

OUR VIEWS

Time to work on downtown fabric

Imagine downtown Farmington as a thriving retail center with a variety of shops, restaurants and service businesses that draw scores of residents into the city every day of the week.

Imagine it, because it's possible, thanks to a three-year grant that will bring consultants from Oakland County's Mainstreet program into our community. Community leaders worked hard to convince them people still believe in downtown Farmington, and this is where the rubber meets the road.

What we find refreshing about county and national Mainstreet representatives is that they seem to have no trouble thinking outside the box. Their savvy, innovative approach consists of a four-pronged attack plan: organization, promotion, design and economic restructuring.

Simply put, they want to help our community transform its downtown area, building on a commitment to historic preservation. Granted, Farmington's retail fabric doesn't feature as many historic buildings as downtown Northville or Plymouth, but we still have enough threads to pull together.

What's required now is a fair amount of needle-work.

Those who participated in the dialogue sessions voiced concerns about having a state road running through town, the lack of parking, disjointed business hours and — a common topic of conversation everywhere — the plethora of discount stores in the Downtown Farmington Business Center.

Consultants seemed confident no challenge would be too great to overcome. But changing downtown-physical characteristics isn't their primary concern.

"The biggest challenge in any community is to get everybody on the same page," said Bob Donahue, Oakland County's Mainstreet coordinator. "The biggest part of Mainstreet is community involvement."

Committees that will work in each of the four plan areas will be formed soon. If you have any skills, talents or even just an interest in building a better downtown Farmington, now's the time to step forward.

You know what they say about a stitch in time.

Issue on the map, but problem hardly solved

We applaud voters in western Wayne County — and across the state — for agreeing that untreated sewage has become Michigan's messiest problem. Of course, maybe folks dredged up recent basement flooding experiences before casting their ballot on Proposal 2.

The proposal, which will allow the state to borrow \$1 billion to fight sewage treatment plant overhauls, was handled. It also creates a state fund to provide low-interest loans to local governments for sewer improvements.

It was the only state proposal among four on the Nov. 5 ballot that was adopted by voters, who are in a conservative mood these days when the subject is money.

Statewide, voters approved it by a 60-40 margin; Farmington and Farmington Hills voters supported it nearly two to one.

The plan will pump up to \$100 million a year over the next 10 years into efforts to help keep raw sewage out of lakes and streams. During heavy rains, untreated runoff often flows into state waterways. Taxes won't go up, although the bonds must eventually be paid off and an already tight general fund will be stretched — albeit modestly — even further.

The bad news is that the money set aside through Proposal 2 barely addresses the problem. We guess \$1 billion just doesn't go very far these days.

The Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments has estimated metro Detroit will need at least \$26 billion over the next 30 years to fix crumbling sewers, build sewage treatment plants and find other, innovative ways to treat water pollution. Statewide, the figure is \$50 billion, according to SEMCOG.

That means Michigan is going to have to turn to the federal government for help. U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Troy, acknowledges there is a need. "This is a national problem and the EPA continues to impose mandates on a variety of communities where the infrastructure is breaking down," Knollenberg said.

Sprawl is also a concern, as some environmentalists critical of Proposal 2 pointed out. Heavy development in previously rural areas is at least partly responsible for our current water quality crisis. Unchecked development — without measures to address water quality issues — will likely make the situation worse and price tag even higher.



Michael Stafford, director of the Cranbrook Institute of Science, talks about water quality issues near Kingswood Lake on the campus of the Cranbrook Educational Community in Bloomfield Hills. He wants to establish a Center for Watershed Education at the institute.

LETTERS

Oliverio remembered

I wanted to thank Joni Hubred for writing a column about Ron Oliverio after he passed away. Ron's death occurred shortly after the Farmington Area Republican Club had put together our latest newsletter, so we were unable to include a fitting and timely tribute to him.

Like many people, I first became aware of Ron from a distance as he engaged in one of his many runs for the Farmington Hills City Council. As I got to know him in the last year and a half of his life, I can honestly say that no one cared more about the success of the Republican party, and no one was more of a challenge for the FARC to deal with. It is that dichotomy that keeps Ron alive today as the subject of many conversations.

Now he has gone off to that great elephant graveyard, to discuss politics with Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt for all eternity. All of us in the FARC hope he has found peace.

Christopher M. Cummins
Farmington Hills

Too soon to run

Over the past week, I have had numerous inquiries from all over the community regarding my intentions of running for mayor next November.

I thought I should make it clear, that although I am indeed giving serious consideration to running for mayor in November 2003, I do not feel it is necessary that I have to make a final decision at this point. Nor do I feel it is necessary or appropriate to make that decision public if I had.

