

Candidates

It's not too early to consider them

It might seem early to start thinking about upcoming elections. But candidates are already lining up for the Farmington school board election in June and the November elections for the Farmington Hills and Farmington city councils and Hills mayor's post.

Nominating petitions are available for the Farmington school board and candidates have until 4 p.m. Monday, April 12, to file with the district's business office.

Incumbent Linda Enberg will seek another four-year term. Newcomer Gary Sharp plans to run for a one-year term, the unexpired portion of the term vacated by Joe Svoko when he resigned in 1998.

On the city council side, voters will be faced with filling seats left vacant by Jody Soronen who has filled in since the departure of Terry Sever, who was elected to the Oakland County Commission. Also open will be seats held by Vicki Barnett and Nancy Bates.

Petitions for council seats have been pulled by Barry Brickner, George Sarkisian, Vicki Barnett, Fran Valley and Jason Abate.

For the mayor's post, Nancy Bates, Brian Conrad, Jewell Hamner and Jason Abate have taken out petitions.

In Farmington, the city council seats now belonging to William Hartack, JoAnne McShane and James Mitchell will be up for re-election. The top two vote-getters will win four-year terms and the third-place finisher will earn a two-year stint.

With two seats open on the school board, there should be plenty of candidates seeking election. Surely, with all the parental involvement and activism in the district, others will step up to the plate and throw their hats into the ring. Perhaps Harrison High School parents whose participation helped forge a palatable block scheduling plan might sign on, for example. And, with the one-year term available, we would hope that those who just want to get their feet wet in local politics apply for that race.

An election is a time for voters to get involved - both in seeking election and for encouraging debate and challenging candidates with tough issues and questions. And an election is indeed supposed to be a race between candidates and stands on issues.

We suggest that outspoken parents Beth Grossman and 1998 board candidate Melody Jaske consider throwing their hats into the

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school board race.

As with the school board, an election is also time for the introduction of new blood and new ideas on the local political scene. We are happy to see Fran Valley's interest. And we also encourage the following local activists to seek election to the city council or consider a bid for the mayor's post: Andy Nickelhoff of the Council of Homeowners Associations, Irene Kornicki former state representative candidate Linda Jolicœur, Cathy Webb, school board member and former state representative candidate.

These community activists are leaders in their own right and have the best interest of their hometown at heart.

The November election represents the end of the first term for a mayor elected at large in Farmington Hills. Aldo Vagnozzi has certainly paved a path for the post, serving primarily in the role of an ombudsman between the public which the city council serves and the elected officials and city administrators.

He has endeared himself to the public and has worked tirelessly on their behalf. Clearly, the role of mayor is more than ceremonial and we fully expect that whoever wins this post will conduct himself or herself in a similar fashion.

Vagnozzi will leave big shoes to fill. The city needs a mayor who invites participation and an open-door policy. Also needed is someone who knows the issues facing the city, and one also willing to negotiate and compromise for what is best for the residents and the city. Staying on top of county, state, regional and national issues and their potential effect on the city is also a primary prerequisite.

The new mayor's post may have been designed as a part-time - not even job - but it hasn't turned out that way. And anyone who thinks that it can be done on a casual basis should think twice about seeking election to this post.

At election time, in any venue, the more candidates, the merrier; the more issues and debates, the more thorough an opportunity voters have for determining what they want their community to be.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DESHER

Kudos: A pat on the back of Farmington area residents and local officials who took the time to go to a Michigan Department of Transportation meeting in Lansing to tell administrators just what they think of noise along I-275 that is scheduled to be restructured.

LETTERS

'Chump change'

Why do people always scoff at paying for school improvements? I want my children going to a safe and nice-looking middle and high school. They are currently enrolled at Botsford Elementary, and I've seen the changes made there in the past six years. They are proud to go to Botsford, but more improvements are needed.

I was on the task force of 1998. These schools are old and need to be properly maintained and updated. Don't we all do this to our homes? Well, school is home to our children five days a week, for eight hours or more.

My taxes would increase about \$150 a year, and I'll gladly pay it. One hundred dollars is "chump change," I spend that on flowers for my garden each year.

So shame on you, Annette Bowdin, and those on your committee, who seem to only care about yourselves and not your children, and how dare you put a value on how much we should spend on our children's welfare while they're at school.

Janifer Carboneau
Livonia

Enough is enough

The new proposal in Lansing to allow police to stop motorists not wearing seat belts should not be supported.

Such a law, no doubt is the spurious brainchild of the marriage between the insurance industry and busybody legislators, aka control freaks, desperate to impose their "vision" of government knows best on the rest of us. That's while accepting rewards for such "altruistic benevolence" in the form of campaign contributions from interested parties such as lobbyists for the insurance industry, an industry dear to both our governor and so many of our elected officials, an industry that loves to share their deep pockets and wealth and wisdom as to how the rest of us should live with needy lawmakers.

