

OUR VIEWS

Traffic problem isn't all cars

When it comes to problems associated with parking in downtown Farmington, lots of people have proposed solutions.

But Realtor David Cornwell has presented the most interesting perspective we've seen about the problem itself, which he contends is a good problem to have.

Cornwell's right. Downtown Farmington has struggled for years to rebuild a solid base of customer traffic. The construction of John Cowley & Sons, restoration of the Civic Theatre, a Main Street grant award and promotions from the newly re-formed Downtown Farmington merchants group have drawn lots of attention to the heart of our community.

The problem with all those forward moves is that they haven't come with solid planning for the traffic, vehicle and pedestrian, their success creates.

Downtown Farmington sits on the brink of a literal rebirth, but a number of hurdles must be addressed and in timely fashion, or progress will slow — maybe even stop altogether. In a letter to city officials, Cornwell said downtown has enough parking, it's just not conveniently located to most businesses, not well-identified with good signage and it's tough for people to walk from their parked cars.

He points out an aspect of this issue that also stands on its own as the single largest problem faced by downtown businesses: It's just not safe to walk downtown.

Officials say there have been few pedestrian accidents downtown. Cornwell points out that may well be because there are few pedestrians downtown. Cars routinely drive out in front of bikers, nose into intersections while pedestrians are crossing and speed down Grand River from Orchard Lake west.

There are only two regulated crosswalks on Grand River, and don't even get us started on the strip of bricked pavement between Starbucks and the Methodist church. Cars don't navigate that intersection well, much less pedestrians.

If officials really want to address parking and traffic flow issues in downtown Farmington, they must first make it safe for pedestrians to walk from parking lots to businesses. Traffic enforcement and signage aren't enough — we suggest pulling together all the players in this game, from the Michigan Department of Transportation to the Road Commission of Oakland County and map out a better plan.

If nothing else, it would be a step in the right direction.

AYP list doesn't offer true picture

The latest measurement of student achievement known as adequate yearly progress, or AYP, targets certain public and charter schools as being on the road to failure.

While we understand the universal and lofty goal that every child should be given the chance to succeed, we believe the AYP method spelled out in the federal No Child Left Behind legislation unjustly burdens districts that have consistently performed at or above state and national standards.

First, tracking scores in every category on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program test is standard practice and required in every school with North Central Association accreditation. Most public schools in Oakland and western Wayne County are NCA-accredited, so internal data is already being used to pinpoint areas of concern or to hone curricula.

The AYP reports, which are dubbed as "the teeth" of the accountability factor in the No Child Left Behind legislation, leave much to guess and a lot to assume.

Still, school administrators throughout Oakland County and most of western Wayne County breathed a sigh of relief when their schools didn't appear on the list as needing to improve.

Their fears of landing on the list are justified. Sanctions spelled out in the federal legislation only apply to Title I schools — those that receive federal funding for special programming based on the number of students who receive free or reduced price lunches according to their household income.

So, again, we're left wondering what good the AYP reports will do for the non-Title I schools.

We know what it will do. The list will lead to inaccurate snapshots of how schools are really doing.



BILL ERESLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The sign behind Dimitri's warns that parking is for customers only. Other owners of private lots in downtown Farmington have put up signs to protect their customers' parking.

LETTERS

An education

On Tuesday, March 25, we were in downtown Birmingham and as we came to the main intersection, there were groups of high school students at each of the four corners waving peace signs with all kinds of signage printing, yelling to motorists to gain attention, yelling in the cars of the passers-by and each group changing corners as the light changed.

I stopped one of the elders, who was obviously one of the teachers from Roper School, as she was hurrying by and asked as to why these children weren't in school. She blithely and smugly reminded me that "They are out here doing what they believe in." My response was "Says who?"

As she hurried along I couldn't help but call to her and ask "Do these kids know who George Washington is? Do they know what the Fourth of July stands for? And in a last desperate move to gain a response I asked 'shouldn't they be in school studying some unrevised American History?'"

No response as she sped beyond earshot. Of course, in our country all people have a right to demonstrate. However, when children who today have an abysmal lack of knowledge concerning our American history and are allowed out on a school day to become nattering nabobs for a cause about which they know so little, it is then reason in itself for re-evaluation as to what is happening in too many schools.

Contrast that with the school and the youngsters at Farmington Hills where we passed a school located on 13 Mile Road near Farmington Road replete with patriotic adornments in the front yard and USA painted on a large stone. Yes, there is hope yet.

George M. Haddad
Franklin

Looting

"Looting must be stopped!" In the '60s, Americans considered this behavior "freedom of expression." University activists hurled rocks at police and soldiers trying to restore law and order. After Vietnam was abandoned to the communists, many militants became faculty members and others joined the media.

