

The Attitude

It shouldn't stop bike path

Oh, come on people! Here the city of Farmington Hills wants to use a federal grant to build you a nice bike path along Farmington Road, so what do you do? You show up about 40 strong at a recent city council meeting to complain about, of all things, a bike path.

One of you called it an "8-foot scar" on the land.

Something similar happened a few weeks ago when some residents let it be known that they were definitely against a city plan to put sidewalks along a stretch of Gill Road in the south end of the city.

"We hope the city doesn't cave in to the pressure of the few on either issue. The community needs sidewalks along busy highways for safety's sake, and it needs bike paths for... well, just for the fun of it."

But, hey, some of our residents do have bad attitudes about these things. And those attitudes seem to surface at city council meetings and on the Observer's letters page whenever one of these special projects comes a little too close to their precious property.

Both sidewalk and bike path would shave a tiny bit of land off the spacious front yards of the people who live along those routes. And who knows what sort of people those walks and paths would attract?

But, as we said, that's The Suburban Attitude you encounter so often out here. If some folks out here had their way, a city like Farmington Hills just wouldn't have a whole lot to do. The city's role would be rather limited: Make criminals, fires and the garbage disappear.

Cut out all that fancy (and expensive) stuff

■ We hope the city doesn't cave in to the pressure of the few on either issue. The community needs sidewalks and bike paths.

Bike parks, sidewalks and special paths for bikers and joggers, they'd jolly well tell you. Hey, they'd say, we're mortgaged up to our eyeballs so we could escape the big, bad city and its problems.

Now you want to bring the big, bad city and its problems out to us with your parks and paths and such. Jeez, just leave us alone, will you please.

Ah, but if the city fathers followed your advice, they'd be seriously remiss in their duties.

A city, even a bedroom suburb like Farmington Hills, has a duty to provide recreation opportunities for its residents — for anyone who cares to use them, actually — as finances permit. And a bike path is about as harmless and unobtrusive as you can get.

Bike paths can be used in nice weather by families who'd like a nice outing in the fresh air close to home. We're hearing too many stories about Farmington-area people who load their bikes on the car racks and head somewhere else to ride. Safe routes just don't exist close to home, they think.

We like councilman Larry Lichtman's attitude on the bike path.

"A city builds things that people need and want," he said in a recent interview. "A bike path is something that will keep us a nice town."

So, cantankerous ones, please back off and let the city do its job of keeping us a nice town.

Ax falls heavily on DNR

Michigan's state government may be a fatted calf.

But Gov. John Engler's bull-in-a-china-shop approach to trimming government costs far more harm than good.

The latest example of the governor's heavy-handed actions involves eliminating a series of state Department of Natural Resources boards and commissions.

With a stroke of the pen, the governor will delete 19 of 27 DNR panels. And a recent, unanimous state Supreme Court decision ensures him that right.

We agree that state government needs trimming. Still, there is a big difference between downsizing government to make it more responsive and less costly, and hamstringing it altogether.

Given this governor's shredding of the state mental health care system — not to mention the sacking of public school financing — we see this latest action continuing a dangerous trend. Make no mistake, finding the proper role of government is the central political issue of the 1990s.

Experience has shown us we can't depend on government to solve all society's ills, as was hoped by the 1960s.

But by now we should realize the anti-government approach of the 1980s isn't working either. Engler's wholesale restructuring of the DNR worries us for several reasons.

For starters, he never mentioned it in the 1990 campaign. Second, he never consulted with the heads of the abolished panels before making his cuts.

Their duties, covering everything from air

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pollution control to plastics recycling to hazardous waste management now pass to the already-overworked DNR itself.

Several of these boards, including the Act 61 Oil and Gas Advisory Board, staffed by industry types, were born of special interest group lobbying. To them, we say good riddance. But others, like the Marine Safety Education Commission, have a legitimate role yet to serve.

Clearly, Engler's action doesn't make this critical distinction. As such, it is more based on short-term political expediency than of any genuine desire to make the DNR more responsive to the public it serves.

In his re-election campaign, the governor can boast of taking action to trim government. It's action, all right. But it's action without regard for consequences.

There does appear to be an alternative. The national governmental restructuring plan currently being touted by President Clinton and Vice President Gore is broad-based and far-reaching — something that cannot be said of Engler's trash-a-department-at-a-time antics. It also appears to be gaining bi-partisan support.

It's this kind of leadership we need from our next governor, whoever he or she might be. And it's that bi-partisan spirit we need from us thus far too divided and cowardly Legislature.



