

# Seniors must hustle for fuel bill assist

By LYNN ORR

There's some federal dollars available for paying high fuel bills from last winter—but most senior citizens who may be eligible for the program are unaware of its existence.

Both Rep. Wilbur Brotherton (Farmington) and Nancy Bates, Farmington Area Commission on Aging member, are worried that eligible senior citizens won't meet the Aug. 15 deadline to qualify for the funds.

"I'm sure some of our senior citizens qualify," says Ms. Bates, but she expects "hundreds of thousands of dollars to be turned back to the federal government for lack of applicants."

The application forms for the program were just made available last week, says Brotherton, who's arranging to have them distributed at senior citizen groups in the area. But most while he's concerned that the message will fail to reach eligible citizens before the deadline.

Applicants 65 years of age and older with low incomes are being sought for the federally funded program administered by the state of Michigan. If seniors qualify, a federal pot of up to \$250 may be made directly to utility

suppliers for outstanding bills from last winter. Cash payments of up to \$50 may be made directly to senior citizens without overdue bills from last winter, but seniors who nevertheless experienced fuel bill hardships.

**TO APPLY** for the program eligible senior citizens must fill out an application and return it to the Special Energy Crisis Intervention Program in Lansing, who can also supply senior citizens with an application form. The toll free number for information is 1-800-292-5930.

Forms will also be available at department of Social Services offices, the area office on Aging, or Rep. Brotherton's office in Lansing. Eligible senior citizens must be 65 years of age or older who experienced financial need as a result of the high fuel-utility cost last winter, and whose total household income was at or lower than federal guidelines.

Income eligibility is as follows: at or below \$3,713 for single persons; \$4,913 for two-person families; \$6,113 for three-person families; \$7,313 for four-person families; \$8,513 for five-person families; and \$9,713 for six-person families.

Another question on the application form asks if utilities or fuel supplies were disconnected or threatened with disconnection as of April 1, 1977, but a "Yes" answer is not required to qualify for the program. Fuel supply companies are being asked to cooperate with the special program, and unpaid balances remaining after the federal payment may be paid on a deferred payment program with some suppliers.

**FUEL SUPPLIERS** have also been asked to assume a major role in identifying those senior citizens who have outstanding heating bills so that applications for assistance can be mailed to them, according to Brotherton. Ms. Bates hopes any eligible Farmington area senior citizens are able to apply for the program, but she is also critical of the low-income standards needed for eligibility.

"The elderly in the suburbs are really in a pinch," she says. "They've worked hard to acquire a little security, but the economy keeps cutting into that. They may own a house and a car, but that doesn't mean their credit situation is any better. They're often just getting by."



Senior citizens can be a little more relaxed next time the scenery looks like this, knowing there's a federal pot of money to help them with their fuel bills. But application deadline is Aug. 15.

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## 4 seats at stake

# Candidates battle it out as election nears

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

A waste of time and money was the way two Farmington Hills City Council candidates described a recent study of the city's recreation facilities and needs at a pre-election meeting.

Other candidates added to the criticism of the city's operation by commenting on the feasibility of senior citizen housing and the desirability of low income housing during Section 5's Homeowners' Association candidates night, Thursday, Farmington Hills primary election is August 2.

Candidate Ben Marks, a Housing Commissioner, took the blame for a "ludicrous" recreation facility report at the feet of City Mgr. George Majoros and Recreation Director Doug Gaynor.

"I don't think they even saw the report before they submitted it to council," Marks said. "It's an insult to the council."

"MAJOROS AND GAYNOR should be taken to task for it," he said.

Incumbent Earl Oppertbauer agreed with Marks. Both announced that they were reluctant to pay for the report.

"I frankly think our money wasn't well spent," Oppertbauer said. Money which was earmarked for the study "went down the rat-hole," according to the incumbent.

Bill and Childs Associates, a planning consultant firm, submitted a study which reiterated the results of a 1975 voter referendum, according to Oppertbauer. The study recommends the city develop small neighborhood parks and a large regional facility.

Once developed, Farmington Hills recreation program should be available to all, according to Marks and candidate Cathy Jones.

