

Hills agenda

Several issues for 1993

It's January, a time to set goals for the new year. It's also a time to look back to see if (and how) past goals were attained.

Looking back over the last couple of years in Farmington Hills, we have to say... we're pleased overall. It's our perception that things have changed for the better over that period thanks to some actions taken by the city of Farmington Hills.

From flood control projects to road improvements to the purchase of an old sod farm for future use as an "active" recreation complex, things seem to be getting done in Farmington Hills.

Parks and recreation are always hot topics in Farmington Hills. We hope things'll cool off a little now that the city has purchased a 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.

With the new facility finally up and running, perhaps the pressure to over-develop the *au naturel* Heritage and Woodland Hills (see Peltz-MDOT) parks will diminish or disappear.

One goal for the new year would be to get that recreation complex up and running as soon as possible. We'd be very disappointed to find the

place devoid of youngsters jumping, running and shouting in a year's time.

And, while we're still on the subject, what about this plan to split off recreation into a separate department with its own people and priorities? It should be considered, anyway.

Here are a couple of other goals we'd like to see accomplished in 1993:

■ **Library** — This plan to merge a new public library with the Oakland Community College Library on the Orchard Ridge has been on the front and back burners over the years. The plan sounds like a good one. Residents need more excuses to be on campus. Support from the city and college seems to be there, so let's get going. Just don't (repeat do not) put the new library in Woodland Hills.

■ **Public involvement** — This is for the governed. Residents, after all, need a goal or two to shoot for. People love to complain about the way the city is run. But those with concerns should show up at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake roads on Mondays when the city council meets. Even those with no specific complaint should take the time to get to know their city officials. You'd be surprised how good they'll be if they know someone is watching.

Better roads still needed

Gov. John Engler missed a golden opportunity in 1992 to improve Michigan's crumbling roads by raising the fuel tax.

His Senate Republicans and House Democrats could have cut a deal so that neither party would use it against the other. There was no talk in Washington of more fuel taxes. Pump prices were stable and even declining.

As the Engler team looked to squeeze \$150 million from the \$5 billion state transportation budget, a tax increase could have been phased in.

Certainly the need is there, especially for county roads. Oakland is plagued by two-lane roads. Wayne's mile roads are an abomination; the county can't even do proper signal timing to avoid traffic jams at red lights. I-275, dedicated only 15 years ago, is crumbling.

As aging gasguzzlers are retired, the new fleet of cars is more fuel efficient, and 15 cents per

gallon simply doesn't raise the revenue it used to.

Finally, Engler's transportation chief, Patrick Nowak, thinks it's time for more revenue.

But the problem in 1993 will be more difficult. Washington is talking of a 25- to 50-cent tax increase to deter fuel consumption.

Michigan's 15-cent tax still is one of the Midwest's lowest, and our roads are an embarrassment. On US-23 and I-69, you can tell when you've reached Ohio and Indiana because the rumbling sound stops.

No, 1993 isn't the best time to beef up road revenues, but it's too late to bemoan lost opportunity.

Good roads still are good politics. Good roads are good for economic development. Good roads are good for tourist travel.

And good roads are a better monument to lawmakers than fat pensions.

Breathe life into standards

Clean air has a price. We're not sure how high it is yet, but people in this seven-county region of Michigan need to realize something is coming, and state legislators will need to pass enabling laws.

The U.S. Congress passed a new Clean Air Act in 1990, and now we learn that our region isn't in compliance. Our goal is to reduce emissions 15 percent from 1990 levels by 1996.

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments put together a task force of road agencies, oil companies, American automakers, universities and environmental groups to make recommendations. The plan goes before SEMCOG's Executive Committee by month's end. Lansing has to pass enabling laws by November.

Without our action, Washington will set not only the goal but the methods, too. We could lose federal road money and industrial permits (translation: jobs, jobs, jobs).

The plan before SEMCOG and ultimately the Legislature calls for:

■ Vapor recovery devices on fuel pumps. The state regulates gasoline stations.

■ A centralized and enhanced vehicle inspection program.

■ A Department of Natural Resources air inspection program paid for by industrial fees.

No doubt state lawmakers will use a fine-tooth comb before agreeing to new laws and fees, checking all the options. They have 10 months to act, and that should be long enough.



