

POINTS OF VIEW

Giving downtown the business

Development authority sees need to change focus

In the Farmington Observer's April 7 editorial, it was stated that the Farmington Downtown Development Authority needed to establish new priorities.

We couldn't agree with the Observer more. In fact, the DDA began establishing those new priorities last year when we modified our charter and extended our existence for 15 years.

For example, when the DDA was formed, our principle objective was to improve the physical appearance of the downtown area. During the first seven years of our existence, the DDA has improved the streetscape of the district considerably.

These improvements include new sidewalks, pedestrian lighting, and new or improved parking lots.

In addition, at this same time the private sector made several improve-

ments in large part, we believe, because of the progress made by the DDA.

The DDA feels that it is time to focus more of its energies on promotion and business recruitment in the downtown district now that the capital improvements are approximately 80 percent complete.

To that end, when the DDA was restructuring its charter last year, we reduced our annual funding to approximately one half the amount that was in previous budgets.

This reflects the fact that most of our expensive capital improvements are behind us and that we have paid off a loan from the city that provided start-up capital when the DDA was first formed.

In addition, the new charter granted the DDA the ability to buy real estate. This will enable us to make purchases

GUEST COLUMNIST



ROBERT E. FITZPATRICK

of real estate to provide for the long-term plans for the district, such as additional parking.

We would like to make known the following facts concerning vacancies and business recruitment:

First, about the vacancy created by the departure of Cargo Express — the

economic climate in Farmington had nothing to do with the closing of this business. The owners of Cargo Express made a business decision to exit the housewares business and close all their stores, not just the Farmington location.

A new tenant has leased the vacant storefront and should be announcing plans for opening in the near future.

Secondly, the DDA has put together a brochure for use by the Chamber of Commerce, landlords or real estate agents in recruiting new businesses.

Further, the DDA, through its executive director, has acted as an advocate for various entrepreneurs who were trying to start businesses in the DDA district. During the last year the DDA has strengthened its ties with the Downtown Farmington Business Association.

We have worked together to develop promotions that meet the needs of the businesses in the district to attract customers.

Finally, the DDA is very much aware of the need for, and the value of, a central point of identity. As Frank Clappison, one of the DDA's first board members so eloquently stated, "You can't build a downtown. Either you have it or you don't."

The very reason for the DDA's existence is to make sure that the downtown is something that future generations of Farmington residents will not only have, but will live in, shop in, recreate in and point to with pride.

Robert E. Fitzpatrick, a Farmington resident for seven years, is president of the Board of Directors of the Downtown Development Authority.

Coverage hides truth behind 'neglected children'

I groan every time the daily papers and broadcasters run one of those "Kids 'most neglected' age group, report says" stories.

My media sisters and brothers do an accurate job of telling us what the reports say. They freeze up, however, at telling you what the reports fail to say.

Let's take two recent reports on the socio-economic plight of America's children. The national one is from the Carnegie Corp. in New York. The state one is from the Michigan Coalition for Children and Families.

The latter group includes what are euphemistically known as "providers" in the social services industry. And "industry" is a fair term. There are the National Association of Social Workers, Council of Cooperative Nursery Schools, Michigan County Social Services Association, nurses groups, foundations, local public health departments, and so on.

One thing is on their agenda: the

government as parent.

The Carnegie task force finds "no clearly defined institutions, such as schools, that serve children under age 3, and that services and supports are not designed in an integrated fashion" — so reports the Los Angeles Times service.

The Michigan report speaks in a monotone:

■ 439,408 women and teens in need of family planning services.

■ "Intensive training" for policy-makers, legislators, the courts and police on drug-exposed infants.

■ Maternal and infant health advocacy services for three more "targeted" counties.

■ Comprehensive health screening of Medicaid recipients until age 21.

■ An increase in the combined benefit of AFDC and food stamps which is alleged to be 16 percent over the poverty line.

■ More substance abuse services to get

women bearing children to stop smoking.

■ A Lead Surveillance System to stop lead poisoning.

■ HIV prevention programs.



TIM RICHARD

■ More than 25 percent of American babies are born to unmarried women.

■ Drug abuse services.

■ Dozens more needs fill the social workers' catalog, all requiring more government-paid "services."

Gov. John Engler — alleged by social services advocates to be "mean-spirited" — already has signed a record \$6-billion social services bill.

What the reports don't identify — and what my media sisters and brothers ignore — is the cause. More than 25 percent of American babies are born to unmarried women. Among blacks it's 68 percent; among whites, it's topping 20 percent.

The LA Times story on the Carnegie report pussyfoots: "The life situation for many of the youngest children has deteriorated badly in the past 30 years."

