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Crowd sways Hills council to quash tax boost

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills officials succumbed to strong public pressure this week when they rejected a hotly debated 1.38 mill increase in local taxes in 1983-84.

Instead, to a full house of applauding residents gathered at city hall last Wednesday, the Farmington Hills City Council unanimously adopted a \$14.3 million 1983-84 budget and agreed to maintain last year's 7.8253 mill (per \$1,000 of assessed value) tax rate. Councilwoman Jan Dolan was absent, covalescing from a recent operation. Council rejected levying the recommended 9.0930 mills in 1983-84. So this year's tax rate includes

7.4191 operating mills and 4.0644-mill debt levy. That works out to fewer dollars devoted to the city's operating budget and more to debt service than last year.

Although the tax rate remains the same as last year, about half of the city's residents, in effect, will receive a smaller tax bill in 1983-84 because assessments, on the average, were four percent lower this year, said Assistant City Manager William Costick. That means that by maintaining the 7.8253 mills levy, the city will collect about \$281,000 (excluding new construction) less in local tax revenues this year.

IN REJECTING the proposed tax increase for 1983-84, however, city council members automatically reject-

ed a proposed one-mill levy for capital improvements to help pay for major drainage projects and a proposed police department expansion, both listed in a six-year capital improvements plan.

"Let's not mislead anyone that this budget in any way will provide for a police facility," said Mayor Fred Hughes.

Even if city officials had approved the tax increase, about \$349,000 would have been taken out of general fund reserves (surplus) to balance the budget. Now having to levy last year's tax rate, city officials will dip further into reserves, taking a total \$221,329 out of \$1.8 million in reserves. That will leave the city with about \$1.3 million in reserves.

But angry taxpayers, who had accused city officials of failing to "cut the fat" out of local government, used the city's \$1.8 million general fund surplus as a weapon in fighting the proposed 1.38 mill tax increase.

Reiterating his strong opposition to a city tax increase, Councilman Donn Wolf led the fight last week, reading letters from homeowners associations and insurance executive Richard Headlee, opposing tax increases.

"I am opposed to any tax increase," Wolf said. "I'm concerned about the increasing surpluses we've been having. I think we should tax and spend our residents' money as it was our own. It's bad business to raise taxes at this time. It's also bad representation," he said.

IN READING Headlee's letter, Wolf said, the Republican leader called the city's proposed tax increase "a grave fiscal error."

It was evident from the start of the special meeting last week that City Council members were shy away from the proposed tax hike.

"I'm pretty sure we're not going to raise taxes here tonight," said Councilman Charles Williams. "I know how the people of this community feel. I know you want your taxes cut and I'm willing to do it."

Wolf immediately made a motion to reject the millage increase and for City Manager Lawrence Savage to submit a revised budget based on last year's tax levy. But after several hours of often argumentative discussion, Wolf's

motion was amended by Councilwoman Jody Sorocoon. Her amended motion, which council members unanimously approved, called for maintaining last year's tax levy but keeping the same proposed \$14.3 million budget and taking money out of the surplus for the deficit created by the drop in local tax revenues.

"We're not talking about holding the line on taxes, we're talking cutting taxes," said Lawrence Savage, city manager.

What's happened, Savage said, is that last year, if you owned a \$50,000 home assessed at \$40,000, your city taxes were \$313. This year, the \$50,000 home now is assessed at \$38,400. So your city

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Eyesore gets new chance as an office

By Tom Beer
staff writer

After a 2 1/2-year delay, plans for converting the long-vacant Bond Elementary School into an office complex are finally being carried out.

Workers, using a technique called "stripping out," were busy last week gutting the inside of the old building on 13 Mile near Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills. The plan, according to Bob Katzman, a builder involved with the project, is to leave the original outer walls and roof while doing all new construction inside.

"The building goes much faster if the walls and roof are already up," said Katzman of Bloomfield Township. "With the roof up, we can work right through bad weather that would stop new construction."

When completed, the new structure will contain one- and two-room office suites and will feature an atrium, or greenhouse, according to Katzman. An October opening is planned, he added.

"It's designed for small or large users," Katzman said, "and the rents will start at about \$250 a month."

Ronald L. Hughes, a West Bloomfield developer, purchased the property for \$340,000 from the Farmington Board of Education on Aug. 8, 1980. Until now, little progress has been made on plans to convert the 38,000-square-foot building to office space as planned.

KATZMAN, WHO blamed the delay on financing problems and "the cost of money" over the past three years, said that he and Hughes planned to form a

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Rubble and ruin surround the old Bond School on 13 Mile and Orchard Lake Road as it goes through the transformation from an educational center to a business office



Joan Hughes shows the prize-winning form which has made her a national champion.

She's tops on motorcycle circuit

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

No way is Farmington Hills resident Joan Hughes going to put up with the traditional image of the woman motorcyclist as a maligned 'Hells Angels' groupie.

Instead, the first National Motorcycle Queen is leading the parade of change on a sleek, black 1100 cc Gold Wing Honda, her 21st bike in the 17 years she's been in love with the sport.

"The rest of the world thinks that if a woman rides a motorcycle, she cannot retain her femininity or be a lady,"

said the 46-year-old recent grandmother and one of the founders of the motorcyclists' Michigan GoldWing Association. "Nowadays, we (women motorcyclists) are your neighbors."

The 250-member GoldWing riders' association is dedicated to opening the door to women of the longtime male dominated sport.

"The club's No. 1 ideal is to change the image of women in motorcycling," Hughes said. That even includes changing the image of the traditional black leather riding apparel most hard and fast motorcyclists wear.

But Hughes' personal touch for get-

ting the message across that it's perfectly natural for a woman to ride a cycle was capped about two weeks ago when she was crowned, out of nine contestants, as motorcycle queen in Great Bend, Kansas.

"FOR MOTORCYCLISTS, it's like the Mrs. America contest," said Hughes, who is in her third year as sales manager at Honda Center in Warren.

"I've gotten a lot of national publicity from all this," she said, referring to her capture of the motorcycling crown. Just as Hughes admits to the difficul-

ty of changing the image of motorcycling women, walking away with the crown was no easy task either. She was put through a rigorous obstacle course, asked questions about her sport, delivered a speech about her love for motorcycling and was judged on the appearance of her bike and her shiny black leather riding apparel.

"Seventeen years ago I had a casual affair with the motorcycle," Hughes said she told the contest's judges. "Now I have a lifetime commitment with the machine and the people involved."

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Millage vote date set by school board

Voters in the Farmington School District will be asked to approve the renewal of five mills for 10 years in a special election set for Tuesday, Sept. 20.

Farmington's Board of Education approved the election date, 7-0, at its June 7 meeting.

The five mills in question expire at the end of the year. Farmington voters last September approved a similar request.

The Farmington district includes Farmington, most of Farmington Hills and a small portion of West Bloomfield.

At its last meeting, the board also:

• Voted to spend \$2,686 to continue its membership in the Michigan Association of School Boards. The money represents yearly dues in the organization, which board trustee Jim McGilley called "the lobbying group for school boards and public education at the state level."

"It (the group) keeps us informed about what's going on at the state level, concerning public education," McGilley said.

• Approved spending \$8,440 to replace parts of 61 classroom clocks at North Farmington High School.

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