

# Cellular tower

## City should not set precedent

The adage that one man's fruit is another man's poison aptly describes a request for a different kind of cellular tower — painted white and bearing a cross on top — at the First Church of Nazarene on Haggerty Road.

The request comes from AT&T Wireless which is asking for a certificate of need — as required under city ordinance — and a waiver for what would be more than the usual gray cellular tower called for in the ordinance.

Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi balked at the request. His colleagues didn't, but nonetheless agreed to table a public hearing on the matter until March 15.

A request from church officials to put a cross on a structure on church property cannot be considered unusual. In fact, it's fitting — except in this case.

Cellular towers may be erected on private property, but they affect the viewing public.

If AT&T is allowed to paint the tower white and attach a cross to the top, a precedent will be set. And it will be a precedent with which future city councils will struggle.

Let's assume a religious cross does not offend most people. They know what it is and they know what it means.

But what will this or future city councils do when a request comes for any other type of symbol, perhaps one not embraced by a majority of residents, or a symbol that projects attitudes considered offensive by most?

Church officials could make an argument that the tower will be for their property and therefore they are free to dress it up as they choose. If that were the case, however, there would be no need for a city ordinance governing cellular towers.

Such towers in and of themselves are as intrusive as billboards, which have come under public criticism for visually polluting the landscape. While they definitely serve a practical purpose, there is no need to make a

**If AT&T is allowed to paint the tower white and attach a cross to the top, a precedent will be set. And it will be a precedent with which future city councils will struggle.**

120-foot tower stand out more than is necessary.

Indeed there is a commercial relationship in the making between the church and AT&T. And yes, the church has a nontaxable status as Vagnozzi pointed out.

Whether the church should behave as a nonprofit organization because it has a nontaxable status isn't relevant to the discussion at hand. Nontaxable status of religious institutions has been a standing issue with many governmental leaders, but it is not currently a reason to deny or approve the request from AT&T and the church.

The issue is whether the city council should allow an organization to decorate a cellular tower in any way it chooses.

The answer should be no unless the city council plans to allow other organizations to follow suit. If that's the case, change the ordinance. Consistency is what is required here.

A cross on a white cellular tower is not likely to be offensive to most people. But the city must be concerned with aesthetics and fairness. If the city council gives the go-ahead to the First Church of the Nazarene, then it must be prepared to open the doors for other similar requests, including for symbols and paint colors that may indeed be offensive.

The current city council would be wise not to set a precedent that will haunt future city councils.



## LETTERS

### Corporate welfare

Time magazine published a four-part series of reports on "Corporate Welfare" beginning with their Nov. 5, 1998, article. The series must have struck a responsive cord as Time cannot keep up with the demand for reprints of this series. I am still waiting for my copy. Copies of the magazine are available in the Farmington Library's magazine section and on their Internet. Every public official, civic-minded people, business educators and concerned press columnists should study this series; particularly now when so many private entities, some within our own area, are out to get their hands on taxpayer dollars to fund their pet projects.

The report exposes the gross hypocrisy of the alleged benefits to a local community in subsidizing rich, for-profit, multinational corporations, with taxpayer dollars. As often as not, the threat of taking their business to another community if they do not get their sought-after handout, vying one community against another, clinches the deal for them. Why does this sound familiar? The benefits promised is usually so much pie in the sky in the long run. New jobs may or may not materialize or last for very long. Meanwhile, local citizens are told that there is no money in the budget for things like sidewalks, more police, or other improvements that one should expect for their tax burden. Senior citizens and others on fixed incomes have to plead poverty in order to get any special consideration for tax relief. Where is the fairness?

Taxpayer subsidies for corporations are a poor endorsement for the American free enterprise system. It used to be, if you needed to fund your pet project, you used your own money or you looked to private sources for your capital. Now, it seems, every business wants to get their hands on taxpayer dollars instead. Something is wrong with this economic picture, but no one seems to be concerned about where this is taking us.

Interestingly, Rep. John Kasich has promised to look into the abuse of corporate welfare at the federal level. Hopefully, this will provide some incentive for our local officials to do likewise at the city, county and state level.

Henry Grysh  
Farmington Hills

### Owing a debt

"Occom's Razor is a principle" wrote Charles Krouthammer, "that holds that the simplest, most parsimonious explanation for a phenomenon is likely to be the correct one."

In the past, we drove the Indians from their lands and to this day have never really repaid them.

Then there was slavery. We tried to take their humanity from them and succeeded constitutionally. The blacks were slave labor.

