

POINTS OF VIEW

Please don't peddle your bike path to us

Far too often the American public thinks that its elected officials and government agencies are always correct in the decisions and actions they take. But if history has taught us any lessons, it is the folly of such thoughts.

When the editor of the Farmington Observer called the residents along Farmington Road the "cantankerous ones," he must have assumed that City Hall was "right" and that the dissenters were demonstrating the "wrong" attitude toward a harmless bike path.

However, the area residents were simply reflecting their concern for the safety of the children and adults who will utilize this path, as well as the damage an eight-foot-wide concrete path will do to the ecology and beauty of the area.

According to the grant proposal submitted by Farmington Hills City Manager William Costick on April 15, the eight-foot-wide concrete bike path on the east side of Farmington Road "will improve people's quality of life" (p.1), "reduce motorized vehicular trips" and "improve air quality" (p. 30).

In addition, it will allow for "enhanced landscaping and other scenic beautification of the area," while passing in front of such historical sites as the Community Center, the Spicer

House, and the Lemuel Botsford House.

What wasn't noted

However, the city manager failed to note in his proposal that some areas of the bike path will be placed up to 60 feet away from the road and through the middle of several landscaped lawns. Other residents will have the bike path placed literally within feet of their homes.

Placing such a path underneath anyone's bedroom or living room windows will certainly not "improve the quality of life" for the homeowner or the value or beauty of the residence.

In addition, bikes are not permitted on any of the trails inside Heritage Park, and the Botsford home is a private residence and not open to the public.

And finally, the city manager never notified any of the area residents about the proposed plan or solicited any input from them.

With more than 15,000 automobiles per day traveling up and down Farmington Road between 10 and 11 Mile roads, it is difficult to believe that a large percentage of individuals will be willing to sacrifice their four wheeled modes of transportation for the two wheeled kind — even to travel to the parks.

GUEST COLUMNIST



JEANNIE E. ALLEN

As the grant proposal itself noted, no parks or transportation agencies could verify how many pedestrians or bike riders used bike paths.

Between 4-5 p.m. more than 1,000 cars travel this route, which is also the time when children are home from school and perhaps riding their bikes to and from the parks.

Would caring and concerned parents want their children crossing Farmington Road at the Heritage Park entrance to follow the bike path at that hour? Even if a pedestrian activated light were placed at the entrance to Heritage Park, how many children or adults will ignore such a safety device, and what will the city's liability be if a child or adult is killed or injured?

Trees, bushes to go

The city has also planned for the removal or destruction of several areas of the natural growth, which include trees and massive areas of flowering lilac bushes. Although the grant has allocated \$4,000 for the replacement of such trees and plants, it will be difficult to replace the mature lush growth which makes Farmington Road such a lovely, pristine area. This destruction will also have a negative impact on air quality since plants and trees are part of nature's purification system.

How will the air quality be improved by ripping out glorious old trees or sweet smelling lilac bushes?

And finally, for the senior residents who currently reside along this area, they will have the additional responsibility of cleaning and maintaining these eight-foot-wide concrete paths. This will be especially difficult for them during the winter when these snow covered paths must be cleared.

Otherwise, they will be held liable for any injuries occurring on this bike path.

Although my elderly neighbors have had heart attacks, by-pass operations, and other physical ailments, they will have no recourse but to struggle with this additional burden. Will this en-

hance their "quality of life?"

Some hard questions?

With all things considered, will this proposed eight-foot-wide concrete bike path on the east side of Farmington Road "improve one's quality of life, reduce motorized vehicular trips, improve air quality, or enhance the natural beauty of the area?"

Or will it endanger the lives of children, fail to eliminate any significant automobile traffic, destroy lush vegetation which naturally purifies the air, and place additional burdens on the senior residents?

The last question the public should ask the city manager is, "Is this the best developed and logically constructed plan for the bike path and the best use of taxpayers' dollars?"

With these additional facts considered, perhaps the public can now decide if the residents along Farmington Road are the "cantankerous ones" or does the city manager need to consult with the local residents to create a more ecologically sound, less burdensome, and safer bike path for the citizens of the community?

Jeannie E. Allen, a longtime Farmington Hills resident, is a licensed professional counselor at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn.

Gov. Engler shifts taxes, responsibility for state's public schools

What," asked the TV interviewer, "does Gov. John Engler really want to accomplish with his school reform program?"

It was unusual for a newsman like me to be answering questions for a half-hour.

First, Engler wants to cut the cost of government.

In his campaign, he argued in effect that Michigan has Chivas Regal tastes and beer income. He sees high governmental costs as a burden on business. Like dear ol' daddy's whiskers, government is always in the way. His view is similar to classical economist Adam Smith ("Wealth of Nations").

