

No hoots? Work with (not around) people

Let's hear it for the concept of inclusion. Because someone bothered to ask the people — and then listened to them — perhaps a development squabble was avoided in Farmington.

Some recent history: When the plan for a clock tower at the Masonic Temple corner was announced several years ago, the good burghers of Farmington town hooted and hollered it down.

There was a similar reaction after a big green sign (disaffectionately known as Old Froggy) appeared at the same location.

Don't scully our fair community (or at least that particular corner of it) with this kind of erud, city and downtown Development Authority officials were told. And told. And told.

Now, with nary a hoot nor a holler from the citizenry, plans for a condominium complex at Adams and Grace — bang in the middle of the most historic part of historic Farmington — are being put forward.

Two vacant houses, one of them more than a century old, will have to be demolished to make room for the condos. The older structure, a farm house dating to about 1870, was one of the first 18 houses to be included in the city's Historic District.

News of the condo plan was bannered across the top of the Observer's Nov. 23 front page. The issue had all the makings of the classic development hooah.

There was the old question that often

comes up in older towns like Farmington: How do you make the old fit in with the new?

Well, it turns out the developer and architect have been working closely with members of the Farmington Historical Commission.

"It can be a very difficult task," said Bill Gonna, president of Timely Construction, the Farmington Hills company that is making the proposal. "We found the Historical Commission to be very friendly and helpful."

"We didn't go to them to tell them what we wanted, but to ask for their advice." We guess that shows what can be accomplished when you work with (instead of around) the people.

Longtime city-watchers say they're surprised at the lack of noisy wrangle over this condo project. Maybe the developer's and architect's attempts at inclusion — seeking out the people and listening to their opinions — was the difference this time.

Or, as has also been suggested, maybe Farmington folks just have this massive tender spot for the Masonic Temple, site of Old Froggy and proposed clock tower. Tinker with that corner and you've got big problems with the management — otherwise known as the people. Put around elsewhere in the city and you care.

Anyway, a public hearing on the condo was held recently at Farmington City Hall. We expected to hear maybe just a little hooting and a hollering. According to accounts, though, there was nothing but support.

Engler's omissions quite evident

At the risk of offending Republicans, we point out that Gov. John Engler's Jan. 17 State of the State address was strongly reminiscent of Democratic Gov. James Blanchard's in the 1980s. Both boasted Michigan was doing things right and Washington was wrong. Both eyed national power. Both also ignored — didn't even discuss — many problems at home.

Blanchard lost in 1990, so let's concentrate on Engler's omissions.

■ Roads — In the same way Congress and the president are deadlocked over the budget, Engler, the Legislature and local road interests have been immobilized for years over raising fuel taxes while our roads and bridges crumble. Their differences are hardly matters of principle — just money, and they should be able to compromise. Engler never mentioned roads.

■ Urban sprawl and lost farmland — Developers are eating up land far faster than the population is growing, generating huge needs for roads, new freeway exits, new water and sewer lines. In 1994, there were bills to address some of these problems, but they were shoved aside during 1995 efforts at school code reform. Meanwhile, developers are eating up the equivalent of 3.7 townships a year — the equivalent of all of Livingston and Washtenaw counties in 10 years. Much of that loss is farmland, meaning we'll have to preserve and import more food. Engler never mentioned land preservation.

■ Natural resources — Engler boasted of cutting taxes 21 times in his five-year tenure but failed to defend the Department of Natural Resources' plan to hike hunting and fishing licenses 20 percent. The governor failed to mention efforts to preserve road ends fronting on lakes. He failed to mention land acquisition in the face of market competition from developers. Engler never mentioned natural resources.

■ Safety — An audit of the state Fire Marshal's office revealed inadequate inspections of schools, public buildings and above-ground storage tanks. Meanwhile, industrial accidents

with uninspected machines have been maiming and even killing workers, notably in small-town small shops. Engler deplored "red tape" and "bloated" government, but ignored safety.

■ Job training — Engler's recommendation was minor: an apprenticeship tax credit for business. What about work preparation curriculum for public schools? What about something beyond a pittance increase for community colleges, where the real preparation for the 21st Century economy is being conducted?

What about the white-collar managerial workers the Kmart and AT&Ts are tossing on the scrap heap? Engler never mentioned them.

■ Public schools — Engler continued to bad-mouth public education by reading a letter from a schoolboy about how safe his charter school is. He continued to sell the false line that charter academies are "pioneers" in education and not former private schools collecting subsidies while pandering to special interests.

Did the governor do anything right? Yes. He's on the right track in experimenting with child care and transportation to help people off welfare. Unlike some Scrooges who would just kick folks off welfare, Engler realizes there's a cost to his "social contract" for helping people improve their lives.

We note, however, that while he is experimenting with welfare, he refused to experiment with these strange "academies" and called for their unlimited chartering and subsidization.

Engler has precipitated a crisis in the trial courts by blocking creation of new judgeships, notably in the metro suburbs, until courts are reorganized and scarce resources deployed more efficiently. He is right. Engler prodded lawmakers to continue their reform effort and implicitly promised to work for a ballot proposal. We look forward to it.

