

# Farmington Observer

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Twenty-Five Cents

## Taxpayers socked with assessment hikes

By LYNN ORR

You might have been shocked by your January utility bills, but the City of Farmington and Farmington Hills assessors' offices have another surprise awaiting residents.

Assessments increased on an average of 10 per cent in the Hills, according to Robert Romer, assessor, and 11-12 per cent in the City of Farmington, according to John Sailer, assessor.

Farmington City residents received their annual assessment notice last week; Farmington Hills homeowners can look forward to being notified in the immediate future.

Before you decide that scouring your local official is the appropriate response, Oakland County's role in your tax increase should be examined.

Most homeowners are unaware that the state's counties determine approx-

imately what increases are due in each particular area. This year, Oakland County determined that both Farmington cities' assessments should increase by about 10 per cent, and it's up to the city assessor to decide how to attain that goal.

"OAKLAND COUNTY looks at three years of sales and comes up with an average adjustment value," Sailer said. "If the state isn't happy with the county's determination, the state can adjust it."

A few years ago, state assessors decided that Macomb County was a little lax in the tax department and directed a whopping 32 per cent across-the-board assessment increase to all residents.

"If we don't do our job, the state will do it for us," Sailer said. "People assume that we raise taxes because the City of Farmington needs money, but I have no input on the budget ex-

cept to submit my department's budget. If the market value started going down, we would lower the assessments."

According to state guidelines, homes should be assessed at 50 per cent of their market value, so if your home would sell for \$30,000, your assessment would be \$15,000. If the market and the sale price goes up to \$35,000, your assessment should go up to \$17,500.

Consequently, if your assessment increases by 10 per cent, your property taxes will also increase by 10 per cent.

Farmington Hills market values are increasing between eight and 12 per cent, according to Romer. "Property's going up about one per cent a month," he said.

And smaller homes are going up faster than larger homes, he added.

"WHEN YOU GET up to the upper

end of the scale, inflation doesn't effect the price as dramatically because the market is smaller."

Both Sailer and Romer follow state guidelines in assessing property, but each man uses a slightly different approach to determine the market value of a particular area.

Copies of deeds from home sales are submitted to the assessors' offices, and average market value is determined from area sales.

But Sailer goes one step further by filing cards of each house sold in the City of Farmington, including a photograph and detailed description of the house sold.

Commercial properties in both cities increased at a lower rate than residential properties, again because market value determines the assessment adjustment.

City of Farmington commercial property rose slightly in market value, and Sailer reported fewer vacancies in apartment rentals.

Romer contends, however, that com-

mmercial property in Farmington Hills is selling at a similar rate as it was last year.

"There's a glut of office buildings, and rents were lower than they were a year ago," he said.

He estimates that most commercial property is assessed fairly close to the 50 per cent evaluation.

BOTH MEN URGED residents to make appointments with the assessors' offices if they have any questions regarding assessments.

City of Farmington assessors' hearings are being scheduled for Feb. 14-18, and Sailer welcomes residents to bring in any evidence that would indicate an unjust assessment.

"It's a reason for a change in adjustment. I'm happy to make it," he said.

If the assessor cannot satisfy residents' questions, the next step is to make an appointment with the Board of Review, which is comprised of three local residents chosen by the

city council, which hears residents' complaints.

This year, the boards of review for both cities will hear grievances March 14 and 15, a schedule which may be extended if applications are substantial.

"The board of review makes the decision about whether the assessment is valid, but they don't reassess upwards," Sailer said.

The boards also can grant hardship exemptions, where there are mitigating circumstances, and the City of Farmington granted two such exemptions last year.

IF A RESIDENT is still dissatisfied, the next step is the state tax tribunal. The resident must write to Lansing for an application form within 30 days after the review.

"If they have any questions, they should call," Romer said.

"It's the responsibility of the taxpayer to complain if he thinks the assessment is off," Sailer added.



Alison Frontier, who attends the first grade, puts her heart into tacking a lacy Valentine to the resource room door. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

## Flanders students give their hearts

Music becomes more dissonant with every generation, hemlines plunge and rise erratically and the slang of 10 years past is incomprehensible to today's children.

But some things remain the same such as children carefully pasting paper lace on a heart-shaped piece of cardboard and calling it a Valentine's card.

Each generation contributes something new to the old custom.

Flanders Elementary School students decided to string their hearts together and make a mobile for their favorite companions.

Laurie Brennan's Valentine will be presented to her Morgan horse Christy.

"I might give it to my horse. His birthday's on Valentine's Day," the fifth grade student explained.

Pink and white scraps of paper cluttered her desk as she pasted her present together.

Across the room from her sat Julie Laurence, who was quietly working on a present for her father.

AS SHE ARRANGED the paper to her liking, she shyly looked up and confided in a soft voice that she had a surprise for her father.

Quietly and firmly, the little girl in the blue sweater refused to reveal what she had concocted for her dad's Valentine.

"It's a surprise," she said. Sitting behind Julie was Marie Waters who revealed that her efforts would go to her mother.

"I'm going to hang it up," she explained.

"I like Valentine's Day. It's fun," Marie said.

Her classmate Tim Miller, had his materials neatly stacked on his desk.

