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Locals scratch heads over state tax relief plan

By Steve Barnaby
editor

Farmington area governmental officials are heading on support of the state Legislature's tax relief plan until they figure out just exactly what it would mean to municipalities and school districts.

Chief among their concerns is how quickly the state would reimburse local units from state coffers for funds lost through property tax reductions. Under the plan property tax would be cut in half. The state's sales tax would be increased from 4 percent to

5.5 percent. The state would be required to pay back money to local units lost to them through the decreased property tax.

Michigan voters will determine the tax plan's fate on May 19 in a special election. If approved, it will go into effect in July.

"We raised hell in Lansing because the law required the state to reimburse us for the presidential primary. They still haven't done it," said Farmington Hills City Manager Larry Savage. While the tax cut would take place immediately, the state could conceivably wait an entire year to pay back local municipalities.

'Will the state borrow the money or will we have to borrow the money and pay the interest?'

— Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman

This would force local governments to borrow money to maintain local services. They would be forced to pay interest on those loans. "On July 1 the state won't have nick-

el one to pay us," says Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman. "The question is, will the state borrow the money or will we have to borrow the money and pay the interest?"

The state would be able to borrow money at a lower interest rate than

would local governmental units, said Deadman.

IN PREVIOUS years, Farmington has been able to invest funds. Last year it made \$105,000 on interest — a tax savings to residents. Under the proposed plan such savings could be threatened if the state didn't pay up in a timely fashion.

Farmington School Supt. Lewis Schulman generally supports the "no-tion" because it does provide a tax shift with recovery through an increased sales tax.

But he too worries about state pay back.

"We haven't had to borrow money in six years," said Schulman. "But the district could have a cash flow shortage, if only a portion is paid back at a time."

Schulman would much rather see the state borrow the funds than the school district.

"We just can't wait until the end of the year," he said.

But all three administrators agree the plan does have a positive impact in thwarting those who endorse even harsher tax-cutting proposals.

Shiawassee County Drain Commissioner Robert Tisch has proposed a plan to cut property taxes in half in two years, costing the state \$2 billion a year without a pay-back provision to local governments.

That proposal won't be on the May ballot because of lack of legislative support in the waning minutes of the deadline to put proposals on the ballot.

WHILE THE PAY-BACK provision concerns local governments, the 6 percent cap on future property tax increases incorporated in the proposal also concerns them.

"I'm not quite sure at this time what that would do. It could prevent any future cuts in millage," said Schulman.

Last year the district decreased school taxes by three mills.

"The districts are very apprehensive. We aren't happy with the cap," he said.

The district could run into problems if inflation increased above the 6 percent level, he said.

Deadman worries that with the quick implementation, local governments wouldn't have time to go to voters and ask for increased millage if needed.

Legislators solicit support

By Steve Barnaby
editor

While Michigan residents mull over a decision on whether to support the most recent property tax relief proposal, state legislators have taken to the hustings in attempts to sell the plan.

State Sen. Doug Ross, D-Southfield, is one of those 114 legislators who have

come out in support of the bi-partisan plan.

"There was a pretty broad consensus that we (legislators) either come up with a workable plan or the voters would turn to Tisch," said Ross, whose district includes Farmington, Farmington Hills, Lathrup Village and Southfield.

The plan endorsed by Shiawassee

County Drain Commissioner Robert Tisch would have halved property taxes, costing the state \$2 billion. Under Tisch, no provision was made to pay back local municipalities for the loss.

Under the legislative plan, the state would have to cut back the budget by \$300 million. But local governmental units will be reimbursed by the state for property tax losses through an in-

crease in the state's sales tax from 4 percent to 5.5 percent.

The state just couldn't afford to cut the budget by \$2 billion in services, says Ross.

"If we don't deal with the tax problem, it could threaten the viability of the state. We wouldn't have the re-

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Officer Sandra Benesik explains basic home locks to a Neighborhood Watch group in the Wedgewood Commons Subdivision. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

Residents band together to fight escalating crime

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

An increasing number of Farmington Hills homeowners are banding together to fight crime in their neighborhoods.

Break-ins have jumped nearly 50 percent in the city over last year and as much as 190 percent in some subdivisions, police said.

That has accounted for much of the growing interest in Neighborhood Watch, sponsored by the Farmington Hills Police.

Sgt. Richard Murphy, program coordinator, describes Neighborhood Watch as a grass-roots organization supported by the local business community, not by the city budget.

Officers in the police juvenile division act as consultants, but citizens run the program.

Here's how it works. If a subdivision, or even one full block (both sides of the street) is interested in

participation, a spokesperson contacts the police department.

A series of meetings are scheduled on different days and times to accommodate residents.

Two police officers meet with neighbors for an orientation, which includes a 20-minute film on home safety, a demonstration of types of locks to best secure a home and other pointers for home security.

"THIRTY PERCENT of burglaries are the result of people going away and leaving their home unlocked," Murphy said.

Residents are encouraged to light outside areas at night, to take precautions when leaving town and to keep garage doors closed.

