

Farmington Observer OPINION

21898 FARMINGTON RD., FARMINGTON, MI 48336

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A done deal?

Take anti-clockers seriously

We admit it. We've been kind of fence-sitting when it comes to this clock tower flap that has some Farmington folks pretty wound up these days. We see both sides.

When we hear people criticize the plan that would put a 28-foot clock tower near the Masonic Temple on downtown Farmington's main corner, we find it easy enough to agree with them.

However, there is another side as stated by members of the Downtown Development Authority Board and other city officials. Their arguments have merit, too.

Now, the clock tower is probably a done deal. Check out that corner next year about now, and you'll know the time — assuming the clock works and is accurate.

The DDA Board has backed the plan and reiterated that support. Officials and business people seem solidly behind it.

But after hearing some anti-clock people speak up (Yes, they finally opened up after weeks of writing letters to the Observer) at Tuesday morning's DDA meeting, we might just be leaning a bit more to their side.

By speaking up (and coaxing responses from board members and others), they saw to it that the issue got some badly needed public discussion.

Some anti-clockers are senior citizens, the kind who put on their gym shoes and do a lot of walking through the old town. Some just don't want the Farmington vista to change — ever.

They tend to get all teary-eyed over the Masonic Temple.

But there are more practical considerations. Farmington councilwoman JoAnne McShane brought up a good point: You'll see very few clocks in big shopping malls, she said at the DDA meeting. The good merchants there don't want you thinking that it's time to go home. They want you spending and spending and spending some more in their stores.

Well, downtown Farmington is sort of a fresh-air mall that's open to auto traffic. The economic well-being of the old shopping district should be Job 1 for the DDA.

Just about everybody agrees that Farmington needs something that will draw people in and loosen their purse strings. There's really no anchor store, unless it's the venerable Civic Theater.

An anchor store is the kind of change downtown Farmington needs, not a clock on a brick tower. Not many are going to come from, say, Flat Rock to see what time it is at Grand River and Farmington Road, we think.

Anyway, we're glad the ladies in walking shoes and the other anti-clockers spoke up at the DDA meeting Tuesday. The DDA honchos sitting at the conference table needed to hear what they had to say. Anti-clockers are concerned citizens who care about their community. They deserve to be taken seriously.

And, if they keep it up, maybe this done deal can be undone after all.

Put rail use in your future

What's made of metal, goes clickety-click. . . and scares the hell out of auto executives?

Why, a train, of course. To be more specific: public transportation on steel rails. The Detroit area has had precious little of that since SEMTA, the old suburban bus company, folded the area's lone commuter rail line almost 10 years ago.

But thankfully that's going to change — how ever slightly — this summer when Amtrak and the state revive the rail link between downtown Detroit and Pontiac — with stops at Royal Oak and Birmingham.

Oakland County residents who work in Detroit will be able to commute mornings and evenings. Once in Detroit, long-distance travelers will be able to make connections for other cities served by Amtrak.

It's a small, but needed, step for a metropolitan area whose main method of transportation has been overpriced cars, expensive gas and clogged expressways and streets.

Everyone knows that the private auto and its concrete pathways will always be part of the transportation picture. But the Detroit area is the only megalopolis of its size where there are so few alternatives.

Rail — be it the traditional diesel engine pulling several cars, or the newly-designed light rail vehicles — should be part of our transit future. It is in other large cities. Why not in Detroit?

The Oakland County line is a start. Of course, western suburban commuters could also benefit from a line of their own.

Public transit, especially on rails, is a good deal. Let's hope the state and Amtrak can keep a good thing rolling.

Make new spirit work for us

Just when we thought we'd seen everything Lansing had to offer, our legislators threw us a new one: bipartisan cooperation.

It's too early to tell whether the new spirit will last, but early kudos must go to Democratic House leader Curtis Hertel and Paul Hillebronde, his Republican counterpart, for making the best of the unusual 55/55 split in the state House.

Rather than pressuring legislators into switching sides, trying for a one-vote majority, House leaders of both parties have decided to share power — just as we called for in an editorial earlier this year.

Quite possibly, legislators can now come up

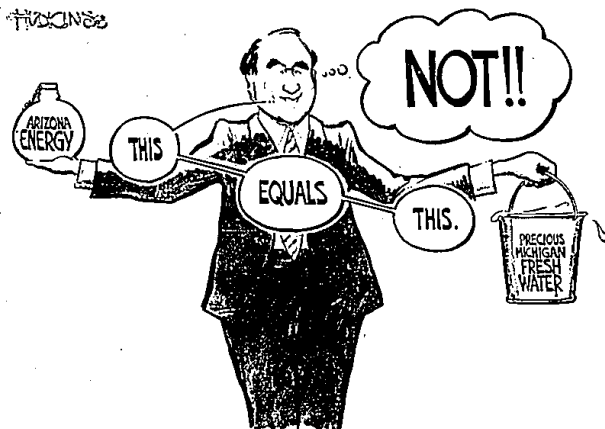
with bipartisan solutions to Michigan's pressing problems, such as auto insurance rates, property tax relief and financing of education.