Lawmakers, most of whom coincidentally are lawyers, relentlessly chip away at our rights under the premise they know what is best for us, and amazingly, their views are shared/formed in many cases by their biggest campaign contributors.

Instead of passing new freedom restrictions, lawmakers should devote time to repealing archaic or absurd laws already on the books. There would not be much incentive for legislators to do this however, as there is no lobby such as the insurance industry lobby, with deep pockets filled with campaign contributions for legislators who share their "vision" to do such unrewarding work. The only beneficiaries from such efforts as repealing bad laws would be the citizens, who really aren't of much concern to lawmakers except around election time.

It would seem that so many lawmakers who want to protect us from ourselves, reach such conclusions following enlightening monetary contributions from industries such as the insurance companies, an industry with a vested interest in seeing such legislation passed.

Lastly, think of all the government beneficiaries of tighter seat belt enforcement laws, such as the police, who would issue more tickets, thus enriching needy courts and municipalities, and lawmakers who would receive even more generous campaign contributions. Citizens, who according to President Clinton really can't be trusted to make decisions regarding their own money would be relieved of even more of their income and freedom.

Ronald Oliverio
Farmington Hills

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Support tougher seat belt law

The opponents failed to listen well as state Sen. Bill Bullard Jr. made the case for toughening Michigan's safety belt law.

They talked about Big Brother government. They talked about the slippery slope to outlawing smoking, closing doughnut shops and requiring calisthenics. They said police should concentrate instead on catching killers and rapists rather than issuing tickets to those rugged souls who refuse to wear safety belts. They beat on the insurance companies.

For a dozen years, Michigan has required drivers and passengers to wear safety belts when a vehicle is in motion. But it's punishable only as a secondary offense. A cop must have stopped you for another reason - such as speeding or having a busted taillight - before he can ticket you for failure to wear a safety belt.

But Bullard, R-Milford, wasn't talking about the number of extra tickets that could be issued with primary enforcement. He was talking about getting people to obey the law - compliance, not punishment.

Michigan, he said, is "stuck" at 70 percent compliance. Try as they might, state officials and insurers can't get 30 percent of people to wear them voluntarily under "secondary" enforcement. California, he said, raised compliance 10 to 15 percent when it went to primary enforcement. More people began obeying the law.

Many laws are like that - designed for compliance rather than punishment. The Open Meetings Act, for example, is very weak on punishments for violators. It's designed to be complied with, to be easily understandable by sometimes amateur public officials. It assumes officials of goodwill are inclined to do the right thing.

Take the littering law, as another example. If you're evasive, a cop never will catch you littering. But if you've been taught that trash pollutes, makes the environment look crummy and can injure animals and fish, you as a good citizen obey the law and don't litter.

When more adults use safety belts, they set

an example for kids. "When adults buckle up, 80 percent of children will. But when adults don't buckle up, only 50 percent of children will," Bullard said. It's too bad so many of his colleagues failed to get the message and mistook the issue in Big Brother terms.

There are other reasons for requiring drivers and passengers to buckle up. When unbelted occupants suffer closed-head injuries, they raise everyone's insurance rates. They cost a ton of money to treat and rehabilitate, sometimes for the rest of their lives.

It's a lesser consideration, but unbelted people injured in vehicle accidents take up six to eight hours of police investigation compared to a couple of hours for noninjury accidents.

Our highways become more dangerous when Michigan lifted its speed limit to 70 mph. It means that it's common to see drivers going 95 on I-96 without getting caught. There is the recently recognized phenomenon of "road rage." Crashes become more serious to the unbelted.

So far, there are no statistics, but we suspect that the increasing use of "cruise control" means more drivers blunder into pile-up accidents or fail to slow down when danger appears.

All of those are reasons to wear safety belts and to make nonuse a primary offense.

We give a pat on the back to those senators who voted for SB 335: Bullard, Matt Dunnakins, R-Lake Orion, John Cherry, D-Clia, Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township, Thaddeus McCotter, R-Livonia, and George Z. Hart, D-Dearborn.

In the Observer & Eccentric area, only Loren Bennett, R-Canton, was opposed.

The bill goes to the House, which has passed a version of the measure in past years. But we have 64 new House members this year. Write to your state representative, State Capitol, Lansing 48909-7514, and ask him or her to support SB 335, primary enforcement of the safety belt law.

Don't be concerned

There is a new ordinance that might be taking effect here in Farmington Hills. It will require everyone under the age of 18 to wear a helmet when bike riding. If the rider is caught breaking the law, he or she can either be fined or warned by a police officer, even if the helmet is not strapped to his or her head correctly. The fine for the first offense would be \$5 and the second \$10, but they might just make it a warning for the first offense.

I think that before this ordinance takes effect, people voting for it should think it through a little further. If they do, then they should realize that almost no one will obey this ordinance. I think that if a person doesn't believe that it is necessary to wear a helmet when bike riding to protect the head, then it is his or her own problem. I do not believe that the city of Farmington Hills should be concerned about whether or not people are wearing a helmet.

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— Philip Power