In the 19th century, the rich made the poor work for starvation wages until the unions were formed to demand higher wages. But unions are out of style again. Businesses are downsizing which means people are out of work or working for lower wages. But CEOs get salaries in the millions.

What does it mean in terms of other nations? A billion people go to bed hungry every night. Sister Amata Miller, I.H.M., gave a talk some years ago about a movement in the United Nations in which the rich countries would have to pay more for the natural resources of poorer nations, such as diamonds and gold. African countries are a good example for being rich in natural resources, but poor nonetheless. The United States voted down the necessary legislation.

Then there was the situation in Latin America. This was documented by Penny Lernoux in her two books, "The Cry of the People" and "In Banks We Trust." Big New York banks would lend money to South American dictators who would spend it on themselves or build up large armies to protect themselves or send the money out of the country. The country would go broke and could not repay the loans.

The International Monetary Fund would tell the country what it must do so that the World Bank could come in and help them repay their debt to the New York banks. The usual solution was that the poor, oppressed people who never got a dime from the loans would have to tighten their belts even more. Often, the countries would have their factories and natural resources taken over to pay their debts.

Obviously, there are great inequities in the world today, and we must try to correct them. To begin to have justice in the world today, we must have a "rule of law." A law that would respect others' rights, resources, lands and oceans. While we must respect others' borders and beliefs, I believe the strongest basis for a rule of law for capitalism would be "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbors' goods" and "Thou shalt not steal." Capitalism gives you a license to steal legally.

We have so much, we owe a debt of justice and loving kindness to those less fortunate.

It seems to me the situation in Indonesia, Russia and Brazil is a rerun with variations of the activities of Chase & Citicorp Banks in Latin American in the 1960's as told by Penny Lernoux.

Virginia M. Mitchell  
Farmington Hills

## It's time to invite regular folks

Bill Clinton presents the State of the Nation, John Engler handles State of the State, and L. Brooks Patterson enlightens us every year as to the state of the Oakland County.

In mid-February, County Executive Patterson delivered the good news that Oakland County, one of the wealthiest in the nation, is well-managed with a booming economy at home and a sterling credit rating on Wall Street.

Patterson's State of the County address was witnessed by about 275 people fortunate enough to have been invited to the event at the Michigan State University Education Center in Troy.

At the address and at a reception afterward at the Northfield Hilton, there was a preponderance of pin stripes and power suits, pumps and wing tips. State of the County-goers were for the most part shining examples of officialdom and corporate America.

But you didn't see many flannel shirts open at the collar, or other uniform of the common folk, at the MSU Center that Thursday evening. Common folk weren't specifically invited, and that's too bad.

While we do understand about space limitations, we also think there should be some way to accommodate everyone who wishes to attend. We hate to see the regular people shut out of an event like that.

### STATE OF THE COUNTY

We know a lot of regular people. They care about their communities and their country ... sometimes a sight more than Mr. Corporate or Ms. Officialdom.

We're sure quite a few regular people would flock to an event like State of the County. And it's a pretty safe bet that they'd have some tough questions for Mr. County Executive during a spirited Q&A session that really should follow that kind of talk.

Invitations were sent out as a marketing ploy, Patterson told Eccentric reporter Pat Murphy afterward. "My State of the County address isn't the hottest ticket in town," the executive said with a laugh. "We sent out invitations to remind officials and business executives of the event. And it worked."

Well, we think it would work even better if the event were a bit less exclusionary. Let's give the regular people a chance to participate in representative government — beyond simply casting ballots and paying taxes.

"You're all invited" should be the watchwords of future State of the County talks. The event should be held at a site that could accommodate a hefty crowd — the County Commissioners Auditorium in the County Complex comes to mind — and it should be made clear that the public is invited.

### COMMUNITY VOICE

**QUESTION:**  
Do you have a good book to suggest?



"Nathan's Run." It was thrilling.  
Latoya Burrell  
freshman



"The Book of Lemurs." It's the greatest book in the world because it's the greatest animal.  
Lomar Wjsoh  
senior



"Of Mice and Men." It had a lot of adventure and a lot of drama.  
Beth Ann Brozovich  
freshman



"The Lord of the Rings." "Stranger in a Strange Land." "Shogun"... It's a lot better than the movie.  
Bill Ault  
parent

## Farmington Observer

JOANKE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450  
SUSAN ROSIEK, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149  
HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118  
PIC KNOXER, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177  
LARRY ODGER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234  
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252  
RICK FICORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JEANNE TOWAR, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD ADRIAN, PRESIDENT

OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power