

OBSERVATION POINT

Local Votes Carry On Suburban Area Government Revolution

By Philip H. Power
Publisher

Back in the days just after World War II, when the suburbs were beginning to happen but no one was noticing it, there were three kinds of local government in this area.

First was the City of Detroit, already beginning to burst by the seams with families who now had a car and wanted to live somewhere else than in the concrete jungle. Second were a series of old, small, essentially farming towns - Plymouth and Farmington are good examples - scattered 10 to 20 miles from the Detroit city limits. Third were a series of townships, often the classical 36-square miles in size, with thinly settled farms and a few clumps of population at larger cross roads.

Now, nearly 30 years later, the suburbs have tripled, quadrupled even quintupled their population. In the wake of this astronomical growth, old forms of local government have buckled and changed, not in response to a vast overall plan but in reaction to new kinds of problems caused by new kinds of communities.

LIVONIA AND SOUTHFIELD, previously townships, incorporated themselves as new, enormous cities - Livonia is 36 square miles, for example, and was accomplished by simply incorporating the entire township.

Westland tried for years to cope with its expanding population under the guise of Nankin Township but finally chose cityhood in 1966. Redford Township maintained a township form of government, but of a special sort - a Charter Township - giving it essentially all the powers of an incorporated city.

Garden City's existence as a city pre-dated the suburban wave of development that hit other communities in this area.

In all these cases, township local government forms gradually came to be regarded as inappropriate for rapidly growing, high-density suburban communities and were changed.

What was left out by the local government revolution were Farmington, Plymouth and Northville - old, small cities, newly surrounded by townships experiencing much more rapid growth than the core areas.

Quarrels developed between city and township. Cities tried to annex township tax base to fatten their own coffers; townships tried to limit city expansion, hoping that in days to come they would overcome the landlocked city by growth.

Two groups of political leaders grew up, one in city and one in township, each secure with its own power base and fearful that change would jeopardize their office. City and township began to duplicate each other services - fire, police, assessment, record keeping - and taxpayers began to howl about wasted funds.

These feuds are nothing more than symptoms that the next stage of local government evolution in the suburbs must take place in the old city-new township areas of Farmington, Plymouth and Northville.

THIS IS WHY it is so significant that yesterday voters in Farmington Township went to the polls to vote on a proposed new charter making the township into the new City of Farmington Hills.

In a drive spearheaded by newly elected Township Supervisor Robert McConnell and charter pusher Richard Frankel, enormous progress has been made in increasing public awareness that a high-density suburban community simply cannot effectively be run under a township system.

The drive also represents one more step in the 10-year-old effort to bring together Farmington City and Township. One direct step to accomplish this - a consolidation election requiring "Yes" votes from city, township and the two villages within the township failed in November, 1969, when the city turned down the idea.

At that time, those pushing for a unified Farmington decided to

concentrate their energy on making the township into a city, with the notion that in the future it would be easier to join two cities together than a city and a township.

This week's election represents a whole of a lot of work by a skilled and thoughtful charter commission as well as a well-run campaign by literally hundreds of public spirited citizens who are not afraid to get out and work to make their community a better place to live. They deserve a lot of praise.

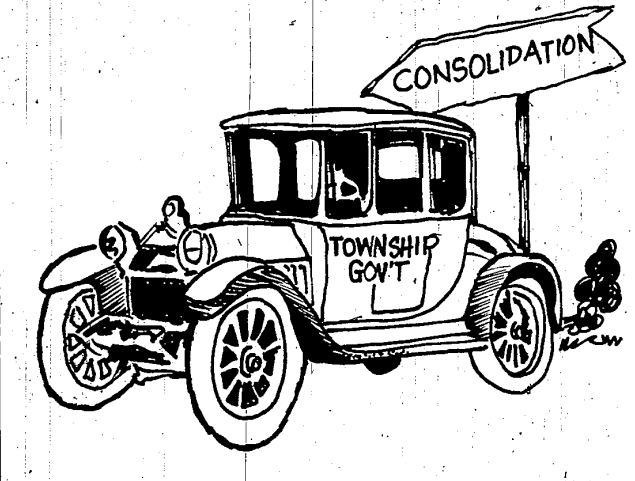
THE AREA's other interesting vote took place in Northville, and concerned an attempt by the city to annex the township, on grounds that together the two communities could provide a higher level of services at a lower tax rate than they could separately.

The vote will be watched very carefully in Plymouth, where city and township have snarled and snarled at each other, for years, but where cooler heads are beginning to intervene.

The two votes taken this week - incorporation of a city with a charter and annexation - represent two methods of bringing to completion the local government revolution that started back in the late 1940's as the suburbs just got going.

They represent real progress, in a period when it's hard to find it.

FASTER! FASTER!



Phil Thompson writes

Time To End 'Sour Grapes' Allegations

Deals, deals and more deals. That appears to be the fact of modern living, especially in politics and especially in those communities showing mushrooming growth.

