

Spitz: Room for reasonable voices in SMOC settlement offer

By [Julia Spitz/Daily News staff](#)

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FRAMINGHAM — Two months ago, people talked.

They didn't shout. They didn't throw punches. They didn't threaten to sue one another. They just talked.

At the end of the April 28 forum at the Lutheran Church of Framingham, it seemed like the talk wouldn't amount to anything more than proof Framingham residents can voice opposing viewpoints with some degree of civility.

It sure didn't seem as if anyone who could stop the insanity cared.

SMOC didn't show any signs of stopping the legal juggernaut, and Town Meeting approved more money to defend Framingham against the South Middlesex Opportunity Council's lawsuit.

But apparently someone was listening. Apparently someone thought it was worth paying attention to the fact about 75 people turned up, even though they didn't think their voices would be heard. Apparently someone thought there was merit in what those voices had to say.

Is SMOC's offer to end the suit the end of the issue? Absolutely not. The problems didn't start in October 2007, when the suit was filed. They grew and grew, bit by bit, one problem at a time.

Have they gotten worse? You bet. It's not just about the money, even though estimates on what's been spent so far are truly frightening. It's about arrogance and ill will. It's about people feeling like SMOC has steamrolled over the town. It's about Framingham Police Officer Phil Hurton getting shot and seriously injured by a man who had no connection to Framingham other than SMOC. It's about people who felt their voices were being ignored.

The letter sent to selectmen by Bruce Hulme, president of SMOC and South Middlesex Housing Non-Profit Corporation, incorporates ideas that were voiced at the April forum and in formats including the Opinion pages of this newspaper: a Leadership Council made up of representatives from local groups such as clergy, police, the chamber of commerce and selectmen, as well as SMOC, to "address the past and future relationship between social service agencies and the town of Framingham," and a Zoning Review Task Force that would include representatives from different town boards.

The letter acknowledges all parties have better things to do with the money spent on lawyers, particularly in times like these.

It ends with hope "that this offer can lead to a productive and constructive dialogue which will ultimately lead to resolution of the litigation."

Is everyone going to walk away happy? Absolutely not.

But maybe voices of reason will be heard.

(Julia Spitz can be reached at 508-626-3968 or jspitz@cnc.com.)

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