

Curbed Base sidewalks on wants, needs

It's tough to imagine city officials couldn't find a better way to spend several thousands of dollars than to build an unwanted sidewalk along the east side of Farmington Road, adjacent to West Franklin Estates.

No, it won't completely ruin the lifestyle or destroy wildlife in that very rural subdivision to have the city install a sidewalk along the east side of Farmington Road. It is, after all, really only a sidewalk and it would be at the rear of the lots. That's not the point, though.

A couple months back, residents talked to city officials at one of the city's community based meetings. Pleading their case, West Franklin Estates residents talked about a loss of ambience and the removal of trees that provide habitat to a variety of wildlife creatures. They thought they'd won.

At that time, Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said the city had other ways to spend its sidewalk money — if the residents there didn't want it, they had plenty of requests from other parts of town that were eager to add sidewalks. Mayor pro-tem Cheryl Oliverio agreed.

So residents were surprised that their petitions — with signatures from more than 90 percent of the sub's residents opposing the sidewalks — weren't merely a formality when

they presented them last week at a meeting with Tom Biasell, the city's public services director. Biasell told them he was there to discuss, listen and take their concerns to the council.

Obviously, the sidewalk could benefit more than those people who live in West Franklin Estates. It could potentially serve all residents of Farmington Hills, not to mention West Bloomfield north of 14 Mile.

City officials should avoid trying to impose a cookie-cutter view of putting sidewalks along all its main roads without paying close attention to how such a change affects life in the nearby subdivisions. There's value in maintaining the distinctive, rural character of some of the city's older areas, especially when such preservation isn't dragging down property values.

Sidewalks are already in place across the street, on the west side of Farmington Road. That should be enough to accommodate the pedestrians who might use that route, unless the city can show requests for sidewalks in that area by a number of residents or liability issues brought up by city attorneys.

Short of those issues, it makes sense to curb this sidewalk plan and spend the money elsewhere.

Family issues will hold court

Startup is still more than five months away, but Oakland County is on target in its state-mandated quest to create a Family Division of Oakland County Circuit Court.

A new state law that took effect last fall, Public Act 388, requires chief circuit and probate judges to develop plans for a family division within their local circuit court. The call for local family courts signals a growing belief that family matters indeed are important and demand the same quality of attention as criminal and civil cases. About 30 percent of the cases that Oakland's 17 circuit court judges hear are family matters.

Overseers of Oakland's historic court reorganization are Edward Sosnick of Bloomfield Hills, chief judge of Oakland County Circuit Court, and Arthur Moore of Oxford Township, chief judge of Oakland County Probate Court. They've toiled with great purpose to set parameters for a Family Division, on course to hear its first case in January.

Widely respected courtroom veterans, Sosnick and Moore have looked to their judicial, administrative and support staffs to build the framework for Oakland's new family court. They've sought advice from several sources, including the county executive staff, the sheriff's department, the prosecutor's office, the board of commissioners, Family Independence Agency, Oakland Livingston Legal Aid.

Says Sosnick: "Oakland County has the potential to be the model for the entire state. We have a unique opportunity to place children and families first, and our plan intends to accomplish that worthy goal."

A tribute to the diligence and leadership of Sosnick and Moore, the State Court Administrative Office recently approved their plan. It calls for six full-time judges within the Family Division, four from circuit court (Sosnick, John McDonald of Farmington, Gene Schmelz of Novi, Joan Young of Bloomfield Township) and two from probate court (Moore and Wendy Potts of Birmingham). Probate Judge Sandra Silver of Bloomfield Township will serve in the division as needed. All have reputations for, above all, fairness.

The Family Division will combine domestic

OAKLAND WATCH



BOB SKLAR

relations cases now heard in circuit court (divorce, custody, visitation, child support, paternity) with juvenile cases now heard in probate court (abuse/neglect, delinquency, adoptions). Judges will be well attuned to available social services.

The emphasis on family means children caught in a divorce, for example, can gain immediate help to ward off delinquency and not wait for two different courts to work through the litigation. No matter how sweeping their problems, a family can expect to work with the same Family Division judge for each.

The idea behind a family court is rooted in the national debate on family values and salvaging the nuclear family. But a family court's role is far less political. Simply put, it limits instances where judges from different courts hand down rulings that affect a family without knowing how the other ruled.

Clearly, there's promise for the Family Division of Oakland County Circuit Court to stand as a model for responsiveness, accessibility and efficiency. In a county where divorces and juvenile cases are on the upswing, I'll watch intently how well the new court lives up to its billing. Family matters have too much impact on too many lives to be relegated to circuit court dockets crowded with more-prevalent criminal and civil cases.

