

Let's hope . . . Land will end parks spat

Score one for the jocks . . . and the bird-watchers. They're both winners for once.

That was our feeling last week after learning that the city of Farmington Hills had finally purchased that former sod farm on Eight Mile Road. The 85 acres will be turned into a recreation complex with ball diamonds, soccer pitches and other facilities.

The purchase of land for so-called "active" recreation in the Farmington area has been talked about for some time. Now that the dotted lines actually have signatures on them, a lot of parks-watchers are relieved . . . for now, anyway.

Sure, the sod farm is just a large piece of empty land right now. But maybe next year at this time — as soon as possible, anyway — young athletes will be strutting their stuff on those diamonds, pitches and courts.

With the new facility finally up and running, perhaps the pressure to over-develop Heritage and Woodland Hills (see the Peltz-MDOT property) parks will diminish or disappear. And let's be honest about it: When it comes to Heritage Park, it's been the battle of the jocks versus the bird-watchers for a long time now.

Remember, in paved-over and populated

Farmington Hills, people do care deeply about how their parklands will be used and what will happen to the last remaining open spaces in the community.

We've said it a few times in this space, but it bears repeating: The 212-acre Heritage Park is a special place. It's about as *au naturel* as it gets in this burg, and the last thing it needs is basketball courts.

Woodland Hills, a wild and woody stretch of land south of I-696 and west of Farmington Road, has the potential to be another place worthy of a long look through a nature-lover's field glasses.

Anyway, with the parks rift hopefully abating, maybe it's time to consider splitting the parks and recreation power structure: One group would run the parks, another would deal with recreation. Each entity would work on what it knows best — without bickering with each other.

And, finally, we do hope that old sod farm becomes a recreation complex in short order. We'll be very disappointed if we visit the place in a year's time and find it devoid of youngsters who are running, jumping and shouting.

We'll be even more unhappy if we find the same old parks spat still simmering a year from now.

Keep city on statistical team

It really doesn't matter how you finagle statistics or where you draw a line on some map. This is still Detroit, the metropolitan area.

It's metro Detroit from the pricey abodes of Oakland Township to the modest bungalows of Garden City. That big — and sometimes bad — city to the south or east of our suburbs is truly part of our social and economic psyche. It always has been.

So we're very much against this suggestion by the federal Office of Management and Budget that affluent Oakland County may want to divorce itself — statistically speaking — from problem-plagued Detroit and Wayne County. Because so many people live and work in Oakland, the county qualifies to form its own primary metropolitan statistical area (PMSA), which is one way the government describes an urban area. The county, one of the wealthiest in the nation, could secede from metro Detroit, so to speak.

Well, the notion is ridiculous. We hope officials on both sides of Eight Mile and Telegraph roads put the suggestion where it belongs: in the trash can marked "bad ideas."

Oakland can no more divorce itself from Detroit than one of its residents can divorce himself from a festering sore on his leg. The thing is to get the sore healed so that the entire body can be well.

Yes, many suburban cynics will tell that Oakland and western Wayne communities are already legally separated, if not divorced, from

Detroit. There are so few reasons to go down (or over) there, they say.

That may be reality for them but not for those who can see Detroit as a jewel ready to be plucked from the bottom of the river.

Besides, Detroit isn't going to break loose and float down that river just because some bureaucrats in Washington place Oakland County in a metropolitan area of its own.

The city's still going to be there with all its problems. And most of us know that social and economic ills are no respecters of lines drawn on maps.

There are other reasons to pitch the idea of a separate PMSA for Oakland. Advocates say that a separate metro Oakland will look better to developers.

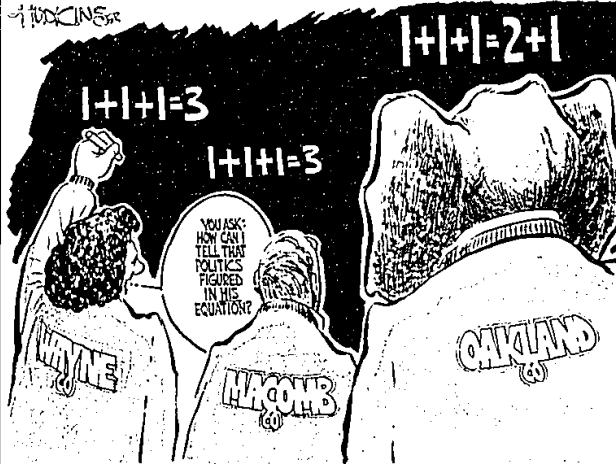
Well, we respond that Oakland has looked good — too good, perhaps — to developers over the last 15 or 20 years. Oakland County needs a reprieve from the bulldozers and architects and clogged highways, while Detroit badly needs commercial and residential development.

Let the federal government come up with something that will make Detroit look good to developers.

