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Historical district residents fight tax

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

Although residents of Farmington's historical district gathered en masse at last week's council session to protest increased property tax assessments, they still will have to pay the 37.65 per cent average increase.

The district's residents have been caught in the middle of a catch-up game to equalize their assessments with the rest of the city and a five year reappraisal strategy of which their district was one of the first to be scrutinized.

Although the average was 37.65 per cent, some of the 124 homeowners were handed anywhere from a 60 to 150 per cent increase.

The area, officially designated as neighborhood 12, is bounded approximately by the intersection of Shawasssee and Grand River on the west, Warner on the east, McComb on the south and Pickett on the north.

The city council, along with City Assessor John Sailer, faced a standing

room crowd whose spokesman was historical district resident Jack Cotton.

"WE FEAR THE INCREASES will destroy the positive movement and pride in older homes," said Cotton. "For many years the downtown residential area was referred to as a blighted one, according to Cotton, until homeowners made a concerted effort to fix up the homes, many of which were built in the 1850s.

Assessing homes is done with a great deal of "Kentucky" windage with political influence and guesswork being part of the system, he said.

But Sailer denied the charges, saying that increases were high this year because of the necessity of bringing the historical district closer to the 50 per cent of state valuation requirement.

Under state law, assessors are supposed to assess homes at approximately 50 per cent of its value. This

is based on a three year sales figure within a designated district, according to Sailer.

"There have been regular increases in the district throughout the years, but they just haven't been enough," said Sailer.

To demonstrate his point, Sailer presented figures which compared the historical district to Farmington Oaks Subdivision, one of the newer housing complexes in the city.

In 1975 and 1976, the historical district residents paid 31.65 per cent and 31.72 per cent respectively in relationship to the 50 per cent assessed valuation figure.

Farmington Oaks, on the other hand paid 41.02 per cent and 41.75 per cent for those two years.

Historical district residents could have been socked with even higher assessments if the district would have brought up the Farmington Oaks figure.

"If a factor had been applied to neighborhood 12 for the determination of a 1977 assessment, a 47 per cent across the board increase would have been required," said Sailer.

"I would be just as angry if I knew someone was paying a lower assessment," said Sailer, referring to the fact that historical district residents paid a lower assessment rate than Farmington Oaks.

Some residents expressed fears that they could lose their homes because they are senior citizens living on a fixed income and couldn't afford to pay the increase.

Sailer denied this, saying that those objecting to their assessments could have appealed to the city's tax appeal board.

He also reminded residents that they could receive a tax rebate upon reaching the age of 65 because of a state law which says that only 3.5 per cent of a senior citizen's income has to be paid towards their tax bill.

"Everything over that goes back to

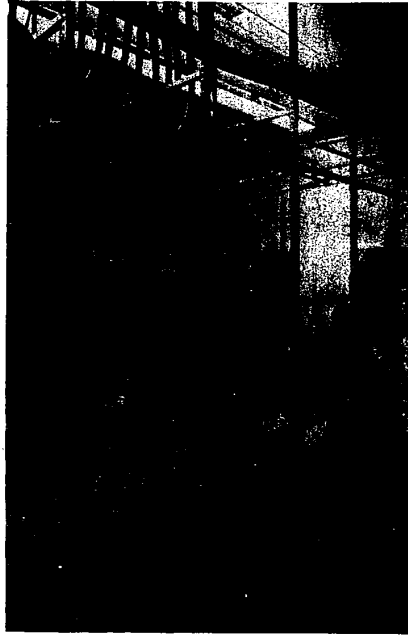
the resident. If it is still a hardship you can appeal to our board of review which has been traditionally very lenient," he said.

Sailer said only about six residents from the historical district even queried his office about their tax boosts.

Sailer admitted that residents who fixed up their houses were being assessed more because their houses became higher in value.

Councilman William Hartsock said that although the residents were "stuck" with this year's assessment, he thought the city council should contact state representatives to change the way property is assessed.

"I believe the aesthetics of the historical district could be destroyed by high taxes. I suggest we communicate with the state and in the future seek relief for those who own historical homes," he said.



Inadvertent art
Although it wasn't designed for a museum, this configuration of cables can overwhelm the viewer, both artistically and in terms of their capabilities. To discover what Bob Pampreen has to say about this new office in Farmington, turn to page 3A. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

School engineer retires

Stultz ready for Florida sun

By LYNN ORR

Farmington School District residents, as well as the board of education, can thank the Boston subways for 11 years of service from Harry Stultz, retiring director of buildings and sites. If it weren't for the infamous MTA, he might never have turned down a job in Boston and headed west.

