

Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

Will roundabouts work with Motown attitudes?

When city officials in Vail, Colo., proposed roundabouts to relieve traffic congestion, local newspapers published editorials strongly opposing the circular intersections.

As delays eased and the number of accidents dropped dramatically, those editors had to eat their words. We're not going to make the same mistake.

After watching several presentations on roundabouts and how they'll fit into the Northwestern connector project area — bounded by 14 Mile, West Maple, Orchard Lake and Haggerty Roads — we're sold on the concept.

Film of the Vail intersections before and after roundabouts showed a dramatic transformation in traffic patterns. Where vehicles once stacked up on high-way ramps, they now move with only a few seconds' delay into the intersection, where drivers follow well-marked lanes to their destinations.

Watching the tape, it seemed as though traffic volumes had actually been reduced, leading one to wonder whether people were just avoiding those intersections because they hated the roundabouts. The actual counts, however, show that's not the case.

We're all used to seeing intersections one way: Cars lined up at traffic lights, with a few at a time moving through when the light turns green. Vehicles are always moving through a roundabout, either in the circle or merging in from adjacent streets.

Clearly, officials are convinced the 11 roundabouts will resolve issues in the Northwestern project. Residents who've seen the roundabout presentation have

had good things to say. But those aren't the drivers who worry us.

Frankly, the folks from the Detroit metro area who answered a recent poll conducted by the Steel Alliance and AAA Midatlantic make us wonder whether roundabouts will ever work 'round here. They were asked to "self-report" their driving behaviors.

They think they're tolerant and less

It's the tortoise and the hare. And of course the tortoise always wins.

likely to exhibit aggressive driving habits, like horn honking and running yellow lights. In short, they consider themselves "turtles."

And denial ain't just a river in Egypt. What we all see on local streets and freeways is the stuff of water cooler and dinner table conversations every day of the week. Whether it's the Motor City mindset or just the frustration of too much traffic on too few roads, drivers

move fast and furious. Internationally renowned roundabout designer Barry Crown said that an actual work in favor of roundabouts, however, is to urge drivers to remember his philosophy as roundabouts become a way of life over the next decade:

"Aggressive drivers like roundabouts," he said. "We get in easy, but he keeps moving. It's the tortoise and the hare. And of course, the tortoise always wins."

Afterthought: You may have noticed a few "letters to the editor" on this and our Op-Ed page just across the way. The vast majority were generated regarding the Monday, June 11 School Board election, which includes two millage questions of vital importance to Farmington Schools and Oakland Community College. We've gone on record supporting Frank Reid and Phil Neuman for Farmington School Board seats, and in favor of both millages, whose losses would be devastating. On Sunday, we'll publish information about polling places and times. The rest, gentle readers, is up to you. It's your job to get to the polls on Monday or to call the District office — (248) 489-3341 — for information about absentee ballots. Those are due by Saturday, June 9. Don't let us down.

Remember the value of preserving historic homes

Detroit isn't known for preservation of its historic buildings, but that doesn't mean suburbanites can't do their part to preserve local history.

"Many of our suburbs are well over 50 years old," said Katherine Clarkson, executive director of Preservation Wayne, an historic preservation organization that works primarily in Detroit. Clarkson and others are trying to raise awareness of the historic nature of suburbs, including those in western Wayne and Oakland counties.

She noted in a speech to the Oakland Branch, American Association of University Women, recently that her organization offers tours of various parts of Detroit. The tours aim to let residents know the history of buildings.

"You forget (the buildings) used to be very productive citizens of the community," Clarkson said May 19 to the AAUW at the Clawson Steak House.

She noted homeowners get a credit on their Michigan income tax for restoration costs. The 50-year mark is the standard for historic designation.

Clarkson, a Highland Park resident, urges those interested suburbanites to work with local historical societies to save structures for the future. "First, realize what you have."

Libraries are helpful, too, she said, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation (www.nthp.org) is a good source, along with the statewide group, the Michigan Historic Preservation Network. The latter, based in Clarkston, is "helpful but understaffed."

Detroit's building boom of the teens and 1920s left some structures that were outdated but could be renovated, such as lively stables. Clarkson advocates "mixed use" of former factories where manufacturing has left transforming into loft living.

Such endeavors have their place in the suburbs, too, where interest in historic structures is strong.

A number of suburban schools have buried time capsules, and it's both fun

and educational to dig them up and see what's changed and what's stayed the same.

Plymouth-Canton AAUW Landmarks members have found neighbors a good source of information on Plymouth and Canton homes and other structures they research. Clarkson also recommends

It shouldn't always be out with the old, in with the new.

talking to neighbors about the history of structures; such talking has the added benefit of strengthening community ties.

Her organization, founded in 1975 as a Wayne State University campus group, offers workshops for developers on rehabilitation of historic structures. Clarkson noted the plethora of pharmacies in the area, but Detroit's virtual absence of movie theaters.

"They overbuilt in the suburbs," Theater owners can't pay their loans in the suburbs, Clarkson said, and can't open in Detroit. Indeed, some suburban theaters are in trouble and the Oakland Mall AMC in Troy has closed.

Clarkson bemoaned the fact that 72 buildings, many of them viable businesses, were torn down to make way for Campus Park in Detroit. She praised Mike Ilitch's commitment to the Fox renovation, but questioned his other efforts.