"I'm going to give it to my mother," he explained, as he worked on his project.

"I like Valentine's Day," he shrugged.

His feelings about the day were shared by Doug Muller.

"I'm going to give my card to my mother," he said, matter-of-factly.

"Valentine's Day is OK," he said. Down the hall from the fifth grade class, six-year-old Alison Frontier was thinking about her little Valentine card.

"I brought it for my class," she said, before skipping back to her room.

Some things will remain the same. Just as children jiggle cardboard and paper lace to make a Valentine's Day card, they will keep on singling out one holiday as their favorite.

"Christmas," said Doug and Tim.

And Julie, Marie and Laurie agreed with them.



Marie Waters thinks happy thoughts while she pastes her Valentine's Day card together. Students in the fifth grade at Flanders Elementary School strung the hearts together to make a mobile. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)

## Historic district hit by heavier home taxes

By LYNN ORR

Although residential property assessments in the City of Farmington have increased an average of 11-12 per cent, some homeowners, particularly those in the historical district downtown, winced when they received hefty jumps in their assessments.

Assessments on residential property east and west of Farmington Road and south of Shiawassee increased on an average of 37.9 per cent, and the area south of Grand River and west of Farmington Rd., including Macomb and Liberty Streets, caught an average 26.7 per cent increase.

Last year, the historical district assessments jumped about 25 per cent, which means that some homeowners have seen their property tax jump by as much as 75 per cent in the last two years.

A dramatic increase in property values in the area and reappraisals last summer account for the increased tax bite, according to City of Farmington Assessor John Sailer.

"Most properties have not been looked at since 1958," Sailer said, and as a result, the historical district was lagging far behind the rest of the city in coming up to the 50 per cent assessment of market value.

SAILER IS IN the process of a five-year plan to reappraise the entire city.

"The goal is equity," he said, "to make sure all our descriptions are accurate and make sure we're treating everyone fairly."

Prices of homes in the historical district have jumped dramatically in recent years, and although assessments won't be raised because of decorating or singular home improvements, a number of renovations that increase the property value will force an assessment up.

"In each neighborhood we ran a sales study," Sailer said. "We don't raise the assessment because someone paints his house, but this year about 80 per cent of the increases were due to an increase in market value."

In reappraising a home, Sailer sends out a letter to the homeowner explaining his intentions, and the owner can refuse to allow the assessor inside the house, a move that is sometimes to the owner's disadvantage.

Sailer takes all measurements and records depreciation, such as cracks in the wall because of age. He then classes the house A, B, C, or D, ac-

ording to where it fits in the state guidelines.

Rating depends on the quality of construction, architectural design, amount of space and other factors which are not entirely objective, Sailer admits.

"I LOOK AT EACH neighborhood and home with relatively the same standards," he said. And letting your house go to ruin won't necessarily lower the assessment since location is the most weighty factor in assessing."

Determining a cost schedule, or the expense in reproducing the home today, is also figured in, according to a state manual.

"We come up with a total value and

(Continued on page 5A)

## Tax rebates are on Hills agenda

Continuing the tax rebate program, hiring a consultant to help Farmington Hills fill out grant applications and zoning requests are among the items city council will discuss at 8 p.m. Monday in city hall.

A resolution for a federal grant will be discussed. The grant would finance pollution control facilities within the Evergreen and Farmington sewage disposal system.

Giving money to the taxpayers will be on the minds of the city fathers. They are scheduled to discuss continuing the city's \$1 million tax rebate program which began last September.

Property owners could receive between \$18 and \$500 during phase two of the program.

AMONG ZONING requests to be considered is the vacation of Liberty Street between Hamilton and Hancock. The street is near Grand River and Eight Mile.

The motion asks the council to relieve the city of the necessity of maintaining the street. Residents would be responsible for the short, unpaved road, which is a street only on paper, according to city administrators.

Other requests deal with changing the zoning on Grand River and Ten Mile, near I-96 to allow for expressway service use. Developers would be able to operate a gas station, a restaurant or other services for freeway users. Presently, the land is zoned for light industrial use.

A similar zoning request comes from an auto dealership owner who

wants to use land on Haggerty between Grand River and Ten Mile for his showroom. That parcel is zoned to accommodate light industry.

Preliminary plan approval for an office center on Grand River between Drake and Halsted also will be under consideration.

## School board sets agenda

A curriculum report on the Farmington Training Center and the updating of the policy manual will highlight Tuesday night's Farmington School Board meeting beginning at 8 p.m. in the former Farmington Junior High building on Thomas Street.

Board members and interested residents will hear a report on the activities of the training center prepared by the special education department.

The board will also continue their review of policies as presented by the policy committee, chaired by Trustee Michael Shippee.

In other action, the board is expected to set a date for a study session on the preliminary budget and appoint a Parent-Teacher Association representative to the Task Force on School Organizational Structure.

Committee and board members' reports and approval of expenditures rounds out the agenda for the bi-weekly meeting.

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Turkeys take a tumble  
The Ten Mile School target ball team took on sports figure Jim Price and their teachers in a recent match. To see how they fared in the just-for-fun match, turn to Page 3A.