United Way

LETTERS

He keeps calling

Oh no... it's happening again. Another school year and it's already started. Now I have to call the school again tomorrow to get my children's dittos corrected. There were misspellings this time. Worse yet, it's a fill in the blank assignment where my daughter has filled in the blanks correctly with the improperly spelled words on the ditto.

Somehow, I had hoped that all of those tax "dollars per pupil" we paid would improve the quality of our children's education, kind of like paying additional taxes to the federal government reduces the deficit, I guess. Have you been to school lately? Have you taken a look at your child's curriculum, their course work, or their returned homework (locate it if you can)?

Our education system is failing to teach the basics of math, science, and particularly English. In fact, one could make the case that this has been going on for so long, that some educators are incapable of raising the level of student instruction due to their own fundamental educational experience.

That's why the dittos worry me. I have also seen, for example, very little class emphasis on spelling and grammar in my own middle-schoolers' homework.

I have seen essay questions marked by other students (instead of teachers), and grade reports returned with no regard to spelling or grammar correction.

Do you ever wonder why your kids say "me and Mary are going to the store?" At work, do you question why the word processing "spell check" feature is so necessary and why management presents overheads regarding "hasse-loo return policies"?

Do you wonder about that retail business sign advertising "Budget Video?" How about these lines from a medical profession mailing... "has been tested by numerous clinics" and... "isolate from semen sample."

According to a new report from the Department of Education, nearly half of all adult Americans read and write so poorly that they have trouble holding down decent jobs. Why am I not surprised?

We've got to turn this embarrassment around, starting at the local level. Hey, I'm concerned about my kids, too. I know their schools don't like it, but I've got to keep calling.
 John Sopor, Farmington Hills

ted, we would have quality education. I am taking a survey asking teachers if they would take a little less pay if they could have what they want in the classroom, which by the way is exactly what we all want in schools — smaller class sizes, teaching within their own specialty, the best curriculum, removal of disruptive students, etc.

So far 100 percent say yes, if they could have that wonderful dream come true classroom. And we can during this window of opportunity created by Senate Bill No. 1.

So get together teachers and tell us what real excellence in education should look like in the 1990s.

And then help us do it for less. I pray for lots of cost cutting in our Michigan schools, but the classroom should not bear the brunt of cost containment.

Redistricting of schools could cut administrative costs in half. If that works, cut the number in half again in a few years. We need more teachers not less, but that means most teachers will have to be happy with a little less wage.

There is lots of money to be saved on busing, maintenance and administration, but a third of our \$9 billion school bill is teacher wages.

Impossible you say? Maybe there is hope. This is the first school year since I was a child in the 1960s that not a single Detroit area school district is on strike.

And better yet, let us acknowledge the wonderful teachers and staffs of West Bloomfield and Plymouth for concessions on contracts they already had. These were acts of generosity and dedication to our children that these teachers granted in a time of crisis. Thank you, there is hope.

I challenge the teachers to take control of the MEA union and vote in co-operation with the governor, the parents and the taxpayers. Thanking you in advance for the dedication and sincere interest in children that you have and need to compromise on high wages. Teachers unite and vote the MEA your way.
 Thomas E. Goebel, Plymouth

Let's become one city

Twenty some years ago, Farmington Hills was a township. The city of Farmington annexed some of the township land, thus it was important to protect township land. It was important to incorporate and become a city.

Now I believe it is important to merge on. I believe it is time for the City of Farmington and Farmington Hills to merge and become one city. How about some viewpoints of people in the city of Farmington? How about some viewpoints of the people in Farmington Hills? How about a citizens panel of mayors and council from Farmington and Farmington Hills to discuss ways to incorporate and become one city?

I believe now is the time to become one city.
 Leonard Weems, Farmington Hills

Let the teachers speak

Let us hear from the teachers. The governor's goals are to reform schools with higher quality and for less money, funded to create an atmosphere that will attract industry to Michigan.

If we want quality, listen to the teachers, not necessarily the Michigan Education Association (MEA), but your every day classroom teacher.

If teachers could teach without their hands

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:
 What's your favorite thing to do when you're not working?

We asked this question at the Farmington branch of the Community Library.

 "Golf. I like being outdoors and getting some exercise." Mary Trevisan Farmington Hills	 "Travel, especially to Florida in the winter time." Bob Krompatic Farmington	 "Read novels. Ann Rice is my favorite author." Toya Jones Farmington Hills	 "Read and work with my dog, an Alredale." Carol Lakeey Livonia
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