That generation now has tenure in our universities and editorial control of the media. Why do Boomers now see this as criminal behavior that must be stopped immediately? "Looting" that was once part of our curricula should qualify Iraqi youth for enrollment in our finest institutions.

If our troops fired on Iraqi children for stealing, Kent State would seem like an American picnic.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

Patriotism

One of last week's letters, titled "Appalled," was from a man whose son is in the National Guard and found it disgraceful that Aldo Vagnozzi had a "No War" sign outside his office.

He seemed to be voicing a popular opinion these days... that good, patriotic Americans should "support President

Bush and our troops." But does that connection between love of country and government make sense?

Do the war supporters think it is unpatriotic to appreciate the history, people and founding principles of our country? Do they think it's unpatriotic to demand that Congress, and not the President, declare war as stated in the Constitution?

What's a person to do when he believes more in the "old" Washington/Jefferson, "limited government" type of patriotism and not the "new" Clinton/Bush type that "waves the flag," "supports the troops" and uses big government to "spread democracy"?

Well, you can speak out against the war as Aldo has done with his "No War" sign. But for some of us, it's because we care about our country and appreciate our soldiers that we dissent.

We don't want our soldiers' lives or our taxes wasted on aggressive, non-defensive wars that make the US more hated around the world (and more prone to terrorism). We don't like seeing our government misuse our military and lend our beloved republic down the dead-end path so many other warrior empires have taken in history. We would prefer to be the peaceful, beacon of liberty that our founders intended.

Jerry Smith
Farmington

Applauds courage

A recent letter by one of your readers complained of (State Rep.) Aldo Vagnozzi's "No War" sign outside his office door.

I, for one, applaud Mr. Vagnozzi's courage for standing up for what he believes is right. In a time where any opposition to the current administration is viewed as nothing less than a terrorist act, it gives me hope that not all of our freedoms have been canceled in the name of "Homeland Security."

The author of said letter explained that his son was a member of the National Guard of Michigan. I, like Aldo Vagnozzi, am a veteran of active duty during war time. Aldo served during World War II, I joined during the Vietnam conflict. It was the rights of all my countrymen that I chose to defend, not just for those that thought like me.

While I proudly support our fine young men and women of the armed forces, and am very grateful for their service, I also am against squandering this most precious resource for the private agendas and political aspirations of a few misguided power mongers. I am always amazed by the inability of simple minds to comprehend that one can be both opposed to an unjust war and patriotic at the same time. Aldo Vagnozzi, by means of his serving in the U.S. Army, and his many years of public service has demonstrated beyond any doubt his patriotism.

The failure to find alleged weapons of mass destruction, the imperialism shrouded as "Liberation," and the inconclusive hunt for Saddam Hussein coupled with the killing of hundreds of innocent Iraqis and the use of powerful weapons of mass destruction unleashed by the U.S. will result in nothing less than a growing hatred of Americans in the Arab world, and a climate that will spawn a thousand Osama Bin Ladens.

God bless you Aldo for being a real patriot.

Robert Rossi
Farmington

Flanders pride

I am a parent of a third-grade student at Flanders Elementary. I am very proud of our school and the many accomplishments our staff and students have achieved over the years.

I have been an involved Flanders parent for eight years. I have seen first-hand how truly committed the Flanders staff is to our children.

As a parent, I have been very involved in school and district committees. Most recently, I was a parent representative on the committee to review Section 105 schools of choice for our district. I have come to realize just how much effort is put into making sure that the best possible decisions are made for our district.

With regard to out-of-district schools of choice, there was a tremendous amount of information to look at.

I believe that principals Mary Joyce Reader and Mark Morawski were wise to look at section 105 schools of choice at this time in anticipation of future trends. Flanders Elementary is a wonderful neighborhood school. By maintaining programs and keeping schools open, we can hopefully continue to attract young families to our community.

Kelly Zupp
Farmington

Post-Saddam

"Fools rush in where wise men never go." What will a post Saddam Iraq be like after an American invasion and takeover?

We can get in, but how do we get out? Would we be able to get out leaving Iraq a better place than it is now? The Middle East culture is nothing like American culture. And Iraq sits right square in the middle of the Middle East with its economy as one dog show...oil. That is, unless sand suddenly becomes a valuable export product.

If we know what's good for our own country, and I'm beginning to suspect our administration does not, we should try to get back out of Iraq ASAP. Let Iraq get handle on its own government by its own citizens with minimal help and let them run their own country.

Kenneth Keop
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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QUOTABLE

"They come to downtown Farmington and they want to find a space in front of a business as soon as they get there."

— Farmington Traffic and Safety Board member Duane Reynolds

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