He is diametrically opposed to Alexander Hamilton and former Gov. Jim Blanchard, who saw government as a tool for economic growth, not an impediment.

On paper, Engler's method of school finance would cost \$300 million less than the current system. "Promises made, promises kept."

Second, Engler wants to shift the cost of paying for schools from local districts to the state.

He is 100 percent correct in pursuing this goal. Michigan's Constitution, a document too few of us read, makes a free public education a constitutional right. It also says establishing and paying for public schools are duties of the Legislature. There is no such thing as "local control" over schools — local districts are mere creatures of the state. There is no such thing as "parental control" — that's an invention by ideological right-wingers.

Along the way, Engler set up another goal that was entirely within Michigan's constitutional tradition. He



TIM RICHARD

sought to wean counties, cities, townships and villages from the \$1 billion nuzzle of revenue sharing. He proposed to give them new taxing tools that they would wield themselves.

Politics being politics, Engler, alas, had to modify the idea drastically.

Third, Engler wants to trim the

power of the Michigan Education Association and other unions.

In my interview with him last winter, he accused our suburban school boards of being entirely too lavish with double-digit pay increases. He wants a union-free environment for charter schools. He wants teachers' union membership to be voluntary. He wants school boards to be free to buy health-care benefits from someone other than MEA.

Personally, I think the MEA has been getting a dirty rap from Forbes magazine, Mackinac Center (which reprinted the Forbes attack and circulated it to every paper in the state) and many critics. The man who coined the term "National Extortion Association," in Forbes' headline, advocates teaching Latin (which none of our trading partners speak) and McGuffey's

Readers (no thanks — I've read McGuffey).

But MEA leaders are an integral part of the Democratic Party. MEA is no friend of John Engler's, even though a hefty minority of MEA members vote Republican. So MEA must be prepared to take its knocks.

Fourth, Engler wants to placate the religious right within the Michigan GOP.

That's where his public school bashing comes in. The religious right's candidates got 45 percent of the vote against Engler's picks at the 1992 state GOP convention. It now controls many county and district organizations. Engler would rather deal than fight 'em.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His office phone is (313) 349-1700.

Legislators opt for chaos over revising school plan

When the state Legislature passed and Gov. John Engler signed the famous Senate Bill 1 eliminating property taxes as the 1994 funding base for Michigan schools, most folks reacted with a mixture of hope and alarm.

They hoped the political establishment, facing financial meltdown at the certain loss of nearly \$7 billion in revenue, would be forced at long last to do something far-reaching about both finance (unequitable) and quality (poor).

They were alarmed that a combination of special interests, ideological bickering and partisan positioning would make it impossible to get anything sensible and coherent adopted before chaos sets in.

Chaos in this case is scheduled to descend near year end. In order to put a sales tax proposal on the ballot in February 1994, legislative agreement must be reached some time this December. Otherwise, school districts will begin running out of money next March because they can't borrow against the July 1994 property tax revenue that SB 1 eliminated.

With fewer than 60 days to go before the Dec. 31 deadline, alarm is gaining ground on hope.

Best evidence: Last week the special Senate committee working on school finances threw up its hands and adjourned, unable to agree on anything.

Conservative Republicans, infuriated that Engler's plan doesn't include a big tax cut — their reflexive cure for whatever ails the body politic, are sitting on their hands.

Legislative Democrats, under pressure from the teachers unions, are pretending — against overwhelming evidence that spending on schools has increased enormously with little corresponding gain in achievement — that nothing's basically wrong with the system.

The two people most responsible for bringing things to this situation — Gov. Engler and Debbie Stabenow, a Democratic senator and candidate for governor — have produced nearly identical funding proposals.



PHILIP POWER

Both would provide all school districts with an identical per-pupil base grant, to be funded by a mix of property, sales, income and nuisance taxes. Perversely, the governor's proposal would most increase funding for rural school districts whose students are doing relatively well in the MEAP test and shortchange urban districts where children are performing poorly.

To top it off, there are signs that Engler's reelection team has polling data showing voters in wealthy districts in Oakland County — Birmingham, West Bloomfield, Troy — don't much like what the governor proposes to do to their locally supported schools.

Readers with long memories will recollect that Proposal A, the 2 percent sales tax rate hike, was defeated last June by precisely such suburban voters. They also will remember that it was by running well in precisely such suburban districts that Engler won his upset victory for governor three years ago.

These voters are the folks who for years have been willing to pay the taxes required to sustain the quality of their schools. They don't understand why their schools and their children now should be put at risk by the political system.

And I don't blame them one bit.

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

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