"My wife and I were hunting down this real estate agent to sign a lease, but I kept on thinking of all that commuting when Gerry Harrison (former superintendent) called me and offered me the job," Stultz reminisces.

"I said yes before asking about the salary because I had already discovered I could live close to work here."

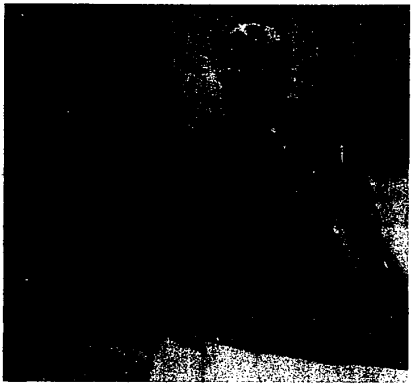
That's how Stultz arrived in Farmington in 1966, working for a school district for the first time after a long career as a civil engineer for the Air Force and a civilian architect in a brief interlude.

The construction aspect of schools intrigued Stultz above all, which is also one of the reasons he's taking an early retirement at 62 to look for greener pastures, as well as better weather, in Florida next September.

"WHEN I FIRST CAME here the Farmington Public School district was growing at the rate of slightly over 900 kids a year. That tapered off until 1970 when the curve started reversing."

"But in that time we constructed quite a number of major facilities along with major remodeling that I can be proud of; however, it's time to be moving on."

Although construction is his major vocation, his job in Farmington involves being "a cradle-to-grave real estate manager," he quips. Although he's especially proud of the recent extensive remodeling of North Farmington High School (the architectural drawings bear his name), he realizes that the maintenance aspect of school district business is the most vulnerable to criticism as well as the first to go under the budget-cutter's knife.



Retiring director of buildings and sites, Harry Stultz, examines one of the many blueprints crumming his office. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

'I've been out on a limb all my life. I guess that's how I like it.'

—Harry Stultz

"In comparison to teaching kids, you really see the results of what we do: When the parking lot is full of water or the halls are dirty or a new building is criticized."

"We've had to live within a very tight budget over the years, and it seems as though the maintenance and operations aspects are the first things to be bled in order to stay within the overall budget.

"That's a way of life, but now there are other things that appeal to me," he says in his southern bred accent. A native Virginian, Stultz's way of

life has included the supervision of such construction as Forest and Woodcreek elementary schools, Power and Warner junior highs, six classrooms and a media center at Shawasssee Elementary, media centers at every elementary school with the exception of four, and Harrison High School, which drew considerable criticism and which Stultz is quick to defend.

"BOTH MR. SCHULMAN AND Mr. Geiger (past and present Harrison principals) think it's a very difficult

building to control kids in because of the multi-floor design and many passageways.

"I don't refute that, but I can't quite see the reason to blame behavior patterns of kids on the design of the building. I, for one, think Harrison is a beautiful, functional piece of architecture.

"And I always say when they dispose of that building, I want to buy it and make it a military school," he says with a laugh.

Although his snappy dress, a green plaid suit with burgundy tie and socks, doesn't seem to fit the stereotype of a military background, Stultz's career was immersed in the military before his sojourn in Farmington.

He and his family spent three years each in Japan and France, as well as many years all over the southern U.S. working as a civil engineer. He was commissioned into the reserves after graduating from Virginia Polytech and served as a pilot during World War II.

For five years after the war he was an architect and partner in several firms until he decided to use his military connections to secure some government contracts at the start of the Korean War.

"As a crutch to get into the door I used the fact that I was a reserve officer, and I came back with my uniform on."

The major general Stultz consulted called in a personnel officer to explain all the new offices planned for construction.

"I volunteered," Stultz recalls facetiously, "and packed my bags for Atlanta." It was the Farmington call that placed him in civilian gear again after 15 years, and he doesn't regret either lifestyle.

"Nothing's ever been bad," he says happily.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics are just one example of military fringes he's enjoyed. Living in Farmington, he explains, is one of the fringes of his school district employment.

"I've enjoyed living here tremendously," he says, and his faith in the school district has been confirmed by his youngest daughter's K-8 attendance in Farmington schools.