Starting a campaign for mayor a year in advance is very concerning to me. I feel it politicizes the office, brings a partisan politics approach to a local, ceremonial and non-partisan position, runs the risk of having a yearlong campaign going on from the council bench, and puts an unnecessary burden on the city administration and the community at large to deal with this for far longer than we need to.

The launching of a campaign at this point would put (others who might consider running) in a position of having to make that decision prematurely and could cost the community some good potential candidates. At the end of the day, most residents are not paying attention to this at this point anyway. It is way too early.

Let's not commit support to anyone yet and get this campaign going a year in advance when doing so is counterproductive to what the office stands for. And, let's not forget, Mayor Bates has a full year left in office; she is alive and well and living in Farmington Hills!

Jon Grant
Farmington Hills City Council member

Sorry direction

I very much share the concerns of Mark Peters ("Letters," 11/07/02) regarding the sorry direction of downtown Farmington.

ing the sorry direction of downtown Farmington retail.

The recent addition of Bargain Books to the west end of the Downtown Farmington Center illustrate how desperately the DDA needs competent leadership. I hope Brent Morgan has the drive to get the situation turned around and stop the discount tall-chasing so Farmington doesn't squander its opportunities.

When confronted with the question of the community's desire for a restaurant or food market tenant in that space, the official rationalization comes with the tired "parking" excuse. It's a downtown setting. How about wanting to be a pedestrian, where people can actually walk and enjoy the surroundings? And what about the large, mostly unused parking lot less than one city block away behind the center?

Vibrant cities are all about hustle and bustle. Most people don't expect to go to Royal Oak, Rochester, or even Northville and park at the door they're headed to. Walking to one's destination is expected and welcomed, because of the atmosphere and surroundings passed along the way. "Dollar" and "closeout" stores turn me and many others in the opposite direction.

This has been my community for 20 years. I walk, run, and bike ride through town regularly and patronize many merchants. Our downtown is a jewel that needs cleaning and polishing.

Linda Cumushlan-Spranger
Farmington Hills

View of charters

You recently published a letter "No more charters" which spoke as to what public schools provide that charter schools do not. I would like to offer another opinion.

I found the Farmington Public Elementary Schools to be of a nurturing environment. However, I wasn't very happy that they gave inflated grades and wouldn't hold back my child that could not perform at grade level.

I found Farmington Public Secondary Schools to be more of a processing plant, get them in, get them out. There are so many students packed in, there is no way for the teachers to get to know the students. So how do they who needs help?

A charter school gave my children something Farmington Public Schools could not. A caring education in a nurturing environment which enabled their self-esteem to grow. Literature and English are treated as separate courses and actually taught.

More charter schools need to be available to provide parents with an alternative. As people realize just how little public schools do for their child, they need to have a non-tuition alternative. Charter Schools was the best thing we could have done for our children. Now they are learning and feeling good about it.

I hope the state does raise the limit on the number of charter schools in Michigan.

Laura Malinowski
Farmington Hills

One-sided reporting

The one-sided content on the front page of the pre-election edition of the Farmington Observer was a keen disappointment to me.

While many of us have political biases to which we are entitled, the tilted reporting (not just the editorializing) of this community newspaper falls far short of that to which this community is entitled.

The front page of the Nov. 3, 2002, edition could not have served any more as a campaign piece for our Governor Elect than if she had prepared it herself.

The heart of the page portrayed a vivid photo of the gubernatorial candidate, flanked on each side by a Granholm article. Totally absent was any reporting of the campaign of the other major party candidate, Republican Richard Posthumus.

I respect the right of everyone to their political convictions. I acknowledge the liberal Democratic posture of the Observer. I suggest that this newspaper as a public vehicle should offer some objective level of reporting. That is what we expect. That is what we should receive. That did not occur.

Harold A. Larson
Farmington Hills

No compromise

In response to the letter by Denise Wood in the Nov. 7 Observer:

Do you honestly believe that by letting your child take a gym or an art class in Our Lady of Sorrows school, without a crucifix in the room, that a child's Catholicity would be threatened? Come on now. Get a grip.

I suggest you take a poll of all the other parents in our school and see just how many agree with you.

And I also suggest you have a little faith in our leadership. Don't you think they have studied this and have seen these programs in action in other schools? No one's religion has been compromised.

Neil Young
Farmington

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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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.

QUOTABLE

"It's gotten to be one of the special parts of Christmas. It's a fulfilling experience."

Carol Brichford, Farmington Hills resident, unicyclist and Salvation Army bell ringer