

Hills council sees signs, plans to clarify policy

It may not do much good this year, but Farmington Hills City Council members want to clarify the rules on where a candidate can put a sign.

The issue was discussed at a council meeting two weeks ago and came up again in last week's candidate forum.

"We've picked some signs up," said city manager Bill Costick. "They were in the right of way."

But determining the right of way is not always easy, Costick added, because the distance from a curb or sidewalk varies for some properties.

That confusion has caused problems in past campaigns as well as this one, councilman Terry Sever said.

"In the last campaign some other signs were taken and some of mine were left alone," he said. "That creates the impression of favoritism. And that's the kind of thing that makes government look bad."

Council candidate Cheryl Oliverio said two of her signs had been picked up, and she'd been asked to move others by the city, while an incumbent's signs (Larry Lichtman's) had been left "blat-

antly" in the right of way. Oliverio said she did not blame other candidates, but thought that the city should be even-handed when it took down signs.

"Everyone should be treated equally," she said.

Lichtman said he has complied with requests to move his signs and added that at least one of his larger signs has been vandalized.

Council members discussed applying a definite distance, such as 5 or 10 feet from the right of way, as a way to avoid problems.

The council plans to take up the issue after the election.

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"He (Bjorklund) had a terrible balancing act to perform," Lehto said. "To charge the lower rate and keep the revenue stream the same would be impossible."

That is because charging \$1 to some customers for the service others are charged \$10.95 (as part of their overall rate) is discriminatory, unless the company can

show that those 400 customers have a special income need or handicap that justifies the lower rate, Lehto said.

Bjorklund said the company was in good shape, but added that going public with its financial report was not in its best interests.

"We are privately held," he said. "We have a right not to have

that made public."

Bjorklund did offer the financial figures to council members, but not for public scrutiny.

Vagnozzi said the company, which is the only cable concern operating in Farmington Hills, is in fact a monopoly and should be required to open its books.

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Board members listened intently to what Funk had to say.

"A lot of us were wondering how we're going to do this," board president Cathleen Webb said. "You've just told us how."

The board will screen applications Nov. 9. The following day trustees practice interview skills in a workshop Nov. 10 when Grand Rapids Forest Hills superintendent J. Michael Washburn visits for a mock session.

Also, the board has set aside Nov. 16-20 as tentative interview dates. Anywhere from eight to 10 candidates are expected to be interviewed initially.

Board members spent the latter part of Tuesday's workshop finetuning the questions they'll ask. They're considering sending the questions to the first pool of candidates beforehand.

"You're trying to gather enough information to advance this person to the next stage," Funk said. "You're trying to get something to get ahead of, something you can validate later on."

"... You're not trying to trap anyone..."

The delicate part will be the final phase, narrowing the field to two or three and selecting a finalist.

Funk recommends trustees do their own homework and wait as long as they can before forming conditions around a particular candidate. She even suggests they get away from each other for a couple of days before the selection is made.

"It's going to be difficult for you; you have quality applicants," Funk said. "It's going to be tough to decide."

The interviews — as required by state law — are open to the public. How the board narrows the field can be awkward for candidates involved.

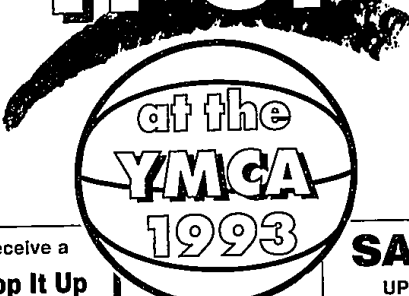
For that reason, Funk suggests the board use an individual tally system opposed to voting. A vote might send the wrong message to a potential successor.

Individual notes and papers board members compile during the interview process are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act, Funk said. However, those notes could be subpoenaed if a lawsuit comes up afterward.

Funk recommends they be destroyed. "And please do so," she said.

When screening resumes and other written material, Funk believes common sense is a key.

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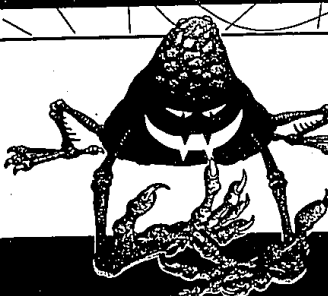
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