

Egg or chicken?

Tower pits city against itself

Convulsed is the only way to describe discussions about yet another cellular phone tower for Farmington Hills.

This proposed 120-foot tower is targeted for the William Costick Activities Center, not far from the Sisters of Mercy and their children's day care center, school and retirement facility.

The issue - particularly the approval of a lease with Nextel in November 1998 - has left some officials perplexed. Not to mention that in this case, the city is the landowner and in line to make big money on the lease for years to come. The city council, which approved the lease, is also the governing body charged with looking out for what's best for the city as a whole.

This issue has left us perplexed as well. The council approved this lease, contingent on an approved site plan, which will be considered by the planning commission, and a certificate of need, which will be considered by council members. Both efforts are required by city ordinance.

Something seems out of order. First a site plan and certificate of need should have been addressed, and if all involved liked both, then a lease could have been considered.

Marcia VanCreveld of the Council of Homeowners Associations put the most appropriate twist to this issue: Is it the chicken or the egg that came first?

The answer to that question aside, it's obvious the city may get stuck. Of course, that's bound to happen when the city is playing itself against itself. It is hard to be objective when you stand to make money on a lease.

Cellular phone companies are fairly adept at providing site plans for their towers. Likely it will be approved. The same goes for a cer-

tificate of need, something for which cell phone companies also have developed an expertise. After all, why would a cell phone company seek out a lease and site for a tower if company officials didn't feel they needed one to stay competitive?

And there are more questions. When the certificate of need comes rolling in, who in City Hall is equipped to review it as it should be? Or will a consultant be hired? Or will it be accepted as a matter of course because the lease - and subsequent earnings for the city - has already been approved?

The process followed in addressing the Nextel request shows how city officials did not follow good, basic and reasonable business practices. It leaves the city and its residents wide open because of an already approved lease. A company may have to get a site plan and a certificate of need. But both are nothing without that precious lease.

Clearly, the city council needs some guidelines - when the city plays the dual role of landowner and governing body - to follow when considering requests from cell phone companies, actually any type of commercial venture. In addition, someone in City Hall needs to explain how this process works to elected officials who are making decisions - before they are put in the position of making the decision.

As councilwoman Vicki Barnett said, "My impression at the time was that this was not a final deal. At no time did I assume that was the last pass I got at it."

It may very well be the last pass. When elected officials can only make assumptions about the process that is being followed, something is lacking in City Hall.



LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oc.homecomm.net

A comfort

Stockton, without even mentioning my name, takes me to task for ridiculing the council's new ordinance forbidding the feeding of geese.

I wouldn't think of holding the council up to ridicule; they do such a good job of it themselves. How else to explain the hours of debate, on television yet, on a subject over which they have almost no control? It is comforting though to know that the city's business is in such good shape that they have nothing more important to do.

I've polled Muirwood's geese; 97 percent eat nothing but grass and seem to thrive on it. Anyone who feels the need to feed Farmington's flourishing flocks of feathered friends needs a new law much less than he needs psychiatric help.

Of course, the ordinance will have zero effect on the size of the flock, its diet, the frequency of their visits or the number of little green stogies they leave on my sidewalk.

A discrete campaign a la Kensington Park's deer control program might be effective; or how about an ordinance making it unlawful to have grass growing on your property?

Harry Guest
Farmington Hills

back to times when cousins married each other and horses both plowed and fertilized fields. Radical environmental groups scared us with Alar, saccharin, mercury in swordfish and other nonsense but never uttered a word of apology when proven wrong. Must we tremble now as labs are torched and food sources boycotted without a thread of evidence proving their claims?

I would welcome labeling of genetically altered food. It would make my selection easier, knowing which product is up-to-date.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

Editorial irresponsible

This letter is in regard to your Feb. 3 editorial: "Helmets a must for sledding." I believe that it is irresponsible for The Observer to recommend that parents put bicycle helmets on children for sledding. Bicycle helmets are activity-specific safety devices. With the last bicycle helmet that I purchased there was a disclaimer that said that the helmet was only designed for use while cycling and that an injury could occur during any other kind of use.