His wife, Annie Laurie, who he considers a constant inspiration, has held the post, in the past as well as presently, of director of the Farmington Community Center. She's also been very active in all kinds of volunteer organizations, he adds.

"It's with a little reluctance on her part that we head south again," he adds.

Stultz himself has accumulated considerable honors during his stay. He's a member of Rotary International, a charter member of Farmington Rotarians; and holds membership in the Council of Educational Facility Planners International, the American Institute of Architects, and Oakland County School Business Officials.

He presently holds professional registration as an architect in both Michigan and Florida, and he plans to continue his career in North Palm Beach next fall.

"There's a lot of competition down there, I hear," he says, "but I've been out on a limb all my life; I guess that's how I like it."

'78 grant will pay for fix-up, sewers

Improvement projects in the south end of Farmington Hills will get a financial boost if city council approves an administration proposal for use of 1978 federal community development grant funds.

The city is expected to receive \$146,000 through the grant program administered by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.

Under the administrators' proposal presented to city council Monday, the largest portion of the grant, \$96,700, would be used to continue a storm sewer program in the south end of the city aimed at relieving spring flooding. The sewer is planned to parallel Eight Mile in Farmington Hills.

City Manager George Majors also suggested that \$20,000 be used to continue the city's grants and loans program to enable low-income residents to make home repairs.

Another \$20,000 would be used to pay Richard Young, the city's building inspector, Majors said. Improvements to Waldron Park, in the south end, would take \$2,000 of the grant money.

THE REPAIRS would range from sidewalks to repairing play equip-

ment, according to Administrative Assistant Michael Doran.

Majors said that \$7,300 would go for administrative costs. Those costs include fliers sent to homeowners in the southern part of the city explaining the home repair grants and loans program. Mailing costs of the fliers are included in this category.

Salaries of housing rehabilitation consultants retained to give advice on a particular grant or loan application also would be drawn from the administrative funds category.

Otsuji completes family practice work

Farmington resident Dr. Gary G. Otsuji has been named a diplomat of the American Board of Family Practice (ABFP) as a result of passing a certification examination offered by the ABFP.

Dr. Otsuji is now certified in the specialty of family practice, after passing the intensive two-day written examination.

Schools tighten security as police search for killer

Prompted by the latest in a series of abductions and murders of children in Oakland County, Farmington area police, teachers and librarians have intensified normal efforts at protecting their young charges.

Children are reminded regularly to avoid strangers and unfamiliar cars, according to Assistant School Superintendent Lawrence Freedman.

"We've always had a safety program but it's a little bit stronger. Rather than a couple times a year, we have daily reminders to the children to walk to and from school with friends. Don't talk to strangers. And we tell them about the Helping Hand program," he said.

The Helping Hand in a window assures the child that he can find help in the home.

"But we don't want to contribute to a hysteria," he added. "We want to have the children aware of the situation."

Principals at Flanders, Gill, High-

meadow and Ten Mile Elementary Schools are telling youngsters to ignore strangers.

FLANDERS' PRINCIPAL Weldon Petz is advising his students to avoid all strangers, even policemen in uniform, that ask to accompany the children.

Police surmise that the person responsible for the recent deaths is a respected citizen, such as a police officer or member of the clergy.

Principals stressed that parents should notify the child's school if the youngster will deviate from his normal after-school routine or will be absent that day.

If the child is required to leave school earlier than usual to meet a doctor's appointment, parents are required to come for him.

"All children are released only to their parents in the school office if they have to leave before school ends," explained Petz. "Before, if the child lived a few houses away, we let

him walk home and told him to call us when he arrived. But we've stopped doing that now."

If the child is scheduled to visit a friend after school, both sets of parents must write notes to the school informing administrators of the plans, according to Walter Prince, Ten Mile principal.

IF A NEIGHBOR will meet the child after school, Prince asks that his office be notified.

"We don't know a neighbor from anyone else. We don't allow any of that. We have to have a note telling us the neighbor will be here or we call the parents and ask them," he explained.

If a child misses the school bus, all the principals who were contacted said that they inform the parents of the situation.

Children who walk to school are told to go in a group. Highmeadow Principal Carolyn (Continued on page 8A)

inside

SPRING IS IN THE AIR

For those who've tinkered around with the idea of camping out for the summer or spreading some home grown vegetables on their own deviouses, the Farmington Observer's opinion page holds special interest. For a look at the back-to-nature movement backlash, turn to page 8A.

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