

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.

Let the sun shine in on Farmington council pick

We're all for expedience in government, but when it comes to issues of critical importance — like who'll fill the new vacancy on the Farmington City Council — we think officials should really stop and take a long, hard look at what they're doing.

More importantly, we believe citizens should be looking closely at how their city officials are choosing to represent their best interests. For one thing, council members appear to be making a decision of critical importance to residents with virtually no public input or even a willingness to identify the potential candidates.

Above all that, Farmington city officials appear to have no trouble at all flouting the spirit, if not the actual letter, of Michigan's "sunshine laws," which are designed to ensure that government keeps its business open and accessible to the people it serves.

Rather than reviewing all the potential applicants as a body, in a meeting that would have to be open to the public, officials are asking anyone interested to contact each city council member separately.

Under the law, council members can't skirt open meeting requirements by discussing business amongst themselves over the telephone or via e-mail and making their decisions outside an open meeting. They aren't supposed to talk about public business in anything other than a public forum.

While we're not accusing them of flagrantly violating the Open Meetings Act, we have to wonder how officials are going to properly evaluate applicants, discuss the issues and

make an informed decision, all at their April 15 meeting — especially when they plan to take applications up until that date.

Don't council members see how that might look in residents' eyes?

We can understand the city wanting to keep the applicants' names out of the public eye until they're sure they've got a final list to discuss. If that's the case, why don't officials then invite those people in and interview them, in a public meeting open to all residents, before a decision is made?

It's not just that this person will have big shoes to fill, but whoever takes on the rest of city councilman Bill Hartsock's unexpired term will have a leg up in the next election. We're not saying that we doubt the council's ability to select a successor, nor are we accusing them of violating any laws. The fact of the matter is, the city's charter doesn't set forth a procedure or rule for filling a vacant council seat, only that officials must appoint someone within 60 days. It isn't that we think they're going to choose someone who's unqualified.

It is simply the matter-of-fact way officials have gone about the process that irks us and makes us wonder what it is they're chartering so close to the vest. We're journalists. That's our job. But you're residents. This is your city. We recommend that you push for a change in the city's charter, to add provisions that would invite your input and participation in the process of filling unexpired council terms. It may not be the most expedient way to do things, but in our opinion, it's the best.

Hey candidates, school board challenges calling

Local school boards have an awesome responsibility. Besides being charged with leading the education of our young people, they have responsibility for some of the biggest budgets around.

And they face some of the biggest challenges.

First, there's the educational bureaucracy set up in every school district, starting at the top with a superintendent and moving down the hierarchical chain. Many of those employees are paid by union contract and that creates special challenges for board members.

Staffing consumes 80 percent or so of school district budgets, so during these difficult economic times budget cutting usually means tough decisions about people and their jobs. And then there's the state funding issue, which creates another entire challenge for school boards — including Farmington School District's looming budget deficit. Even though Clarencville is a small district, officials face some big issues. The future of community education and the onset of block scheduling are just a few.

All of this preamble is to note the incredible

importance of the job that school board members do. And before the application deadline passes, we'd like to encourage all serious potential candidates to consider joining the race to seek election to the school board, which voters will decide on June 10.

Deadline is 4 p.m. April 8, and applications must be withdrawn at the school board office — for Farmington, it's on Shawneese in the Schulman Administrative Building; for Clarencville, it's on Middlebelt north of Seven Mile. Two seats are up in both districts; so far, there aren't more board candidates than there are positions to be had. Running for school board is not a challenge to be taken lightly. As a board member, you represent the school district and must look out for the best interests of the entire district, including people who don't have pupils in school.

You must take a big-picture view of issues; be willing to be responsive to the public; and know the difference between when it's best to reach consensus with your peers and when it's best to take a stand.

In all, it's an awesome, difficult task. Any takers?

County shouldn't stall on issuing CCW permits

From the time the lame-duck state legislature passed the controversial law making it easier to get a concealed weapons permit that went into effect July 1, the law has been beset by problems.