"Life situation," my eye. The truth is that pregnant women who fail to get prenatal care don't have husbands with jobs. They have low incomes because they don't have husbands with

jobs. Ditto with low birth-weight babies. Ditto with child abuse. Ditto with sexual abuse.

Neither the Carnegie nor the Michigan Coalition for Children and Families has the political courage to place blame where it belongs. Their entire focus is governmental services. They ignore marriage and paternal responsibility.

In January we heard brave words from President Bill Clinton about going after deadbeat dads and from Gov. John Engler about not letting teen dads play prep sports. Both know the cause of the problem. But they never will reverse this socially sick trend with more "services."

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. You can reach him by Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1881.

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Guv's re-election bus must watch out for stop signs

As his re-election bus tour sweeps through 41 Michigan communities this week, Gov. John Engler is on a roll.

The winner on Proposal A, he will campaign on "Promises made, promises kept" in cutting property taxes. The prime mover behind legislation to cut the power of the teachers' unions, he will claim to be tough enough to deal with Michigan's problems. Look for him to take credit for the boom in the economy, the drop in the welfare caseload and, for all I know, the success of the Red Wings in the Stanley Cup.

Things look good for the guy just now.

But wait a bit.

Engler may be tough and he may be shrewd, but he's hardly the warm, caring human being that Michigan voters traditionally favor. His negative ratings on the polls remain persistently high. And never underestimate the power of the MEA, Michigan's largest, richest and most motivated political interest group.

What may wind up being the primary factor is how voters in suburban communities served by this newspaper wind up interpreting the effect of Proposal A.

Monday's school millage turndown in Southfield could well be a forecast of things to come. It was just the first in a whole series of property tax votes over the next several weeks.

Wait, you say — wasn't Proposal A supposed to end millage elections? And didn't Gov. Engler assure us that passing Proposal A guaranteed a big property tax cut to make up for the 2 cents hike in the sales tax?

Ah, yes. That's what the political rhetoric was. But, as always, the hard truth is much more confusing and not nearly as nice.

Follow me through what Proposal A actually does.

First, to pay for schools, it increases the sales tax from 4 cents per \$1 to 6 and imposes a 6-mills state tax on all real property. These taxes are the major source of funds to pay for K-12 public schools.

Second, the state also requires all school districts to levy 18 local mills on all property with an exemption for homesteads. (It's this 18-mill levy that many districts will be voting on over the next few weeks.) So the base property tax will be 24 mills for business property (6 plus 18 mills) and 6 mills for homes. This is, indeed, a



PHILIP POWER

sharp cut from the statewide average of 35 mills last year.

Third, however, about 40 districts are now spending more money per pupil than the \$9,400 limit this base financing plan provides. They are allowed by Proposal A to vote on local "hold harmless" millages that enable them to maintain high support for schools.

In Southfield's case, for example, the district is presently spending an average of \$9,400 per pupil. The Southfield vote Monday was whether to approve a local tax of 23.88 mills on all property, which, when added to the 6 mills state tax, would make a Southfield homeowner pay 29.88 mills in property tax.

At this point, the glass is either half-full or half-empty. Gov. Engler will argue that 29.88 mills are a real cut from the 34.6 mills Southfield property owners paid last year. But his opponents will point out that 29.88 mills are a hell of a lot more than the 6 mills the governor promised under Proposal A.

It's around this argument that the politics of Michigan will rotate for the coming months. Voters in the 40 high-spending districts in particular are smart, highly motivated and tend to vote Republican. They wouldn't like to be betrayed on something as important as their property taxes.

I'd advise the somewhat self-satisfied folks running John Engler's campaign to remember that in politics, like opera and baseball, it isn't over until the fat lady sings.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. You can leave a message for him from a Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1880.



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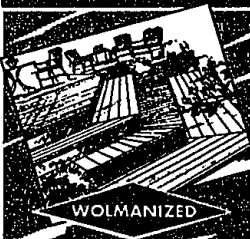
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Garage Building	Mon., 25th, 7 pm		Wed., 27th, 7 pm	Mon., 25th, 7 pm
Installing Glass Block	Wed., 27th, 7 pm	Thurs., 21st, 7 pm	Mon., 25th, 7 pm	Wed., 20th, 7 pm
Handy Mans Barn Building	Sat., 23rd, 10 am	Sat., 23rd, 10 am	Sat., 23rd, 10 am	Sat., 23rd, 10 am
Selecting & Installing Kitchens	Thurs., 21st, 7 pm		Wed., 20th, 7 pm	Thurs., 21st, 7 pm
Vinyl Siding		Wed., 20th, 7 pm	Thurs., 21st, 7 pm	
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