Not that partisanship is dead. There is talk of Gov. John Engler's mounting an offensive designed to undercut the newly bipartisan House. Likewise, there are Democratic office holders who would love to see their party back in undisputed control of the House.

But the governor — and his Democratic rivals — shouldn't ignore public opinion polls that show little tolerance for legislative gridlock.

To leaders of our newly bipartisan House, we say thanks. Now get down to business.

HICKINS



Professor Engler on the weightiness of Relative Clicketozies

LETTERS

Another 'no' on clock

I like what has been done in the last few weeks to downtown Farmington.

I do not like the proposed clock tower plans for the Masonic Temple corner. It will detract, rather than enhance, that fine historical site.

Perhaps a living monument — a grant, scholarship or award program for students in all Farmington schools — could be initiated. I'm not sure if funds could be disbursed that way. It's just a thought.

Marie Kane, Farmington

Yet another 'no'

As corresponding secretary of the Farmington Historical Society, I have been directed to write a letter on the Society's behalf opposing the erection of the proposed clock tower at the corner of the parcel of land occupied by the Masonic Temple, and showing the following reasons for the Society's opposition.

■ The Masonic Temple is a beautiful example of Victorian architecture. It is one of the principal landmarks of the city and has been since 1876, when it was built.

■ The present plan is for a brick tower 28 feet high. No specifications are available, if they even exist, but the sketches shown reveal a monolithic structure completely incompatible with the Masonic Temple's architecture.

■ The proposed site of the tower is in an acute angle formed by the intersection of Farmington Road and Grand River. The space available is cramped for a tower of that size. When it is placed next to the Masonic Temple it will crowd that building as well as derogate from its charm and historical authenticity.

■ Between money raised by the Downtown Development Authority and the 125th Anniversary Committee, the sum to be spent on this project is approximately \$88,000. The clock tower is unlikely to cause any significant economic growth in the Downtown District. The Downtown Development Authority can find more productive use for this money.

■ If the authorities believe that a clock tower must be built there are potential sites which would make it an attraction rather than an eyesore. There is a broad expanse of lawn between the City Hall and Grand River where the tower could stand without being crowded. In that location it would be an enhancement.

Robert J. Slegmund, Farmington

Biased reporting?

I was greatly disappointed when I read your Feb. 25 article entitled "School board field takes shape."

Knowing personally all of the people that you referred to in your article, it is obvious to me that you made no effort to verify charges of "low-energy, weak educational and professional

credentials," that were described to you by an already three-time losing candidate.

Had you taken the effort to properly do your homework, you would have discovered that each of these people has not only donated extraordinary amounts of time supporting the many programs in their own children's schools, but have also served countless hours participating on committees, meetings and forums dealing with programming for the entire district.

Just how do "low-energy people" accomplish all of this?

You, Larry O'Connor, have violated your moral duty to the community that you serve and that supports the newspaper that you represent. Is there a motive behind your biased reporting?

Bonnie J. Murphy, Farmington Hills

Sell those papers!

I can bear no more.

Why does your newspaper continue to quote the words of Richard DeVries? The voters have spoken in three previous school board elections and place no value on what this individual has to say.

He does not speak for the general tax-paying public which feels our school board is doing the best it can during these very challenging times.

I am familiar with the school board and with some who may seek out the opening positions in this upcoming election. I have never known these people to have low energy or lack credentials.

The people who seek out a place in this election are not rewarded by high pay or additional status. They want to help our schools advance and to continue to be recognized as highly acclaimed.

I believe that your paper should stop quoting the individuals that the voters feel do not speak on their behalf. Stop trying to sell papers by making friction.

When it comes to our children's education, let's show our children we can have a change without sensationalizing the situation.

Anita Bogorud, Farmington Hills

Thanks for the story

I just a note to say thank you for the Feb. 11 article about the closing of Marillac Hall. As the word spreads, we have spoken to many people who expressed their sadness and told us of the help a sister, daughter, aunt or cousin had received from the agency during a crisis pregnancy.

It's been a very busy two weeks, getting all the young women placed in some kind of stable environment, but we are now ready to move on with our outreach services to pregnant teens and young mothers.

Jacki Kelsay, coordinator, community relations, St. Vincent & Sarah Fisher Center

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Given the recent explosion in the World Trade Center in New York City, would be afraid to work or live in tall buildings?

We asked this question at the Orchard Place shopping mall in Farmington Hills.



"No. . . I would not stay away from one just because of that."
Joanne Bushlon
Novi



"Yes, I would. If I had a choice, I wouldn't live in one."
Melonie Miller
Rochester Hills



"It would depend on when the building was built, is there a sprinkler system?"
Jane MacKinnon
Beverly Hills



"No. It (an explosion) doesn't happen that often. Everyone thinks it'll never happen to them."
Terri Melnick
West Bloomfield

The Farmington Observer

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