

OUR VIEWS

City should treat variances with care

You could call them "signs of the times," these ordinance variances passed by Farmington City Council members for business people looking to keep up in the marketplace.

Officials know it's time to revamp the city's sign ordinance and are wisely choosing to wrap that process into the Main Street program. In the meantime, officials reminded business owners at a recent city council meeting that a variance basically gives them permission to violate the law.

Council members meant to stress the gravity with which variances should be considered by business owners. However, we urge officials to keep the same thing in mind as they deliberate.

Applications are considered on a case-by-case basis; all applicants should be considered equally.

Communication key with businesses

The owners of Salon Nouveau on Grand River came into the Farmington City Council's June 2 meeting with a full head of steam.

They were upset, and rightly so, to learn through a news article that their property had been discussed at a public meeting of the Traffic and Safety Board. The Cooks' property includes a parking lot, and board members had talked about the number of parking spaces gained if their lot and those adjacent were combined.

City officials argued, and rightly so, that what gets into print isn't necessarily what's going to happen. The Traffic and Safety Board only makes recommendations to the council, they said.

Still, officials could have saved the Cooks a lot of effort and headed off a great deal of ill will by simply telling them their property had been part of the conversation.

Rather than casting blame on the newspaper, perhaps city officials might consider telling business owners when their properties have been discussed at a public meeting, even if no official action is taken. They would undoubtedly head off rumors and might even make strides toward gaining the cooperation of folks who make significant contributions to our communities.

Normally, reporters enjoy being the first to break a news story. But in this case, we wouldn't mind getting scooped.

When talking trash, problem begins here

Apparently when it comes to Canadian trash we're mad as heck and we're not going to take it anymore.

That's what area politicians have been hearing from their constituents over the last few months since it became widely known that Toronto was trucking all its trash over the Ambassador Bridge to a landfill in Sumpter Township.

Recently public hearings began to gauge just how vociferous this opposition is and draw support for a drawer full of proposed state legislation to either limit, clean up or de facto ban trash from Canada and neighboring states. As many legislators know, several of these well-intentioned proposals will not pass constitutional muster but will make voters feel better about their representatives.

The sticking point is Sec. 8, paragraph 3 of the U.S. Constitution which grants to Congress the power "to regulate commerce with foreign nations and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes." Congress in turn has approved the North American Free Trade Agreement that allows private landfills to take Canadian trash and allows Canadian landfills to take American trash, including quite a bit from Michigan (some of it hazardous).

Stepped up state inspections of landfills have discovered that Canadian trash is actually cleaner than Michigan generated trash (which isn't as bad as Wisconsin and Indiana trash).

We also support legislation to expand the bottle and can deposit law to include more categories (such as water and juice bottles), though we understand that something needs to be done to compensate small businesses for the cost impaired. We also support more community recycling programs.

The problem isn't foreign waste. The problem is waste and finding the best, safest ways to handle it.



City and school district officials have teamed up with law enforcement and the Call to Action Coalition to drive home the point that parents should do all they can to keep alcohol out of their children's hands. Here's hoping we all get through this summer without another disastrous house party.

Consider the IA

Newsweek magazine's June 2 edition has named Oakland School's International Academy in Bloomfield Hills "the number one public high school in the country," based on AP and IB test scores.

For parents preparing their kids for college, the *Newsweek* article may come as a rude awakening, confusing them even more as to which scores for tests have become the next gold standard for college admissions.

The SAT and ACT may soon join the MEAP's tests as irrelevant predictors of future college success, mostly because so many students are taking these tests more than once, skewing the results. The AP and IB tests are only taken once and represent actual college level work, giving a truer snap shot of a student's academic ability.

The Farmington Public Schools are one of 13 Oakland County districts that currently send their students to the IA school. Each year a lottery is held among Farmington eighth-graders for the 20 seats that makes up the district's share of the school.

Most of the funding for the IA comes from the basic state aid funding that every Michigan student receives, around \$6,700, which is about \$3,000 less than what the other Farmington students currently receive. As a result of this limited funding the IA has one of the most austere high school buildings you'll ever see. For example, it has no gymnasium, no pool, no library and no outside sports field development. They do however have an outstanding school orchestra that is consistently one of the best in the state.

