

City concerns

Business, industry near top

Mention Farmington (city of) and people think: nice downtown, Founders Festival, Downtown Development Authority, Civic Theatre, Masonic Temple, gracious old homes... and perhaps that a neat sculpture is coming soon to a spot near City Hall.

People probably do not think industrial blocks when someone says Farmington. Yet, the old town does have a couple of them within its 2.6 square miles. The one along Eight Mile Road has known some hard times with the closing of Chesley Industries a few years ago.

So it was good to report in the Jan. 17 Farmington Observer that a Detroit firm — Weather King Windows & Doors Inc. — is moving into the 90,000-square-foot facility that once housed Chesley Industries. Some 55 to 60 employees from the Detroit plant are expected to transfer to Farmington.

"We like the city of Farmington," said Earl King, Weather King president. "It's a smaller community, so it's easier to work with the people."

Redevelopment of the industrial space should remain an important item on the 1994 agenda for the city of Farmington, 87 years old and trying to retain its small-town character while sandwiched between larger, faster-growing suburbs.

The city must continue to work with the chamber of commerce and the businesses to do something to boost tenancy along the industrial strips. That something, however, should not include tax abatements.

Keep school operation public

Our school finances are ailing, but privatization is a medicine best taken in small doses.

Contracting out in certain specific areas, such as busing, janitorial services or building and grounds maintenance, could provide savings for financially-strapped local public schools.

But contracting out management of an entire school district, as the Pinckney Schools in Livingston County is attempting, courts disaster. A major issue is the public's right to know. Our public schools are forced by law to conduct business in public.

That means the public gets to scrutinize every decision, as is its right.

It's true those same laws would apply to a privately managed school district. Yet we strongly doubt that managers trained in the private sector, where secrecy is the watchword, would be as forthcoming as even the most reticent local superintendent.

Think that doesn't pose a clear and present danger? Then consider this: Plymouth-Canton Schools is already under fire for hiring a private consulting firm to guide its search for a new superintendent.

The controversy is that the private consultants recommended school officials conduct their search in private by concealing the names of those who have applied and meeting in dubious private sessions to evaluate candidates. It's an ominous trend.

A group of journalists recently met in Troy for a first-of-its-kind seminar on the effect of privatization in promoting government secrecy. The outlook isn't bright.

"When you are dealing with private businesses doing public business, you are losing access,"

■ Downtown is an important aspect of tiny Farmington, and officials are right to pay attention to it.

Downtown is an important aspect of tiny Farmington, and officials are right to pay attention to it. Shopper circulation should be a special concern. Officials, both in the city and on the DDA, have to keep on providing reasons for folks to cross Grand River Avenue — Farmington's main street — from the solid businesses on the south side of the street to the relative obscurity of the north.

Actually, the Farmington DDA has done wonders since its inception eight years ago. We expect even better things to come for the old business district. The DDA must continue to come up with ways to market and promote downtown.

There are other items for the 1994 agenda. In our opinion, one of them is historic preservation.

Farmington's history — and there's lots of it, happily — must never be compromised for development's sake. The historic district is as much a part of the community as the business district. Officials must do whatever is necessary to protect property values of the older homes, historic gems with few equals in Oakland County.

Let's hope the money will be there so that Farmington officials can accomplish these and other goals.

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said one local environmental reporter who attended the seminar.

The problems involve more than just journalists. As the press loses access, so do parents, so do other taxpayers.

Still, privatization is a tempting option, especially as local schools grapple with the revenue loss they could face as a result of state property tax reform.

There are local school districts — Avondale, Clarencville and Redford Union immediately spring to mind — just as small and financially pressed as Pinckney.

One of Pinckney's major reasons for going private is the lack of expertise due to its small size. That's more of a reason for consolidating school districts than for privatizing management structure.

Even our area's "giants" like Birmingham, Rochester Hills and Livonia are facing new financial pressures.

We encourage all local schools to do what they can to stretch taxpayer dollars as far as they can.

But turning district management over to a private firm would be a large, and very public, mistake.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Hardly normal

Excuse me! Am I missing something here? Defense attorneys representing Raymond Ponke describe him as a "normal middle class American who loves his family." I think not.

This man was insanely jealous with an uncontrollable temper. Concern for his daughter? Now she has neither parent.

