

Eleven Pines Communication is necessary

Monday's Farmington Hills public hearing on the Eleven Pines project is a prime example of how the public and government communicate – or don't.

Both sides have the best intentions, but somehow meanings and details get lost.

To the city's credit, the planning of the development, which includes a nine-hole expansion of San Marino and accompanying apartments, condominiums and single-family homes, has been done fairly openly. That doesn't mean, however, residents have received the details they need.

Despite media coverage and city programming on cable television, homeowners in nearby residential areas, such as Independence Commons and Old Homestead subdivisions, and Saratoga Farms condominiums, were shocked and concerned to learn of the details of the project.

So how does that happen? Like it does in any form of communication. Media outlets go through the same thing. As much as you inundate people with information, a lot of them aren't paying attention at the moment the information is presented, or when they need the information.

It's no wonder city council members are frustrated – Jerry Ellis said as much. Meeting after meeting has led the city to the point where things are beginning to happen with the project and now they are confronted with criticism, questions and outright anger.

On the other hand, there is no wonder homeowners are frustrated. They, too, said as much. Despite the city's openness, that doesn't mean details have been as forthcoming as may be necessary for homeowners.

They don't understand why they didn't receive direct contact from the city that apartments would be built near, or that perhaps their view of San Marino will change. More important, homeowners with wells are right to be concerned in light of the landfill and its contaminants. It's just the way it is.

Residents who questioned why the city bought property without knowing the full extent of contamination in the landfill on the property west of Halsted are right to wonder. It may not necessarily be the wisest buying. While council members talk of a Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and limiting liability

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ty for the city, residents are plainly concerned about what's in the former landfill, and the consequences of dealing with it.

While the train is speeding up as approvals come before the council, residents feel helpless to put the brakes on or to change the city council's mind.

It is time that the city council schedule an informational meeting with homeowners who will be affected by the nearby development.

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An expanded golf course has been the goal. How to pay for the golf course and the property bought by the city for it have dominated city discussions and plans. What city council members must realize is that these may not be the topics that most concern the homeowners who will have to live next to this development.

When the results of tests taken at the landfill are to be available within the week, we urge the city to be as public with the results as they have been with their plans for a golf course expansion.

The more information that is given and the more the homeowners are directly involved, the more they might work to make this new golf course and residential development a reality.

Let's not also forget that homeowners also have a responsibility to be involved, stay alert and to ask questions and demand answers.

Open primaries are way to go

In nine days, on March 11, Michigan Democrats will finally have a say on their party's presidential nominee. Well, some Democrats, anyway.

Those who have a few hours to spare on a Saturday can head for a closed caucus site in western Wayne County. That is assuming they can find one. Caucus sites are often union halls or Elks lodges, not the local elementary school, city hall or fire station where polls are usually located. (City and township clerks have a list.)

Once there, after signing a piece of paper declaring their party affiliation, caucus participants will choose sides – just like in junior high school. One side of the room will be for Al Gore, the other Bill Bradley. But this still doesn't constitute a "vote." Only after hearing impassioned pleas (or, more likely, tedious speeches) by local Democrats supporting their group's candidate, will participants be asked to cast a ballot. The vote at some sites will be on an anonymous paper ballot. At others, it will be a show of hands.

But then going through all this trouble is certainly worth it to help choose our next president, don't you think? Except that by the time the state's Democrats weigh in with their choice, the nominee will likely be a foregone conclusion.

Nearly a dozen large states, including delegate heavyweights Ohio, New York and California, will hold presidential primaries on March 7, four days before the Michigan caucuses. If Vice President Gore translates his commanding lead in most polls into wins in those states, the Michigan result – whatever it is – will amount to a blip on the nominating radar.

Democracy at its finest? Hardly. More like presidential politics at its lowest. Both Gore and Bradley withdrew their names from last week's Michigan primary ballot, helping to create the quirky "open" election that the state's Republican establishment wanted but now tries to disavow because their guy, Texas Gov. George W. Bush, didn't win. The Republicans are steamed because some Democrats and many independents voted for Arizona

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Sen. John McCain. The turnout helped McCain capture 52 of the state's 58 delegates to the Republican convention.

In the wake of that embarrassment, some party officials and state legislators began calling last week for a closed Republican primary. We think that would be a serious mistake.

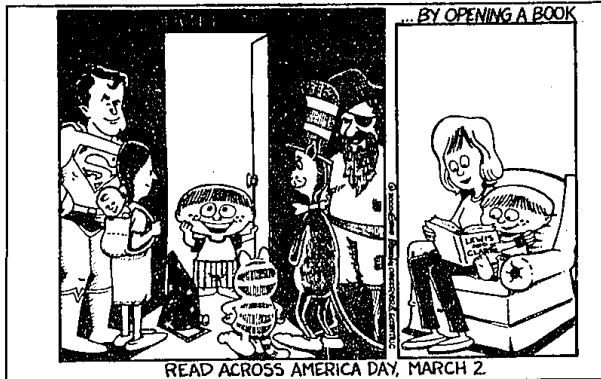
Gov. John Engler and his minions can moan all they want about "borrowed" voters who won't be on the Republican side come November. But they have short memories. What about the "borrowed" Republicans who previously voted for Democratic presidential candidates Jesse Jackson and George Wallace, or even Geoffrey Fieger in the Democratic gubernatorial primary just two years ago? And the last time we checked, "independent" voters were just that – free to cast a ballot for whomever they choose, regardless of party affiliation.