"There should be someplace where kids can go for free," Marks said. He noted that even area swimming facilities

charge a fee.

Mrs. Jones, a teacher, agreed with Marks. She has passed out recreation department flyers for programs in her classes.

**WHEN THEY RECEIVED** the flyers many students said they wanted to join the program. Next day, those same students came back without the fees because their parents couldn't afford them.

"Their parents say it's too much (money) to play," she said.

Low income housing also took a couple of knocks from the candidates. Candidate Mel Panovich adopted his opposition to low income housing as his main issue in the campaign. He urged voters to look toward Southfield's problems as an indication of what could happen to Farmington Hills if low income housing made its debut.

With federal funds will come federal regulations, according to Panovich. "You know what's going to happen when the federal government comes in and says this is your house and you move in here. The houses won't be kept up," he said.

"I don't know where you can build any homes in this area for a low cost," Oppertbauer said.

Senior citizens housing received support but candidates voiced disapproval of changing the city's master plan.

"Senior citizens aren't burns or delinquents. They're people who have used their savings for medical expenses. They've had husbands and sons fight in the war," Jack Renaud said.

"I HAVE TWO aces and I want to go on record as saying they can build anything on it for senior citizens," he said.

One of the ways senior housing can be reserved for members of the community and their parents is by building it with money received from sell-

ing bonds, instead of a federal grant, according to Oppertbauer. It would still be possible to keep the rents under \$200-\$250 per month, he said.

"I stand solidly behind senior citizen housing," he said. Fears that senior citizen housing would cause property values to decrease are "poppycock" according to Oppertbauer.

Candidate George Roberts supported senior housing but had reservations about approving the sites that have been proposed.

"It's nice to be for senior housing, if its mid-rise I don't want it in my backyard," Roberts said. Building senior apartments on Orchard Lake Road would be undesirable.

"Who the hell wants to live on Orchard Lake next to a Rexall's drug

store, Taco Bell and a gas station?" he asked.

If an apartment for seniors was constructed, businesses would build around it, he argued.

"I don't want to see senior citizen housing all over the area," said Marks. "But I don't think that anyone wants to see that."

**MARKS SUPPORT** of a 60 foot high mid-rise senior housing was opposed by Joe Alkateeb, who urged the master plan be followed.

"The Master Plan cost \$87,000. You've got to stop taking pot shots at it. We're playing too many games with the master plan," Alkateeb said.

Farmington Hills needs to draw up another master plan for the future,

listing the problems that need to be solved, he said.

"Let's do it in a very systematic, professional way," he suggested.

His support of the present master plan leaves room for supporting senior citizens housing, he added.

"I'm accused of being against senior citizens. That's not true. I'm going to be a senior citizen myself someday. I'm willing to sit down with William Twigg and go over the problem with him," he said.

Twigg is the leader of the Nardi-neers, a senior citizen group which applied for the zoning change so they could build an elderly housing project in Farmington Hills.

Joann (Jody) Soronen advocated sticking to the master plan under the threat of creating a "hodge podge" of

different zones in the city.

**PRESSURE TO CHANGE** the master plan can come from other cities, as well, she said. Therefore, Farmington Hills ought to be aware of what is happening in neighboring cities.

"High rise on our borders can cause an increased pressure on us to change our zoning," she said.

Another source of pressure to change the zoning can come from persons who are using senior citizens housing as a lever to affect city changes, according to Robert Anzovar.

He advocated honoring the results of the senior citizen survey. "There are places in this city for the buildings and they should be built if that's what the people want," he said.

# Earning money with money is part of treasurer's job

By LYNN ORR

Back in township days, more than \$1 million in township funds could be found sitting in checking accounts, collecting dust rather than interest.

But no longer do city treasurers watch money sit, waiting for the bills to come due. Municipal financing and investing is big business these days, as city treasurers and finance officers attempt to earn money with money.

Farmington Hills Treasurer Girard Miller's investment portfolio runs an average daily balance ranging from \$8-10 million. The city will receive and disperse more than \$75 million this fiscal year, Miller says. And it's

his job to make sure the city is getting the best possible return on the money that doesn't have to be immediately paid out.

