

Dim view

Football lights intrusive, costly

Many of the reasons for lighting Farmington's football fields for Friday night games are sound. But those reasons aren't enough to endorse spending \$700,000 and ruining many Friday nights for the neighbors of the three schools.

Those of us who didn't attend high schools in Farmington knew all about Friday night football. They were fun, raucous events that drew student bodies together and helped bond school spirit for students, parents and alumni. Cheering on the home team was the place to be, whether you were there to watch football, the cheerleaders or the band. It was also the place to be for those looking for a party.

The idea that Friday night games will draw more students than Saturday afternoon games is beyond dispute; the ramifications of such gatherings will be both positive and negative. Sure, there will be bigger crowds, though you can expect the true football fans will show up Friday night as they do now on Saturdays. There would also be plenty of noise, bright lights and traffic, plus some vandalism, and yes, some alcohol and drug use. Neighbors know this.

Adding lights would bring some real improvements for the schools' athletic and band scheduling. Marching bands would be able to play during the Friday games and then travel Saturday to competitions — something that is often now compressed into a single afternoon, if it's done at all. Lights would also allow coaches more time to study film and practice for upcoming games since they will all be a full week apart. Soccer teams would also benefit with a number of night games.

So, we all agree this would be nice for the schools, allowing them to catch up to the Jones

es all around Oakland County, where Farmington is the only district left without lights. The main impetus, though, seems to be providing a safe, supervised place for teens to be on Friday nights — so they're not cruising the streets or loitering at the mall. That's a worthwhile goal and something this community is striving to achieve through its recent Call to Action Summit by the Farmington Families in Action and the school district.

However, that reasoning assumes that three or four Friday nights a year at each school will make a difference for teenagers. With a nine-game football home season, teams play four or five home games a year, and the district has already decided that it should keep homecoming at its traditional Saturday afternoon time slot (largely because of the tradition).

That cuts the number of varsity football Friday nights down to three or four, with the lights being used around 22 to 27 times a year at each school — including junior varsity, soccer, a band competition and practice and others. That is a lot to ask neighbors to put up with — lights, noise, parking and crowds — in exchange for the community good of busying teens for a couple hours on three or four Friday nights each fall.

Spending three-quarters of a million dollars will go a long way toward meeting some educational needs for the district. Is this really the best use of taxpayer money?

If the school board does approve the lights, as seems likely after last week's meeting, the idea of piloting the lights at one school to work out any bugs in the security and parking issues looks to be a wise move. It would also limit the budget impact this year.

Keep close tabs on concealed guns

Guns. Next to abortion and assisted suicide, it is one of the most emotionally-charged public issues in Michigan.

While many people are split on whether there should be more or less control on handguns, the public should be aware of an innocuous-looking package of bills proposed by state legislators that threatens to do much more harm than good.

On the surface, the package of related bills, whose chief sponsor is state Rep. Alan Cropsey, R-DeWitt, has some advantages. It would standardize statewide the rules for people applying for a concealed weapons permit and require that applicants complete a 12-hour firearms training course. One bill also allows government to revoke a permit of anyone with a blood alcohol level of 0.02 percent while carrying the pistol.

At present, each county has a board which reviews requests and approves them if the applicants can prove a reason to have the permit.

But the bill package in Lansing starts at the opposite end — requiring that the boards "shall issue" permits unless there are problems with the background of the applicant.

If approved, the bills will put more weapons in the hands of persons going about their daily business and pose a serious public safety threat to everyone.

While many believe that "law-abiding" citizens don't pose a threat while carrying a handgun to protect themselves outside their homes, the increase in the accessibility of handguns has a potential for misuse in a variety of situations.

The proposal to liberalize the concealed weapons permit laws, supported by a majority of the state House, is poor public policy and a clear public safety threat.

It should be rejected by the Legislature with support from the public.

There are several good reasons for opposing the bill.

One bill gives gun boards potentially abusive discretion to go in to closed-door sessions when discussing applications.

Michiganians should heed the warnings of two well-informed organizations which have voiced strong opposition to the bill.

While the bills seem harmless enough on the surface, the Observer agrees with the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan and the American College of Physicians in opposing the package of bills.

The prosecutors' association made the public policy position clear in a letter to a state representative.

"Every effort should be made to reduce the level of violence in our communities and to protect the lives and safety of our citizens," it said. "We are convinced that the move to liberalize the issuance of concealed weapons permits, if successful, can only serve to increase the number of tragedies that we witness daily from the misuse and accidental discharge of handguns," the association said.

The medical organization went one step further.

"The growing incidence of firearm violence has reached epidemic proportions. Members of the college overwhelmingly agree that firearm violence and the prevention of firearm injuries are public health issues of increasing concern and that physicians should be involved in counseling patients and support community actions to reduce injuries and deaths involving firearms."

Under Michigan law, a person with a permit to own a gun may carry that gun; he or she just may not carry it concealed. Michigan already has common-sense rules on carrying handguns. To roll back these restrictions and make Michigan a "shall issue" state would be a mistake.

The bottom line is that the life you save may be your own.

If writing to your state legislator, refer to House Bills 6661 through 6669, inclusive.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What are the pros and cons to having lights at the high school athletic fields?