Finally, if Oakland splits from Detroit, the resulting PMSAs will rank something like 16th and 17th, respectively, in the nation in population. The current metro Detroit area, which includes seven counties, ranks fifth with 4.4 million people. That's lots more clout.

No, we're better off with Detroit, problems and all, on our statistical team.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

On lead in water

Many years ago a scientist named Needleman conducted tests on 1,000 children.

After discarding 400 samples, the remaining tests showed unequivocally that the higher the lead content, the less intelligent the child.

The late Warren Brookes broke the story about why the 400 were dismissed. Some had high lead and high intelligence. This did not conform to the scientist's preconceived notions.

An industry of removing lead has developed on one false, unsupported research. Holes exist where there once were gas stations.

Pollute the ground water? Our water comes from the Detroit River. The polluted soil is carried to Milford where they use ground water. Take samples 40 feet down? Lead is a mineral.

It comes from the ground.

Lead is useful because very few chemicals will dissolve or "rust" it. Now I receive a letter from the 100 percent safe bureaucrats in Farmington that my drinking water may be contaminated by lead solder.

I think I will go back to smoking. What will these guys save me from next?

Hank Borgman, Farmington

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Dems must target suburbs

Michigan, like the rest of America, is becoming suburbanized. This fundamental change in demography, symbolized so aptly here in Chrysler Corp.'s move from urban Highland Park to suburban Auburn Hills, will drive politics for at least 25 years to come.

To demonstrate, just compare the elections of 1960 and 1988.

Detroit cast 22 percent of the total Michigan vote in 1960. The Detroit vote was 71 percent Democratic, so John F. Kennedy took a 312,000-vote lead out of Detroit. The Detroit suburbs also gave Kennedy an 84,000-vote; and Michigan went for JFK.

But by 1988, Detroit vote's had plummeted to just 8 percent of the total in Michigan. Even though Michael Dukakis got an 85-percent margin from Detroit voters and a 217,000 lead coming out of Detroit, it couldn't stand up in the suburbs. Now accounting for fully one-third of Michigan's total vote, suburbanites voted 60 percent for George Bush, their 320,000 lead wiping out the Democrats' margin from Detroit.

Another fact to show how important the Michigan suburbs have become: Bush's total margin in Michigan (290,000) was far greater than his total vote in Detroit (44,000). In other words, George Bush could have won Michigan without getting a single vote in Detroit.

From 1948 to 1960, Democratic presidential candidates opened their campaigns at Labor Day parades in Detroit. In 1992, Bush came to Canton Township.

So how do the Democrats get around the growing size and increasing anti-tax Republicanism of the suburbs? The answer is they must learn to understand and target suburban voters.

This isn't easy, especially when Democrats have to retain the votes from the inner cities to win, while Republicans can afford to virtually ignore them. Worse, Democrats have to figure out how to sell their vision of an activist government to a suburban constituency that is largely anti-tax because it is made up predominantly of property owners.

One important lesson Democrats should have learned by now is this: There's the biggest possible difference between government programs that take everybody's tax money and spend it on a minority and those that spend taxes to help out everybody.

It's the difference between social welfare programs and public works. Some examples:



PHILIP POWER

• The New Deal was not a social welfare program. It was a public works program created to benefit everybody in the face of the Great Depression, a natural disaster that affected everybody. Its popularity created the modern Democratic Party.

• The War on Poverty was a social welfare program. Focused on the poor and dispossessed, and erected just prior to the Great Inflation, it was deeply unpopular. The political backlash created the modern Republican Party.

• Even though involving the often wasteful and inefficient expenditure of colossal sums, Social Security and Medicare are so popular as to be untouchable. They are entitlements, benefiting everybody. Any party that proposes big changes in these programs had better watch out.

A current example of this insight can be found in the suddenly popular field of job training.

Traditionally, politicians have looked on job training as targeted toward minorities: the illiterate, the out of work, the displaced, the unskilled. And as long as job training was conceived as a social welfare program created to benefit the few, it remained unappreciated, unpopular, unfunded.

But the notion is now being recast. Job training is needed for everybody — kids leaving school to enter the work force and all workers now on the job — because we are in international competition with better skilled economies. All of a sudden job training has become a human investment, a perfectly appropriate and politically popular object of government.

(Next week: two choices.)
Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What's the smartest thing you've ever done?

We asked this question at the Farm Hills doughnut shop.



"I married my husband, Vasso. He's been a wonderful husband and a great dad."

Vanna Nestorovski Livonia



"I haven't lived long enough to know."

Casey Scruggs Livonia



"I got married. There's been a lot of satisfaction with the kids and married life."

Jerry Bradley West Bloomfield



"Change careers. I used to work in the auto industry and now I'm in computers."

Ray Kaczor Farmington Hills

The Farmington Observer

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