Land use is a complex topic, not easy to cover in a newspaper editorial, but as we celebrate Detroit's 300th anniversary, we should remember the historic value of many of our community buildings. It shouldn't always be out with the old and in with the new.

Even some newer communities, such as Westland, offer much in terms of historic value. Let's celebrate our history, and our historic buildings, taking pride in where we have been.

THE PERFECT GIFT FOR THE MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE...



Geoff Brooks' cartoon is a cartoon.

LETTERS

■ A champion

Pam Christian is a champion for our community's children and I enthusiastically endorse her candidacy for school board. I have known Pam as a neighbor and leader of my daughter in Girl Scouts for over two years, and she is an outstanding role model for young and old alike.

Pam is Junior Troop leader at Forest, advising and mentoring fourth and fifth graders. As an indication of her commitment, she doesn't even have one of her own daughters in it. Pam teaches the girls through example — responsibility, integrity, moral character, commitment and the importance of community service.

I know that Pam is very committed to the Forest PTA as well as, serving on the Executive Board as Secretary, and the Diversity Committee. She shares Forest's commitment to the educational success of our children by promoting and modeling responsible parenting, playing an integral role in assisting student learning through her volunteering and seeking opportunities to enhance parent involvement.

Pam Christian will be tireless in her efforts to secure a high quality education that supports the development of all children. Pam Christian certainly has my vote.

Donyale DeSouza
Farmington Hills

the PTA, Commission of Youth and Families, sporting events, Cities Government meetings, legislative affairs in Lansing and did not mention the hours of homework in preparation of Board meetings.

Now balance with this work, your family and a range of family commitments. I do know that the board members attend more meetings and events than most realize and I do know they agonize over striking the balance.

Since being a board member is more than just attending two meetings a month, I have to wonder how Mr. Goshorn will attend every district event while balancing a full-time position and meeting family commitments?

Frank Reid has clearly demonstrated his ability to strike the balance and has my continued support and vote. To date, the only other candidate I have heard commit to dedicating full attention to being a Trustee of our School District is Pam Christian. I believe she knows the task ahead of her. Her commitment has been demonstrated by her many volunteer efforts within the school community. She is accessible and proactive. Pam Christian has my full support and my vote.

Joe Suoke

Former School Board Trustee

■ Responds to charges

I have been made aware that current members of the Farmington School Board and others are circulating accusatory letters that, sadly, are riddled with inaccuracies. I'm sorry that so many people have misconceptions about what has happened during the course of the past year at Forest.

My son, Josh, a fourth-grader at Forest School, came home at the start of the school year with a schedule that required him to have four different teachers — his homeroom teacher, a science teacher, a social studies/math teacher and a reading teacher. The kids switch between classes several times during the day. This system has been called "platooning" or "team teaching."

We met with Mr. Lewis (the building principal) during the second week of school with another family and expressed our concern about the amount of switching and the number of teachers our children would have. I have learned that other parents also expressed concerns about this system. Our son was switched to a different group so that he had one less teacher. However, our more basic concerns with platooning were not addressed.

In October, we met with Mr. Lewis, Judy White (the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction) and several teachers. Judy White suggested that one of the parents meet with Kathy Nyborg, who is a district specialist in language arts. I didn't participate in that meeting, so I don't know exactly what happened. I do know that nothing changed, and we continued to have concerns about the switching and the lack of integration in language arts.

Finally, in early February, when it seemed that nothing was going to change, several parents spoke at the school board meeting to voice their concerns with platooning. After the meeting, Dr. Masfield promised that he would have Judy White investigate the situation and get in contact with us. After winter break, we did hear from Judy White, who essentially said that Mr. Lewis would be contacting us so that we could tell him our concerns

(again).

In mid-March, a group met with Judy White and Mr. Lewis. Judy White promised that she would set up an in-service with the teachers to discuss our concerns and see what could be done.

In late April, when it became apparent that nothing had been done, a group of parents decided to hold a meeting to determine whether there were others that shared our concerns about the platooning system. I was not part of the group that organized this meeting, but I agreed to be a speaker at the meeting to explain the chronology of what had taken place during the course of the year.

It is my understanding that notes were taped to the doors of all parents in the 3rd, 4th and 6th grades. They were hand delivered in order to save on postage.

The meeting took place on April 26 at the Faith Covenant Church. Virtually everyone agreed that the language arts program was woefully inadequate. The major disagreement was whether the platooning was or was not a factor in the deficiency.

The good news about all of this is that the teachers and administration held their in-service meeting, and have agreed to make changes for next year. Apparently some of the details will have to ironed out, but we are very pleased with these changes.

Ultimately, reasonable people can disagree on whether the platooning system is good or bad; it is very unfortunate that those who believe it is good have attacked those of us who have serious questions about it.

Phil Neuman
Farmington Hills

■ Thanks for article

Just finished reading the article about Mona Armstrong. (Senior league veteran golfs every Monday 5/24) It certainly caught the essence of Mona. I have received 2 phone calls already, requesting information about our senior ladies league. Thank you again for presenting the information in such an interesting format.

Mary Anita McHugh
league chairwoman
Farmington Hills

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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