Bully for the voters, we say. More than 1.3 million, about 28 percent, turned out, more than for any Michigan presidential primary since 1980. That figure will probably be double or even triple the turnout for the March 11 caucuses.

Funditis have been crying for years about disillusionment with partisan politics eroding the public's confidence in government. Is party affiliation really more important than getting a genuine, meaningful chance to participate in the process?

The Observer believes both Michigan Democrats and Republicans should hold open presidential primaries, preferably on the same day and at a point in the election year when the votes of state residents can make the most difference. To do otherwise would further complicate an already Byzantine presidential nominating process.

GEOFF BROOKS



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

No to vouchers

"A leader has to lead, otherwise he or she has no business in politics," said Harry Truman.

The entire Farmington Board of Education is aggressively assuming its responsibility to lead in an effort to accurately inform the community on the proposal to amend the Michigan Constitution in November 2000. The issue at hand is vouchers – using public funds to subsidize parochial and private education. Be aware that the fundamental safeguard put in place by the founders of our Constitution ensuring the separation of church and state is very much at risk. Approximately 80 percent of the non-public schools in the state are religious schools. We stress that the religious liberty of all taxpayers would be threatened through an involuntary contribution to religious institutions. Vouchers will funnel your dollars to private, mostly religious schools, yet as taxpayers you will have no say.

The founders of our Constitution also strongly believed that education is the essential prerequisite for full participation in our democratic society. Democracy at its heart is about working together for what is best for all, especially our children. The voucher movement at its heart represents the extreme conservative right wing crusade to reduce government responsibility for the good of all, while maximizing government support for private and corporate gain. Vouchers have the effect of fostering narrow self-interest. If more people were thinking about the next generation instead of a self-serving special interest, our country and world would be better for it.

Clearly, this letter cannot adequately address the numerous complexities of this ballot initiative to amend the Constitution. Be aware of individuals with their own special interests who will do all they can to confuse the issue in order to forward their own cause.

Private schools tend not to choose to provide special services to special education or English to second language students. Private schools tend to be highly segregated. Private schools tend to be highly religious in their mission. And, private schools definitely choose who gets to attend their schools. Parents will have absolutely no "choice" although voucher promoters defend themselves by stating "parents can apply."

Public schools choose all children and provide for their special needs, while at the same time being accountable to you, the taxpayer. A

vote for vouchers is a vote against equal opportunity for children, a vote against promoting and protecting our democratic values and a vote to pay for others' religious education with your tax dollars. When in doubt, think of the big picture.

Cathleen M. Webb
Northville

Made her day

I am a Farmington resident and African American. I stopped at the Farmington branch library to return books. I had a friend with me and we were going to lunch. The display honoring Black History Month in the library was so very nice. It was complimentary and inspiring. I would like to thank the Farmington Community Library or those who assembled the display. It certainly made my day.

Janet Spencer
Farmington Hills

Thanks again

Thank you very much for the lovely article, "Sharpen parenting skills with classes" in Thursday's paper. We appreciate your efforts in letting the community know what a wonderful resource they have in the Farmington Youth Assistance.

I'm sure that your article will inspire parents in the community to take a class that they might not have otherwise known about. Just think about those lucky children who will have skilled parents to help guide them.

I will check out the Observer web site and send along an article on parenting. It is so exciting to me that volunteering my time to Youth Assistance has turned into a career in running parenting classes through Voice-Works Seminars and independently, I am teaching, "Parent Talk" to Ford Motor employees through their lunch time seminar program as well as "Love and Logic" to businesses and schools in other communities in the metro area. It feels so good to have the work you do be so enjoyable. Volunteering is also very rewarding and will always be a part of my life. Thanks again for using your talents to help the community.

Marilyn Nuttle
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Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450, jmaliszewski@oc.homecomm.net

HUGH GALLAGHER, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149, hgallagher@oc.homecomm.net

PIA KNOX, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177, pknox@oc.homecomm.net

TRACY SWAN, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2118, tswan@oc.homecomm.net

RICK FICORILLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150, rficorilli@oc.homecomm.net

JIM SHANNON, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR, 734-953-2180, jshannon@oc.homecomm.net

SUSAN ROSE, PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100, srose@oc.homecomm.net

BANKS DEBMON, VP/CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, 734-953-2252, bdebm@oc.homecomm.net

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

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

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— Philip Power