The governor quoted the gist of President Abraham Lincoln's Civil War order No. 1: "Advance on all fronts." Engler should adopt the order himself. There's more to advancing Michigan than cutting taxes and subsidizing private schools.

MEMORY LANE

This week in history as reported in the pages of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise:

■ 40 years ago — Feb. 2, 1956 (Enterprise) Some 27 people applied for the vacant position of Farmington City Manager. The North Farmington Baptist Church, the Rev. M.R. Walter officiating, began operation Feb. 5, 1956. Services were held at Farmington High School. Ice cream was advertised at 76 cents for a half gallon at the Farmington Dairy on Grand River.

■ 10 years ago — Feb. 3, 1986 (Observer) Frank Carl Smith, retired teacher and civic leader, died in Botsford Hospital at age 80.

Ken George's layup with 30 seconds left lifted unbeaten Harrison to a 53-49 win over Livonia Franklin in prep basketball. Coach Mike Techman's Hawks were 12-0 overall and 10-0 in the Western Lakes Activities Association.

■ 1 year ago — Feb. 2, 1995 (Observer) Farmington Hills firefighters from Stations 2 and 4 had to use the Jaws of Life to pull a woman from a wrecked auto at 12 Mile and Farmington roads. There were no serious injuries in the accident. Farmington Hills City Clerk Kathy Dorman was honored by the city council for being accepted as a member of the International Institute of Municipal Clerks.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:
What do you look for in a house?

 Mark Ryance Farmington Hills "More room. Room for a home office."	 Hazel Locklear Farmington Hills "A good furnace. I've been a Realtor, and that kitchen and the No. 1 concern."	 Cindy Davis Farmington Hills "Layout is important. The kitchen and the family room should connect."	 Karen Lemanski Farmington Hills "Storage space. When you move in, you think you have enough. Then you find out otherwise."
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We asked this question at the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library.

LETTERS

They were helpful

I would like to thank the many kind people who stopped to help me one recent Friday morning after my Ford Mustang skidded off the icy Drake Road pavement and into a ditch.

Particularly helpful were a passing mail delivery person, a gentleman in a station wagon who offered use of his car phone, and a Farmington Hills fire inspector who allowed me to wait in his official car until my car had been pulled out.

Fortunately, neither my car nor I suffered any damage. The experience was made positive for me, however, by the clear reminder that people do care.

Shula Brown, Farmington Hills

'Tabloid headlines'

The money-making hype of a recent nationally televised trial has not fallen upon deaf ears. The Farmington Observer has decided that the tabloid type of headline reporting can sell newspapers.

It is important that the residents of our city know that they do not live on a crimeless island. But it does not serve the community, the victims or the victims' families to have their hometown newspaper headlines speak repeatedly of the same crime: "Assaults lingers in teen's memory," "Case presented today in 'Most Vicious Crime,'" and "Court date delayed in double murder case."

A newspaper has many pages that can be used to print follow-up stories.

I am glad to see that the once wasted left hand column of the Observer's front page is now being used for news.

Betty Cook, Farmington Hills

Hates backpack rule

I strongly disagree with the opinions recently stated in your Dec. 25 article concerning the ban on backpacks at Warner Middle School. As a Warner student, I feel it is my job to speak of what is really happening here.

I believe that if backpacks can hurt backs, then it is the parents' decision to decide whether their child should wear a backpack.

Frankly, a lot of the parents think this is ludicrous. If they're concerned about a child's health, then they'll call. They don't need the school to make the decision for them.

In the locker commons it's packed because of the ban. Between periods, when we're "allowed" to go to our lockers, it's almost impossible to get to our lockers. It's so crowded. We must wait and then shove our way through the stampede.

Then we must search through our small, crowded lockers, to find our materials. At the same time, we must make sure that people don't trip over our books or step on our materials.

Also, just about everyone is forgetting things: homework, notebooks, calculators, even their glasses. It just goes to show it's impossible to remember everything.

Furthermore, there's no room on the desks for all our books, folders and notebooks. We have to put our materials on the ground sometimes, which is even easier to trip over than a backpack.

We were also denied the right to express our opinions. Why else would it be announced that "petitions will not be accepted," on the very first day of this horrible backpack ban?

Not only were we given just one-day notice, but we couldn't even have a trial run without the backpacks. We had no idea of the schools disapproval of the backpacks.

We were totally oblivious to the situation. If we had known of all the concern backpacks were causing the teachers, we could have put them under the desks, so not to be tripped on.

The principal could have banned backpacks from the halls at lunch, rather than out of school for good.

It's sad to say, but I'm not that proud to be going to a school with such awful rules.

Brianna Knoppow, Farmington Hills

'Excellent Service'

I wish to extend a public acknowledgment to the excellent service I obtained from the Discount Tire Co. on 12 Mile at Orchard Lake.

I have a 10-year-old car and a new baby, and car trouble is something of a game of roulette with me. I finally gave in to the inevitable, having to buy new tires on top of Christmas presents.

Instead of sale for new tires, I was told the rim could be repaired. They fixed it and sent me on my way very quickly. I couldn't believe their honesty.

The employees at Discount Tire were excellent, not only to me, but to everyone that walked in the door while I was there.

Jeanie Crayne, Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48335. Or, they can be faxed to: 810-477-9722.

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— Philip Power