First, more than two dozen county prosecutors around the state, figuring the law was weak and fearing they'd end up handing out permits to people they'd later be forced to prosecute for gun crimes, resigned from their respective gun boards.

Then permit seekers approached their gun boards in droves in an effort to take advantage of the less-stringent CCW requirements. County officials, watching their operations bog down in paperwork, sought help from local police departments.

However, most of those local departments suffer from budget constraints and manpower shortages of their own, and a majority have balked at providing much help to the county, whose pleas have fallen largely on deaf ears.

And then there were the sheer numbers. Wayne County has received more than 5,200 applications since the new law went into effect; Oakland County has gotten more than 6,300 requests. The difference is, the other counties appear to be handling the workload better. Oakland County has processed better than 80 percent of its applications; Wayne County less than 50 percent.

Recent figures show Wayne County still has some 3,000 permits awaiting approval,

the highest percentage in the state, according to state police figures. Wayne County Sheriff Robert Ficano has pleaded manpower poverty, noting that until recently the county only had one person processing the requests. They've since upped that to nearly a dozen but, in our mind, it's still not good enough. The process is still lagging at unacceptable levels. Ficano has asked for additional funding to handle the workload, but has so far been rebuffed.

Companies all over corporate America are being asked to do more with less. It's time for Wayne County to follow suit.

We were among the first to question the wisdom of a law that makes it easier to get a permit to carry a concealed weapon. And though there's no real evidence yet to suggest the less-restrictive law has heightened gun violence, we still think it was an ill-conceived idea pushed through by legislators who were themselves being pushed by the powerful gun lobby to use their influence one last time.

Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Duggan has never been a big fan of the new law. We hope his distaste for the law isn't coloring the county's handling of the situation. It is, in fact, now the law, and thousands of law-abiding county residents are following it to the letter. It's time for the county to do what it takes to serve a constituency that deserves nothing less.



LETTERS

Absolute power corrupts

This is in regards to Phil Power's Jan. 3rd editorial on the elimination of straight ticket voting. Absolute powers corrupt absolutely, and I very much doubt if the Democratic Party held the Governorship, controlled both houses of the Michigan Legislature and then held millions of dollars in political contributions over the heads of the Michigan Supreme Court, that they would do any different.

How quickly we forget the 2000 elections, millions of corrupted ballots, hundreds of corrupted officials and a final decision not coming the people's ballots but the Supreme Court.

We had a "non-partisan" Federal Election Commission chaired by three Democrats and three Republicans deciding millions of dollars in election funding for the Reform Party. We had a debate process not conducted by the League of Women Voters, but by a beer company that had the Green Party presidential candidate Ralph Nader physically thrown-out of the event for just trying to watch.

Is it any wonder that half the people have stop voting in this increasingly rigged and corrupted system?

So Democrats, if you still think restoring straight party voting or the ending of having to report every last dollar to the state is campaign reform, walk a mile in the Green, Libertarian or Reform parties shoes. These parties are not even allowed on the ballot in the State's so called "Democratic and Republican" primary elections.

This is not a democratic process, but is a private club the Democratic and Republican Parties have created by and for themselves. It allows them to exclusively parade their candidate before an automatically divide public. Yet everyone including Independent voters (who are the majority of Michigan's voters) and the people from the other three major parties must pay taxes for these phony elections.

Clearly the only way to fix the election process is create a fair level playing field for all the parties. However this will never happen as long as the Democrats and Republicans are caught up in this private game of rigging and twisting the election law to their own party's advantage each time.

Eric Borregard
Farmington Hills
Mr. Borregard is the Green Party candidate for U.S. Senate.

School start findings

I find the debate and process with respect to changing high school start times interesting. While not being passionate one way or the other, curiosity had me do my own research and attend the town hall meeting where the superintendent and task force were to solicit input in a democratic manner.