LETTERS

Support for millage

As parents of four children in the Farmington Public Schools, we thank you for you Jan. 7 editorial on the upcoming millage renewal.

While we are grateful for the wealth of information received and enjoyment obtained by reading the Observer twice weekly, we are disappointed that your newspaper doesn't more directly and aggressively support the much needed passage of this renewal.

It is our opinion that Farmington system has 25 exemplary schools. We are confident that one day each will have a plaque to flaunt their accomplishments.

It puzzles us why anyone would not support this renewal, or how our school system is to continue its fine work without it.

We have listened to presentations of this renewal and have asked questions trying to understand any basis which would support its defeat.

Surely statistics must show that our property values, the health of our community as well as our children's educations are directly affected by the quality of our schools.

It is encouraging to hear positive endorsements from business and community leaders.

We see Superintendent Flanagan, Assistant Superintendent Barrett, as well as our seven devoted board members standing ready, able, and willing to explain and re-explain this proposal as well as answer questions relating to this or any other matter.

Please aggressively encourage all of your readers to support the Feb. 2 millage renewal. Our kids are worth it.

And yes, user-friendly is a fine term to use when discussing our school establishment, because it certainly is.

Linda and Steve Kaplan, Farmington Hills

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.

Manager generated respect

Some animosities transcend circumstance and become fixed parts of life. Dogs and cats, for example, or suburbanites and Coleman Young, or New York Yankee fans and the rest of humanity.

Folks in my trade develop equally persistent dislikes, usually arising out of the realities of our work. We don't like lawyers, for instance, because we think most are weasel worded and, because many use us.

High on our dislike list are city managers and cops, mostly because both believe (wrongly) their job entails trying to keep bad stuff out of newspapers. I'm particularly sorry for city managers because they're between a rock (local newspapers) and a hard place (city councils); if something gets screwed up in town, everybody knows about it.

There are, of course, exceptions that make the rule.

On top of my personal list is Bob Deadman, who retired last week as Farmington's city manager after a 35-year career in public service.

Bob started out in 1957 in Farmington when he was hired as a cop (well, "public safety officer," as the fire and police departments are combined). Rejected by the Detroit Police Department because of bad eyes, he started his career riding a scout car in the suburbs, supporting a wife and three kids and going to Oakland Community College and Madonna at night.

He became public safety chief in 1966 and city manager in 1972, surviving for 20 years in a trade usually marked by short tenure.

Why? "Because while I was riding a scout car, I really got to know the community and the people in it. That and the fact that the members of the city council were good folks to work for."

That sounds just like Bob Deadman. Direct, decent, thoughtful, measured and not a showboat.

We got to know Bob pretty well at these newspapers over the years. I'd guess our reporters thought more of him than nearly anybody they covered in local government.

Here's the take on Bob Deadman according to



PHILIP POWER

Bob Sklar, who covered him while editor of the Farmington paper from 1985-90: "What I remember most is his compassion for the little guy who came before city council, his never-say-die approach to the central business district, the respect his police officers gave him even long after he left their ranks, and his commitment to historical preservation."

That's high praise from a community journalist who covered a city manager.

Here's another assessment from Tim Richard, surely one of the most tough-minded bordering-on-surlly reporters ever to work for these newspapers: "Deadman was a 20th century cop. He put the law and public service above personal convenience. This is unusual, given that he served a small city where personalities loom large. He brought city administration, both as a police specialist and generalist, open-handed dedication."

"I forgive him for attending Cooley High," was the way Tim ended his note to me.

In this business, too often we get entangled in the push and shove of daily news and conflict without ever pausing to reflect on why some communities we serve are such wonderful places to live. People like Bob Deadman are why. All of us — press and public alike — are better off because of able and dedicated public servants like him.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His toll-free voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1881.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Would you please recommend something for us to listen to?

We asked this question at Harmony House in downtown Farmington.



The new REM Band, or the Frank Sinatra box set, or Harry Connick Jr., or Garth Brooks... Kevin O'Connell Livonia



'Def Leppard just came out with a new album that's great.' Mary Robb Farmington Hills



'10,000 Maniacs. Their new album is "Our Time in Eden." Kevin McKague Novi



I would recommend country or classical music. I love Pavarotti! Helen Masell Redford Township

The Farmington Observer

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