A new state law makes that job a little more complicated for finance officers; but the law also may help cities earn better returns on investments.

Prior to the legislation's passage, municipal funds investments were restricted to commercial bank certificates of deposit (such as certain time certificates); U.S. Treasury issues (such as bonds and notes); and Home Loan bank bonds.

The new law opens the door to investments in 29 additional U.S. agencies, including: the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA); Small Business Administration; federal land banks; and the Federal National Mortgage Association, the most popular investment for municipalities across the nation, Miller explains.

"Agency securities such as these usually give a better return," says Miller. "Those involved with the market consider the agencies as good as gold as far as the principal risk," he says, although the returns on agency bonds are less attractive than a couple of years ago when fewer municipalities were allowed in the field.

The bill also added commercial paper to the list of allowable investments, which made some state legislators a little nervous, Miller admits.

**COMMERCIAL PAPER** consists of technically unsecured promissory notes of a private corporation. Under the law, municipalities are restricted to investments with Prime 1 rated corporations and only 50 per cent of any amount can be put into commercial paper.

A corporation like General Motors, for example, could borrow money from a municipality with the promise to pay the principal plus interest in no more than nine months. Unlike U.S. Treasury notes, there is no guarantee that the money will be repaid, Miller says. But since private corporations

with Prime 1 status have several lines of credit, they are only "risky" in the event of a catastrophic economic crisis, he points out.

"I'm not all that excited about commercial paper," Miller says. "The purely technical and fundamental security of these investments is comparatively weaker than that of U.S. Treasury bills and perhaps even commercial bank certificates of deposit."

But the law's restrictions virtually assure an investing finance officer that default is unlikely, he adds.

The new law liberalizes the investments of municipal funds in Michigan, which has been one of Miller's goals since he arrived in Farmington Hills a year ago after serving as a finance officer in New Jersey.

"I'm not all that gungho about building up a big track record as the kid who made \$14 million for the city," says Miller, who is just 26. "The general opinion is that most municipal treasurers are ultra-conservative because we work in a political environment."

**WITH THE** expertise available to municipal treasurers and the restrictions on investments, Miller would argue with the theory that more permissive laws might result in chaos—"the notion being that they ought not to be entrusted with such permissive authority for fear that they will inevitably place funds in some ridiculous security that goes the way of the Edsel."

"I think it unfortunate that such opinion exists and that the public opinion of the finance officer could be so unfavorable."

It would seem, however, that the investments of Farmington Hills taxpayers' money have sustained a good track record with some exceptions.

"Certain funds comprising 30 per cent of our investment portfolio sustained a \$30,000 paper loss in January 1977, despite the fact that the investments were made in legally proper U.S. government securities in accordance with existing Michigan law," Miller says, emphasizing that hindsight often haunts a finance officer.

"Had I access to the right crystal ball, we would have sold off the entire portfolio on Dec. 31, 1976. But running counter to this short-term loss was the fact that since July 1976, we had amassed capital gains value of more than \$150,000 on the U.S. government portfolio."

Where does Miller get the funds to invest in a long-term enterprise when many of the city's receipts must be paid out on a short-term basis?

One choice is water revenue funds. For example, if the city wants to build a water main, it's usually necessary to sell bonds to raise the money. But since taxpayers are assessed for the water main, over the years the city will accrue funds in the water revenue account. The bonds originally sold to pay for the water main, however, may not be dated for maturation (when the principal is repaid) for some years down the road.

As the city treasurer, it's Miller's job to invest those funds to the best advantage.

"Back in August, we had about \$1 million available in water revenue

(Continued on page 4A)



## Keep your chin up

Jeff Locklear strains at the bar during the chin-up competition in the 10th annual Detroit Metropolitan Youth Fitness Meet, held last Thursday at Willow Metropark near Flat Rock. The meet drew more

than 2,500 youngsters from 53 Detroit area communities. (By story and additional photo, see Section A, page. (Staff photo by Gary Friedman)

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RIDE 'EM COWBOY

The Jaycees rodeo is past history, but staff photographer Gary Friedman was to capture some of its highlights. Check page 8A to recall some of the dustier moments or see what you missed if you weren't among the crowds.