"More people can make it because it'll be later at night."
 Christina Sweeting
 Farmington Hills



"Parents can make it. They can support their kids more."
 Adlene Michael
 Farmington Hills



"Personally, I think it's a great idea. I like night games. Then again, I'm not a neighbor. I don't know how they'd feel about it."
 Tammy Kress
 Farmington Hills



"It would be a better use of the facility."
 Curt Katsala
 Farmington

We asked this question at a Farmington High School soccer game.

LETTERS

Lack of respect

My parents have lived in Canterbury Commons in Farmington Hills for 25 years. In fact, they would have had their house paid off this July. Their house backs to the large field at North Farmington High School. They have had "privacy" since they moved in. (Not including football practices, little league players, etc.) Two weeks ago, without ANY notice, the city dug up the field behind their house and laid gravel. They took away much of their tree-line. They brought in a huge modular and port-a-potty and placed both right smack on their property line. They put up a fence.

Now my parents, who for 25 years had nothing in their back yard, look at these items every day. In addition, they now have bulldozers back there. The city has forced them to put their house up for sale and relocate. They are both in their 60s and did not want to ever have to re-establish roots. My mother had just had work completed on a \$40,000 all-season room which faces the "field."

I am very upset and angry, as are they. No one ever notified them about this. Yet when they had their addition put on, they got the run-around from the city for many months. Nobody from the Farmington Board of Education would return her calls and answer questions. The principal of North Farmington found it amusing that she was upset. The only consolation that she received was from a gentleman who is in charge of the company who is doing the work.

I just thought I would comment on the lack of respect that the city and the school system had for my parents. All they would have asked for would have been some notification of what was about to happen to their solitude.

Laura Raymond
 Farmington

Forget petty grumbings

As a regular patron of the Village Mall, I find it sad that a small number of shop owners, such as Barbara Horrigan-Goins of the Celtic Shamrock, would take issue with Deb's Crafts and the success of her Beanie Baby sale days. I'm sure that the vast majority of other businesses in the Village Mall and downtown Farmington are more than happy to have the foot traffic and added exposure. It doesn't take a marketing genius to realize that having an extra hundred people in the area is far better for everyone's business than not having them come there at all. In Ms. Horrigan-Goins' recent letter to this column ("Packed mall not always good"), she complains about "inconsiderate people blocking the hallway" and "unsupervised children" when describing the customers in line to purchase Beanie

Babies at Deb's Crafts. I've attended several Beanie Baby sales at Deb's and have witnessed no such behavior. How would Ms. Horrigan-Goins feel if someone were to use those same exaggerated and unflattering terms to describe the group of people who attended an open house at her shop on a recent Saturday? But I guess that's different.

And shame on the landlord of the Village Mall for his kowtowing to a smattering of shop owners and telling the proprietor of Deb's Crafts, Debbie Watson, she can no longer hold her Beanie Baby sales on Saturdays because she's getting too big a crowd. Let me get this straight: A landlord leases retail space to a tenant in a competitive free-market society, then proceeds to tell that tenant she has to change in their back yard, look at these items every day. In addition, they now have bulldozers back there. The city has forced them to put their house up for sale and relocate. They are both in their 60s and did not want to ever have to re-establish roots. My mother had just had work completed on a \$40,000 all-season room which faces the "field."

Like many others in the area, I have the pleasure of knowing Deb Watson personally and consider myself lucky to do so. She is by far one of the kindest and most considerate individuals one could hope to meet, and I enjoy doing business at her shop. For the record, Deb holds her sales only one or two Saturday mornings a month, certainly not the constant, unruly stampede her detractors would have you believe.

Deb, you were a success long before Beanie Babies and you will continue to be a success long after. Please don't let the petty grumbings of a few jealous competitors, or a landlord who plays favorites, affect the way you run your business.

Alex G. Yvonnou
 Livonia

Sidewalks needed

I'm writing this letter concerning my subdivision, Farmington Square. We have many little children running around in the summertime, as well as in the wintertime. I would like to suggest that our subdivision have sidewalks. I think it would be a lot easier, not to mention less stressful on parents if we did. They wouldn't have to worry about a car coming by, afraid it could hit the children walking or riding their bikes. We have just recently gotten sidewalks put in through our common ground, but I feel it would be better if we had them around the whole subdivision. Like I said, it would give parents much greater peace of mind and provide better safety for the children.

Melissa Judge
 Power Middle School

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— Philip Power

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

40 YEARS AGO — APRIL 3, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)
 A proposed budget for the 1958-59 fiscal year was the major item of business taken up at the Wood Creek Farms Village Council meeting. Council members were sharply split, however, on the question of whether or not the village should earmark \$500 for rubbish pickup service for the last half of the fiscal year.

25 YEARS AGO — MARCH 31, 1973
 All three Farmington high schools were slated to have new principals in April: James Geiger, Harrison High; Lynn Nutter, North Farmington High; and Clayton Graham, Farmington High.
 2 YEARS AGO — APRIL 1, 1994
 Talk of renovating sewing and cooking from Farmington schools' Life Management curriculum was nodding a few parents. One school official said pressure to add foreign language and technology helped press for the removal. Parents said kids need to know these skills.