In this time of school budget cutting, the Farmington School Board should be considering the IA model as a way of getting more out of its other high schools with less money. They should invest in more arts and AP or IB type curriculums. At the same time, they should cut back on those programs that distract a student's attention away from academic study time.

Farmington Schools has one high school that is ranked number one in academics nationally. Why not bring that same formula to the other three Farmington High Schools?

Eric Borregard
Farmington Hills

Don't raise SBT

Michigan's single Business Tax is one of the most complex ways to obtain revenue from job creators in the nation. It requires compilation of revenue, payroll, inventory and dozens of other business accounting items, adding some together, subtracting others and creating good work for many accountants.

Now some lawmakers who are opposed to cutting the state's budget are looking for new revenues by changing the past practices that have been used to determine the SBT burden on Michigan's companies - a burden that some national

experts say push Michigan to the 4th highest business taxes in the country. Of course, these changes all result in higher tax revenues for the state - about \$100 million more in total.

These aren't loophole closings. They are fundamental changes in the state's tax system. They come at a time when Michigan's businesses are facing some of the toughest challenges they have faced in 20 years or more.

We don't need taxes. We need a state budget that is balanced. It's time to ask Rep. Aldo Vignozzi where he stands on these key issues - for higher taxes, or for balancing the state's budget without raising taxes on Michigan businesses.

Harry A. Lomason
retired chairman, CEO
Douglas and Lomason Co.
Farmington Hills

Skills for old guard

So our cowardly political "old guard" has resorted once again to sending out their perpetual skills. Big surprise.

Community activist Christopher Cummins has the audacity to address lake front property rights and is shot down by some goody two-shoes environmental cone-head.

Let's get to the truth people. Mr. Cummins and his living relatives own a substantial lake-front estate on Lake Michigan. Wouldn't it be nice if each and every one of us had family with enough vision to provide such a beautiful property for the unborn generations?

And wouldn't it be nice if each and every one of us made the sacrifices to pay the taxes and upkeep for such a property? In this case, Mr. Cummins and family have done just that - accomplished what most Michigan citizens only dream about.

And what? Mr. Cummins and his family have the nerve to keep the place neat and tidy?

Funny how the green-eyed monster, hiding behind phony environmental righteousness, has a "problem" with how we maintain our own properties.

Test assured. Once again, this is nothing more than class envy. The perpetual battle between these families and individuals who achieve excellence vs. those who sit back and baste them for leading a rich and rewarding life.

Those who achieve success will always be a threat to the political old guard. I encourage all political newcomers to ignore the cowardly old guard, their twabit skills - and their staff apologists at our local newspapers.

Mark T. Gordaner
Farmington Hills

Swain says thanks

I would like to thank everyone who came out to vote on Monday. Your participation in the democratic process sets an example for the future voters of our area to get involved.

I would especially like to thank those who helped me with my campaign. It took many dedicated people to help convey my message of "Communication, Equity, Consistency, and Efficiency." Some hosted morning coffees to allow me the opportunity to explain my philosophy and position on issues, some placed signs in their yard, and some distributed brochures and talked with their friends to encourage participation in the election process.

Without my husband, Joel and son, Jon's support, this could have been a very long two months. I would also like to thank my daughter, Shannon, and her classmates in Mrs. Neil's third grade class at Beechview. Many of them made me beautiful good luck cards at the beginning of my campaign. They gave me the inspiration and focus I needed throughout the two months I spent talking with and listening to citizens of our community.

We have some challenges ahead of us in the Farmington Public Schools. But, after meeting so many people, I am convinced that these challenges will be met with positive attitudes, enthusiasm, and a desire to come together as a community. We all have the same goal... to provide the tools and resources so our children can unlock the door into the world of education and achieve their goals and dreams.

I want to congratulate Karen Bolen on her victory in this election. I wish her success as a school board member and offer my services.

Cheryl Swain
Farmington Hills

Ah, relief

I read Thomas Hunter's letter about the new outhouses going up at 14 Mile and Farmington Road.

I am quite "relieved" now that their true function has been revealed. All this time I figured they were toll booths to raise money for MDOT's new road projects.

Now Mr. Thomas doesn't have to hold his bladder, and I can hold onto my change!

Andy Nickshoff
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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Part of HomeTown Communications Network™

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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 awesome, but at the same time it's scary."
- Carol Sethl, mother of quadruplets