Bob Sklar is managing editor of our Oakland County editions.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

40 YEARS AGO — JULY 25, 1957 (ENTERPRISE)

Seven people were injured in two auto accidents in the Farmington area, including four-car crash injuring six people on U.S. 16, west of Drake.

A special meeting will take place to formally accept the resignation of Clayton Goers as township treasurer and appoint a replacement.

25 YEARS AGO — JULY 26, 1972 (ENTERPRISE & OBSERVER)

Temper flared at a Farmington Township

board meeting when Steven Davidovich, Republican candidate for trustee, challenged board members to disclose "all their holdings and income" to clarify potential conflicts of interest on items before the board.

2 YEARS AGO — JULY 24, 1995 (OBSERVER)

More than 300 marijuana plants — with a potential street value of \$320,000 — were confiscated from the basement of a Farmington residence.

Harrison High jazz band returned from a trip to Europe, including Paris, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. The 18-member group was one of several choral and musical groups selected from each state to take part.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Where are you going for summer vacation?



A few places: New Jersey, Atlantic City, and Little Rock, Arkansas for a convention.
Nancy Simanek
Farmington Hills



We went to Sea World in Ohio and will go up north to Charlevoix.
Jan Corrigan
Farmington Hills



No special travel plans.
Bill Wolff
Farmington Hills



No special plans.
Ed Dolan
Farmington Hills

We asked this question at the Farmington Community Library, downtown branch.

LETTERS

Formal complaint, last step

I am writing in response to your (Dec. 26, 1996) article "Long distance runaround can be real hang up." Unfortunately, the experience (Mary Rodrigue) recounted with respect to long distance telephone service is shared by a significant number of our fellow citizens.

As you probably know, since the break up of the old Bell System, the regulation of long distance service such as your calls to Canada is exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Federal Communication Commission. However, in light of the potential for fraudulent practices on the part of a few of the long distance telephone companies, I have often relied on our consumer protection laws to prevent long distance companies from taking advantage of their customers.

I believe that quite a great deal of the fraud can be reduced and/or remedied if consumers closely examine their bills and report any errors to the service provider with a demand that the bill be promptly adjusted.

In the event that the consumer's attempt to resolve the problem by contacting the long distance company does not prove fruitful, I suggest that they contact the Consumer Protection Division of my office at (617) 373-1140 to make a formal complaint. I hope this provides some information to you and your readers.

Frank Kelley
Attorney General

Honored to serve

I want to express my appreciation to the Farmington/Farmington Hills community for its support in electing me to the Farmington Board of Education. I would also like to thank the Observer for its endorsement. I want to thank all of my supporters whose diligent work on my behalf was very much appreciated. I would like to particularly thank my family, whose support and help were invaluable in my campaign for a board seat.

I regard serving on the board of education a very significant obligation, and I take it very seriously. At the same time, this is a very exciting and challenging time for the district and for education in general, and I look forward to making a positive contribution as a board member as we move forward into the 21st century.

As a district we have a lot to be proud of, and have produced outstanding results across the entire spectrum of achievement; academic, as well as arts, music and sports. Even though we have accomplished much as a district, there is still much to do. As we move forward, we must ensure continuous improvement in all outcomes, including test scores, while promoting vigorous cost containment. We must provide effective, early intervention for students with learning problems while also providing expanded opportunities for gifted and

exceptional students. We must bring equity to facilities across the district without adversely impacting ongoing operating costs. And these are but a few of the challenges facing us going forward.

I truly believe that our district has all of the right ingredients to be world-class, and I am honored to serve at a time when we will be called upon to put all of our talents to work to move Farmington Schools to the next level of excellence.

Frank L. Reid
Farmington School Board Trustee

Recognizing fitness

I would like to thank the Farmington Observer for the article on the Great Lakes State Games Michigan Athletes' Relay entitled "Fit to Run," July 6, 1997. Unfortunately important information and appropriate recognition was omitted.

The Oakland Fitness Council has a longstanding, collaborative relationship with the Farmington Family YMCA. As a result of this relationship, the Oakland Fitness Council (OFC) approached the YMCA to be a part of the Michigan Athletes' Relay on June 21, 1997. The OFC was asked to coordinate the relay because it is a regional extension of the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness, Health and Sports. The Governor's Council is the founder of the GLSG and Michigan Athletes' Relay. The Oakland County team of the 1997 relay was comprised of runners, bicyclists, and in-line skaters from the Farmington Family YMCA, Working Wheelers Cycling Club, and Team Extreme/Botsford TRACC, respectively.

I appreciate the Farmington Family YMCA for providing recognition of the relay, and would also like to recognize the efforts of the Oakland Fitness Council and its members who volunteered their help. We hope to continue work with you and the Farmington Family YMCA in the future.

Carrie Petro
Assistant, Oakland Fitness Council
Coordinator, Michigan Athletes' Relay

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 Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

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— Philip Power