Her mother is dead and her father might be spending time in prison. Her young life has been shattered and will never be the same. I only hope Ashley Ponke has lots of love and support from family and friends.

Pat Thoresen, Farmington

Seek citizen views

When the clock tower was proposed for downtown Farmington, many citizens were opposed because it did not seem to fit in architecturally with the Masonic Temple building and surrounding area.

Letter writers and other citizens wanted to keep the open appearance of the corner, or at least have a small garden or pedestrian-focused area which fit in with the surroundings.

The gray wall that was put up does not seem to fit either expectation. Had the choice of the brick and style used on that corner matched the Masonic Temple building, it could have been a beautiful complement and a welcoming corner to pedestrians and passers-by.

One has to ask if the city or DDA has a unifying architectural plan in mind for the downtown area, or are projects proposed and approved out of some need to satisfy a special interest group or for purely utilitarian purposes?

Is there a plan to create an atmosphere or theme which reflects a traditional "old town" atmosphere? Farmington is a special place because of such buildings as the Warner Mansion, Masonic Temple and Salem Church.

We hope that those charged with making decisions about the new construction and remodeling in the downtown area will continue to seek out citizen views and focus on creating an atmosphere that protects the charm and historical significance of our city.

Pam and George Wright, Farmington

Thanks extended

To Frank Lauhoff, Farmington city manager.

On behalf of The Salvation Army of Farmington Hills, I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation to you and the members of the city council for ringing the bells for us on Saturday, Dec. 18, at Kmart on Grand River.

Your efforts raised \$428.50, which will be used to feed, clothe and provide other necessities for the needy in the Farmington area.

We trust you experienced the "true meaning

of Christmas" while ringing The Salvation Army Kettle bell.

Thanks again and may God bless you and your families in this coming new year.

Capt. Homer P. Smith Jr., Salvation Army

Structure is issue

I heartily applaud Judith Berne's Jan. 3 "Point of View" column.

It has been my contention, since the school funding debate began, that funding reform without cost structure reform is pointless.

Regardless of how the funding is derived, if the cost of educating our children is not addressed, then we are simply pulling the same money out of different pockets.

Hailing from Virginia, I can remember cities of 300,000 with one school district and counties of 145,000 also with one school district. While here in Michigan, we have counties of 55,000 with seven school districts. Certainly this has not gone unnoticed in Lansing, or has it?

Who in our state Legislature will demonstrate the intestinal fortitude to address this fundamental issue of cost structure? One can only wonder why they insist on taking a grossly overweight and inefficient gas hog of an education system to the body shop for a new paint job when it should be in the garage for an engine overhaul.

Please don't lose your focus on this issue. Your public trust will be justly deserved if you are able to make the citizens of Michigan realize that other states have far more efficient education systems than ours. I challenge you to publish a comparison of state systems showing the ratio of students to administrators and students to superintendents as well as average students per district.

Give people the information they need to make objective judgments about relevant issues and our career politicians will be less able to cloud their minds with emotional appeals designed to protect themselves from the wrath of the state teachers union.

Paul R. Nichol

AIDS is no joke

The struggle over AIDS has been going on for a number of years. Some people still do not see the seriousness of this epidemic as it has caused this country.

As a student at Troy High School, I was very pleased to see a piece of the AIDS Memorial Quilt being displayed in the Troy High School common area during AIDS awareness week. I wanted to thank Student to Student, an AIDS group at our school, for getting this activity together so that the whole student body could see the quilt.

Hopefully, reality will hit now that this memorable quilt has been seen by people through different cities and states. We should all treat AIDS on a more sophisticated level and not as a joke.

Kristen Knight, Troy

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:
Did figure skater Tonya Harding know about the plot to cripple her opponent?

We asked this question at the Komer Barbers in downtown Farmington.



"I hope not... I'd really like to believe not."
Andrew Haines
Ypsilanti



"It's hard to imagine that she had anything to do with it. She's a pro and she knows what it takes to get there."
Dan Klawender
South Lyon



"I don't think so. I don't think she had anything to gain by it."
Brad Thompson
Farmington



"I don't think so... but I sure would make a good movie with all those bad guys."
Mike LaFever
Farmington

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