Perhaps it all comes to mind because of the attention being fo-

cused on the Watergate case and the manner in which many of the nation's top political figures have become involved.

Politics has always been a dirty game. It is one in which one candidate can make all sorts of statements about the opposition and

never get around to proving one... unless the press forces it. It's something that is accepted and something that is quickly forgotten once the election is over.

Politicians label such actions as "just part of the game" - something that goes with campaigns and is accepted. In most cases, all candidates are more or less guilty of name calling and are prepared to get the same kind of treatment from the opposition.

All of which leads into the meat of an incident that suddenly hit the fan in Canton Township and caused what we believe is needless embarrassment to a dedicated supervisor who has served the township well and with great integrity over a long period of time.

We refer to the published allegations that Canton Township Supervisor Phil Dingley may have been guilty of a conflict of interest in the sale of a portion of his farm to an individual who later represented interests seeking the cable television contract for the township.

Township trustees did award the contract to the company represented by the individual for a 30-year period.

We have a strong feeling that there was quite a bit of irresponsible reporting involved and that the story as printed (not in this newspaper) was that given to reporters by an another man representing a rival cable television outfit that never got around to making a bid for the township contract.

It could well be a case of "sour grapes" over a failure to land a cable franchise and then unloading information quickly swallowed by an ambitious but gullible reporter.

Why do we say this? This newspaper knew of the land sale incident two or three weeks before the story broke in metropolitan newspapers. But after a thorough check of the situation and after going through the information offered by the other cable television outfit, we decided not to break the story until we had all of the facts.

The Observer was told of Township Supervisor Dingley selling

a portion of his farm for \$7,000 an acre (an accepted price in Canton Township). It was told of the 30-year contract awarded a cable television company, the lone bidder. The representative of the successful bidder was the same person who had bought the land.

We were told a second bid for the cable franchise had been presented but not brought up in the township board meeting. A check showed the company had not made a presentation because it didn't know the matter was coming up.

The Observer talked separately with Dingley about the possibility of a conflict of interest. He informed us that he had talked the matter over very carefully with Township Attorney William Sempliner after making the sale and was advised it was not a conflict of interest.

In the discussion with Sempliner, Dingley even offered to resign his supervisor's position to avoid conflict of interest if necessary, and again was told it would not be.

We have dealt with Dingley for the better part of 12 years, dating back to the time when he was township clerk under then Supervisor Pete Stein and have never found him to be anything but an honest, hard working official with a desire to do his best for his community. No one has ever questioned his integrity in all those years.

Now because of the tremendous growth in the community his reputation has been questioned, in our view without sufficient fact.

It's about time the scandal mongers in the area or in the Detroit newspaper's who delight in cutting up public officials, settle down and stop thinking of how they can help build a better community with sensible suggestions instead of malicious and unsubstantiated rumors.

Canton Township is headed for big things that can only be accomplished by full cooperation of all and not nasty criticism of every action of public officials by some narrow minded, so-called do-gooders.

HCMA Thinks Big; Gets Slapped Down

"Think Big" is the sign you used to see in many business offices a few years back.

"Think Small" seems to be today's motto in governmental circles, where the accent is on (a) getting as much as possible for yourself and (b) getting someone else to pay for it.

Last week the Wayne County Board of Commissioners almost unanimously voted to hold up \$2.4 million in property taxes to the five-county Huron-Clinton Metro-

politan Authority (HCMA), an agency which operates nine "metroparks."

Commissioners gave three basic reasons: HCMA was developing too much in the hinterlands of Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw counties; many Wayne residents lack cars and can't drive out to Kensington Park or Metropolitan Beach; the HCMA board is malapportioned under the "one man, one vote" principle.

Develop Detroit's Belle Isle in-

stead, the Wayne board suggested.

Several years ago, Livingston County was in a mood to quit HCMA. Folks there figured they've got theirs, so don't let those city folks drive out here and use our woods and lakes.

In March, rural residents of Washtenaw County turned out to a hearing in an Ann Arbor school to oppose HCMA's plan for a Mill Creek Metropark, which would be a little larger (4,900 acres) than Kensington.

Commerce Township residents, about three years back, hollered down a plan for an Oakland County park on what was formerly a private park site. That meeting had unmistakable racial overtones.

The message to HCMA seems to be: Think small; develop parks closer to people.

You can see HCMA's dilemma. Director David Laidlaw, who runs some of the finest parks in the country, points out that roughly half the HCMA park users are Wayne County residents. That's proportional to the amount of taxes Wayne pays (56 per cent) and number of residents (59 per cent).

HCMA did make an honest but weakly managed attempt to get enough money to take over Belle Isle. Voters, however, turned it down. County officials must take some of the blame for the defeat because the cleverly-worded ballot proposal was going to give only half of the new money to HCMA while county allegation boards were to get the other half.

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher

The Livonia Observer - The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer - The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer - The Southfield News & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer

MEMBER
NEWSWAPERS OF AMERICA

Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.
36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Canton Township, Farmington,
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Bingham Farms