On the process side, I found it astonishing that the task force was established not to determine the pros and cons of whether this was the right action for Farmington to do at this time, but rather what were others doing and what it meant to implement early start times in the district. The task force readily admits that whether we could afford it or whether it should be a top priority in these times of fiscal constraints was not their responsibility or charge.

It was also admitted that there were

no committed dissenters, yet 95% of the 100-plus parents, teachers and students who attended this town hall meeting were emphatically against this change. The superintendent states that the task force was developed because of the vast number of people he spoke to who felt it was a "no brainer" and felt like the right thing to do.

On the debate side, it's amazing how if you visit the district-supplied web site you only get the proponent's side of the issue, mainly from Edina, Minnesota, and little or nothing on the fact that all districts in Minnesota have not seen a positive overall effect. No one claims to prove that late start has, or ever will improve academic performance.

No data was shown that we have an attendance problem. Future "creative solutions" would be developed to handle any adverse impacts. It, of course, was regrettable that this was being looked at in the fiscally difficult times, but the board will have to make some tough decisions, not the task force.

So it will be time for our elected school board to make some "tough decisions" as from all appearances the task force and the superintendent are very clear that this decision is a "no brainer." One hopes our school board uses their collective brains when deciding whether a "change" such as this is needed at the expense of fewer teachers, larger class sizes and reduced support activities for our schools, some can "feel good."

William Boskey
Farmington Hills

Advice for future judges

I see there are at least three candidates for Judge for the soon to be vacated position at the 47th District Court. I note that two of the candidates either hold an elected or appointed position.

Obviously, if elected, the successful candidate will have to resign from the appointed or elected office. Thus, I assume you are both more interested in a higher calling than your current positions.

While I am confident that neither of you would use your current position to further your higher aspirations, I recommend that you both resign. That will show your full and complete commitment to the position you both seek.

I also recommend that all of the current and future candidates refuse to accept any contributions from attorneys and PACs that are associated with law firms. As a general note, I find PACs particularly offensive in that it is nothing more than a way to circumvent the law that prohibits contributions from corporations.

I am sure this will be welcome news for all the attorneys who now practice or may practice before the 47th District and who may feel obligated to contribute to one or perhaps all the candidates. While I realize that attorneys who contribute to candidates obviously are not looking to curry favor should they ever appear before the successful candidate, this will simply eliminate any doubt or suspicion, no matter how unfounded.

Thomas C. DeWard
Farmington Hills

Applauds school board

I would like to applaud the ongoing

efforts of our Farmington Public School Board for the time, consideration and the forum they supply to the taxpayers.

After viewing the recent emotionally charged school board meeting concerning the potential shared time program with Our Lady of Sorrows, I was extremely impressed by the way Mrs. Webb and her fellow board members handled all of the negativity.

From their reaction to the comments about our public school teachers, to their handling of the outbursts and interruptions, I must commend our board on their compassion towards the OLS parents, their composure under fire, and their consistent professionalism. How lucky we are to know that as parents of students attending public schools, we have a welcome venue where we can air our questions and concerns.

Whether it involves altering school boundaries, the issue of rising school numbers, changes in the curriculum, closing campuses for lunch or most recently the late start discussions, we know that our voices can and will be heard. Thank goodness it is not up to just one person in the Farmington Public School system to alter the destiny of our children.

As several of our board members stated to the OLS parents, their questions need to be directed to their own administration. Stop making our board members out to be the villains in this! They are simply looking out for the welfare of their own students which is something they have been elected to do. They are the ones listening but have little control over the powers that be at OLS.

There is somewhat of a history of controversy with the administration of OLS and anyone who sends kids to school there is aware of the situation. Please start dealing with these issues on your home turf, and respect our school board for their integrity and professionalism as we do.

Thank you Dr. Maxfield, Mrs. Webb, Mrs. Enberg, Mrs. Brouillette, Mr. Inch, Mr. Sharp, Mr. Reid and Mrs. Christensen.

Janet Kelmigian
Farmington Hills

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your 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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