"You're advertising what you have by keeping them open," he said.

Designator numbers and operation identification are part of Neighborhood Watch. Designator numbers are given each participant to call information into the police depart-

ment regarding suspicious neighborhood activity. Numbers are used in lieu of names for persons who don't want to get directly involved.

Operation identification involves engraving all metal and plastic goods, such as stereo components, televisions and bicycles, with a driver's license number. Pictures of jewelry, paintings, and other fine goods should be taken to aid police if they're stolen.

"A fence doesn't want to take time to grind out an identification number," Murphy said.

If the goods are taken, they're more readily identified with a license number, which can be easily traced by police.

Farmington Hills police also offer home security checks for any resident who requests it. CETA employees who perform the check suggest ways to make a home "target hardened."

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Is kindergarten the place? School-bound tots take first exam

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Four- and 5-year-olds dressed in their Sunday best came to Fairview School in Farmington Hills this week to meet the academic world head on.

The children, scheduled to begin kindergarten in September, were taking part in a Farmington Public Schools effort to determine their readiness for school.

"Ours is a formal kindergarten in an academic setting," supervisor Richard Ruitter told a small group of parents while their youngsters were being tested in another room.

"We anticipate 650 youngsters of kindergarten age, and most of them will belong in school," he said.

"But some of them will probably need another year at home." The purpose of the preschool testing is to evaluate children on their psychological development not their chronological age.

Some school professionals believe that children who are forced into a formal academic setting before they are ready will always feel behind the rest of the class — up until high school graduation.

"OUR AIM is to make school more successful for all students," said Paula Mellin, one of the test coordinators.

Groups of five youngsters and their parents met school administrators in half-hour sessions. The children had a picture taken together which will be used in their academic files.

In the testing, each child was quizzed on motor skills, social and emotional development and thinking ability.

Parents will receive notice from the school suggesting kindergarten for their child if the test results are satisfactory. If the child isn't ready, Ruitter will call the parents to discuss the test results.

The final decision rests with the parents.

"We would hope that they would take our advice," Ruitter said.

"This is a critical time for youngsters. It's one of the few times an educator can say 'The child isn't ready. Wait another year.'"

THE DISTRICT is using the Gesell Developmental Test. The results are satisfactory. The norms were set in the testing of 12,000 youngsters.

"I can't find a better test," Ruitter said. "The results will be fairly accurate."

Part of the test is a general interview with the youngster. There are also comprehension questions such as what to do when cold or hungry. Children must also complete a half-drawn picture and copy some geometric figures.

The child's mannerisms, speech patterns, and attention span are also considered.

"Many children might be normal or

above normal in IQ but not necessarily ready for kindergarten," Mrs. Mellin said.

"They may not be able to sit still, or may not be ready to leave mother. Boys in general are about six months behind girls in development."

"Most parents already know if their child is ready for school," she continued. "They've watched their older children or they've had feedback from nursery school teachers."

This is the first time the Farmington Public Schools has tried to reach all kindergarten-bound youngsters for testing.

"We'll test into April if necessary," Ruitter said.

Parents may schedule a half-hour appointment Monday through Friday, morning or afternoon, by calling 626-8335.

The child must be 5 years old before Dec. 1, 1981 to register for kindergarten.



Ricky Butts (far right) constructs a block figure while test coordinator Paula Mellin evaluates his



test. Above, a smile of relief at a correct answer. (Staff photos by Randy Borst)

Pardon our dust

Over the next three weeks, the Observer will be putting on a new face.

We've redesigned our look to make the paper easier to read, developing a more contemporary style while maintaining the better aspects of our familiar appearance.

The project was nine months in the making and involved work by people in our editorial, composing and computer services departments.

We'd like to know what you think of our new look. If you've got a suggestion or comment, mail it to editor Steve Barnaby at the Farmington Observer, 2352 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

Accident ends chase

A 19-year-old Redford Township man was charged with reckless driving after leading Southfield, Farmington, Livonia, Farmington Hills, and Michigan State police on a high-speed chase Sunday morning that ended in a crash.

The driver, John Gale, 19, of Redford Township was arrested after his 1974 white Pontiac Trans Am crashed into a building at 31411 Eight Mile owned by the Progressive Lift Truck Co. of Livonia, police said.

Southfield police patrolling the area of Telegraph and 10 Mile were passed by a speeding car shortly after 4 a.m. Sunday, said Southfield police spokesman Sgt. John Hood.

The car, traveling south on Telegraph, was paced at speeds approaching 95 miles per hour, Hood said. The

car reportedly ran a red light at Nine Mile before turning west on Eight Mile. After the car crossed Grand River, Southfield officers slowed down because of the danger, but radioed a description of the car to other police departments.

Just west of Merriman, the Southfield officers found Gale inside the car which was resting against a brick wall. Gale was transported to Botsford Hospital where he was examined and released to his parents, said a hospital spokesman.

Gale is scheduled to appear April 6 in Southfield's 66th District Court. Upon conviction, the charge of reckless driving carries a maximum penalty of 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine plus six points on a driver's record.

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