect a government to respond to the electorate and serve, not duck and dodge, the needs of the people.

At the moment, the people need government to step in and propose solutions to a ton of budget problems, school funding not the least among them. Real solutions are needed, and it's up to the boys and girls in Lansing to provide them.

Next week we will examine the role jobs play in the solution.



JIM JAGOFF/Duff photographer

Working together

Like the close relationship between a teacher and student working together, it's time for our legislators to come to terms with the

real need for an innovative solution to funding education.

Hopes for better race relations flicker here

BEING NATIVE Detroiters, especially those of us who are proud of the distinction, we never quite get over the embarrassment of those from the outside who can't help but notice our Achilles' heel segregation.

Recently a journalist friend of mine popped into town. Looking for work to seeing him, I was disappointed when he didn't show.

A note came about a week later. Of all things, he was researching a book on racism and poverty. Detroit was his model.

"I found myself overwhelmed with work once I got there (Detroit)," he said.

My heart sank. Yet another book on a problem with which we just can't seem to deal.

HIS LETTER continued.
"I found Detroit to be . . . a place of great human feeling and surprising beauty amid the physical destruction. Fires have torched so many city blocks, but the flame of hope burns."

"I met committed Detroiters who are committed to helping people retool their lives and roll on to a better time. To these people and the grassroots programs that are rebuilding cities like Detroit my book is dedicated."

I thought about that letter this week after reading about the meeting between some concerned Birmingham business and civic leaders who sat down Thursday with officials from the NAACP, the Oakland

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County Center for Open Housing and the Birmingham-Bloomfield Task Force on Race Relations.

Seeing a predominantly white suburb face this area's largest problem is, indeed, rare. Most suburbanites burn a lot of psychological fuel denying that any problem exists at all.

AND WHILE the Birmingham meeting may be just a flicker rather than a flame, it is at least a start. At any rate, it makes this cynic believe that my friend could be correct, that hope does, indeed, exist.

Many Birmingham residents look upon themselves as leaders and this past week they got their chance to do just that.

Faced with a few highly publicized racial incidents in recent months, some folks in town decided it would be best to go public and clear the air. Hence the meeting.

If nothing else, it demonstrates that merit exists in the open meeting system, something that is becoming



Steve Barnaby

rarer each day in our so-called democracy.

And everyone survived, survived so well, as a matter of fact, that participants have agreed to convene once again in the heat of August.

Not bad for round one.

"WE IMPARTED a sense that the city is open and willing to improve race relations," said Birmingham City Manager Thomas Markus.

"City fathers have to assume responsibility just as I have to assume responsibility for what goes on in my house," countered NAACP board member Merrell Weeden, who noted that dealing with the undercurrent of racism is just as important as dealing with the recent public incidents.

Not a flame, but a flicker. Now we need to see action from other suburban communities so the next time my friend comes to town he has more names to put in his book.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor for Observer & Eccentric newspapers.

from our readers

Who runs the schools?

To the editor:

Rep. John Bennett has introduced House Bill 4940, which would prohibit smoking in schools or on school grounds.

The Michigan Education Association has consistently and successfully opposed all past legislative initiatives for tobacco-free schools.

It's regrettable that the teachers' union appears to be far more concerned with protecting faculty smoking lounges than the health and safety of children.

Albert A. Zack,
Farmington Hills

Recycle politicians

To the editor:

Let me see if I have this straight. Beginning July 1 we all will begin to sort our trash for recycling. This extra effort on our part adds value to our waste. In fact it becomes so valuable that part of this new ordinance makes it illegal for unauthorized people to take trash from the curbside.

Once sorted, this stuff is too valuable to let anyone steal it.

She wants better schools

To the editor:

I commend you for your editorial, "Keep Trying! Schools need challenges" on June 20.

I am in complete agreement that Farmington schools are in desperate need of Richard DeVries. But more importantly the taxpayer is desperate need of a public servant like DeVries.

Someone with new ideas to get on that school board and explain how property taxes can be so high and Farmington schools so weak. And why all my neighbors are choosing private schools over Farmington schools.

LASTLY, I must disagree with your statement: "The district needs board watchers and people willing to take on the establishment order, even if

failure is almost certain against a powerful, entrenched opponent."

I doubt any challenger would elect to run if losing were inevitable. I believe the establishment can lose, that the underdog can win. And that the Farmington School District better get prepared, because voters are not going to tolerate any more of this "establishment rules" philosophy.

We want better schools. We want better usage of our tax money. And even though we demand it now, it is obvious we will be forced to wait until the next school board election.

Gina Petrak,
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others in the From Our Readers column.

Letters will be withheld only for the best of reasons, and the decision to do so will be made by the editor.

Letters should be mailed to the editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

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