It seems to me that if you were to encourage any helmet use, it should be one that is designed for sledding and not bicycle riding. I think that an even better step toward safety would be to encourage parents to closely monitor their children while sledding. Parents should find hills that are free from trees and water (creeks and lakes). It would also be smart to not sled down hills that are too steep to help reduce speed. They should also try to find times to go when the hills are not so crowded.

These very simple steps alone, followed by some common sense would go a long way to preventing accidents while sledding.

Bernie Brosnan
Canton

Parents key to Internet use

The Internet has become a blessing and a curse to our public libraries. It has opened the wide world of information to library patrons on every subject under the sun. It has allowed them to contact others with similar interests in every corner of the world. It has helped expose scoundrels and bring down tyrannies.

On the other hand it has allowed hate mongers, pornographers and shady commercial enterprises to send their messages out for all to see, and it has opened a new way for sexual predators to seek out and ensnare their prey.

This is a tough issue, especially when it involves children. We want them to benefit from the special power that information gives, but we also want to protect them from the dangers of demeaning material and the physical danger of the sexually unbalanced.

Several groups have demanded that libraries use filtering software to keep out all sexual material, while others also demand that certain kinds of political or religious subjects be filtered. Many are also demanding that librarians or library aides stand guard and watch what patrons, especially young ones, are viewing.

The American Library Association opposes filters because the current filtering programs do not work. The software keys on particular subjects or key words. They often allow some inappropriate material through while filtering out perfectly good material. The ALA objects that the filters provide a "one-size-fits-all" solution that treats young children, older children and adults in the same way.

As Jean Tabor of the Canton Public Library points out it gives parents a false sense of security while infringing on the rights of other library patrons.

The Canton Library has a Cyber Kids room designed for children 7-12. Minors and their parents sign an agreement that they won't go to an inappropriate site. In Garden City, patrons must be in the ninth grade to use a computer unsupervised. Younger children must be with a parent or guardian.

The ALA also emphasizes communication between parents and children before they get to the library and while they're there.

The group suggests:

- talking to your children about the Internet
- asking your children to share their favorite Web sites
- talking to them about what they see on the Web
- teaching them how to behave when using the Internet
- providing guidelines on what you deem

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appropriate for them, and

■ teaching children safety rules for dealing with strangers on-line just as you teach them how to deal with strangers in person.

Parental involvement is also a key message at the Livonia Public Library. The library does use filters on computers in the children and young adult areas with the caveat that "parents/guardians should be aware that the filtering software has inherent limitations which prohibit total and complete blocking of sites which may contain obscene, sexually explicit and/or other possibly objectionable materials. Parents/guardians, not Library staff members, are responsible for providing appropriate guidance to their children/wards relative to the use of both filtered and non-filtered Internet access."

We believe there is a middle ground.

As libraries cannot select the material on the Web as they do with books, we believe all libraries should have available unfiltered computers for use by adults (including young adults who are often seeking legitimate information about the very subjects blocked out by some filters). These computers should have screens which allow a patron to view the computer monitor privately and keep others from being offended.

We believe that parental involvement is the most important tool against inappropriate use of the computer by children.

But using filters in the children's section of the library will help keep out some inappropriate material, as will some staff monitoring.

An area librarian who supports filtering told us the use of computers is a "privilege," not a right. She's wrong. Access to information through libraries has long been a taxpayer supported government service and use of that service is a "right" paid for by tax dollars. A small group of "moral arbiters" should not decide what subjects are worth being informed about.

A good library makes available a wide range of material so that patrons can make their own choices about controversial ideas. It is not the role of a library to pick and choose which ideas should be "filtered" out on the Internet just because some sites deal with those ideas in an inappropriate manner.

Welcome labeling

Genetically altered food should be welcomed by supporters of diversity.

The Nazis' failure to establish a pure Aryan race is well known. Inbreeding of family groups develops insanity, and is outlawed in most countries. Marriage outside the community produces children with better attributes and immunities.

The father of grapefruit may have been an orange. Bio-engineering makes citrus more delicious, strawberries larger and corn-on-the-cob available most of the year. Acreage required to produce abundance has been reduced, fewer insecticides are needed, and spoilage has been lowered.

Where have we gone wrong? Alarmists calling these "Frankenfoods" would turn the clock

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— Philip Power