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Twenty-five cents

Board hears appeals

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Eva Lawson didn't want to take on all of city hall Monday afternoon. The Farmington Hills resident did, however, want to appeal her 1985 property assessment. She went before the three-member Board of Review to argue her case.

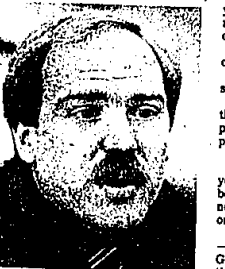
"They cut it a little last year, but they raised it so much this year," she told the board. "I don't think it's fair. I did expect it to be raised some, but not that amount."

"It's my home, and it's the only home I have."

Board member Joan Lennis gave Lawson a hardship appeal form to fill out.

"I live off Social Security and one-half of my husband's pension from Chrysler," Lawson told the board.

"YOU CAN put all of that in there."



Assessor Dean Babb
Lawson case is typical



consists of, from left, Joan Lennis, Harlem Morris and Gordon Meyers

Eva Lawson, a Farmington Hills resident, opted to go before the Board of Review this week to appeal her property assessment. The board

Lennis said. "We just want you to answer this to the best of your ability."

"You don't have to come and see us; you can just leave it out there," board member Harlem Morris told Lawson, motioning in the direction of the city assessor's office.

Lawson went away reasonably satisfied.

"You've been very nice, and I thank you very much," she told the board members. "I appreciate anything you can do to help me."

Cases like Lawson's aren't unusual, city assessor Dean Babb said.

"That was very typical of what you see at the board of review."

Often, property owners don't realize they may file a written hardship appeal; others don't realize they must apply each year.

"YOU HAVE to come back in every year and reapply," he said. Appeals can be made in person, but it's really not necessary. What's important is the data on the form."

The three board of review members — Joan Lennis, Harlem Morris and Gordon Meyers — have been meeting throughout the month to hear assessments from property owners.

Appeals from property owners Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of

this week were the board members' final days of hearing appeals.

"It's a paper flow, but we try to stay on top of it," Babb said.

"We try to stay as current as we can. Some cases, it's a decision they can make right then and there." The board never makes its decision, however, with the property owner still present.

MORRIS CHAIRS the board. All three of the appointed board members are licensed real estate agents; Meyers specializes in commercial property, while Lennis and Morris specialize in residential property.

"They all are knowledgeable about market values," Babb said. "They've been a very good board of review."

Board members are paid \$18 an hour for their services. Meyers is now on the board this year; Lennis served for the first time last year, while Morris is a four-year veteran.

Some of those appealing argue that their assessment exceeds 50 percent of the sale price. Others are "people who think for whatever reason they are not being uniformly assessed."

"AND A lot of people questioning why the assessment went up. We're getting a lot of commercial and industrial people with the increases we've

made there. A lot of our commercial appeals have been questioning the increase." The largest increases in commercial assessments have been in the area of 60 percent, he said.

Five hundred people have requested appointments before the board this year, while 300 more have submitted written appeals.

"We're down a little bit from last year," he said. Last year, 970 appeals were submitted.

Babb doesn't think of the board of review as a "rubber-stamp" operation and hopes the public doesn't hold that view.

"It's a shame a lot of people perceive that. It's just not true."

"IF THEY do, they're suffering from a misconception. The board of review is independent from the assessor's office. It's like anything, you've got to convince them your assessment's wrong."

Those who have appealed their assessments should be notified by mail of the board's decision by the second week of April.

Property owners may then appeal those decisions by petitioning the Michigan Tax Tribunal (P.O. Box 30333, Lansing 48909) before June 30.

Judge rules for Marks in recount

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Oakland Circuit Judge Alice Gilbert has upheld a Farmington Hills City Council election recount making Ben Marks the winner by one vote over opponent Terry Sever.

Marks, who has served on the council since the recount early last December, will continue as councilman until the November election.

"Obviously I am happy," said Marks, who intends to run for reelection in November. "There is no question in my mind that the court decision was going to be no less than this. I am very happy that the system works. I'm satisfied. It's over."

Equally happy the issue is over, Sever, who claims he lost seven votes in the recount, believes he should be on council.

"I still feel very strongly that I won the election," Sever said. "My seven votes — I still wonder what happened to them."

Although Sever would not commit himself to whether he intends to seek election to council in November, he said, "I will say that's my seat. I have every reason and right at this point to claim it."

GILBERT'S DECISION last week came almost four months after Sever asked the court to intercede and declare the recount unconstitutional.

In her decision, Gilbert said that the state Legislature provided a process of recounting election ballots that, while not infallible, is constitutional, according to Gilbert's law clerk.

The recount showed Marks received 11,008 votes to Sever's 11,003. Marks picked up 26 additional votes in the recount while Sever stayed even — losing and then gaining seven votes.

In the November election, Sever edged past Marks with a 15-vote margin to win the council seat. He served on council for three weeks until the recount.

If Sever had not lost seven votes in the recount, he would have remained on the council.

Following the recount in early December, Sever, through his attorney Paul Nida, took the issue to Oakland County Circuit Court.

What concerned Sever about the recount process were the chads — the rectangular perforations on the punch card ballots — and how they were counted.

DURING THE December court hearing, Nida argued that recounting punch-card ballots is unconstitutional and consequently the recount should be "thrown out."

Under state law, four bipartisan Oakland County canvassers checked each ballot by hand and punched out the chads that were dithered or detached on at least two corners, according to Oakland County Clerk Lynn D. Allen.

In testimony provided by one of the Oakland County Board of Canvassers who participated in the Marks-Sever recount, the process was done legally and properly.

The county canvasser also testified that the chads covering the entire punch card were examined, not just those for the city council election.

New programs keep school costs on rise

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

The Farmington School District should remain in good financial shape. That's the opinion held by retiring finance director William Frisk, who presented school trustees last week with an overview of the district's preliminary 1985-86, \$49.3 million budget.

Even though district officials expect to continue operating under the current 33 mills in 1985-86, homeowners total tax bills may increase due to a projected \$23 million increase in the district's state equalized valuation (SEV).

As required by state law, school officials will receive public comment on the preliminary budget at a public hearing scheduled for May 7.

WHILE SOME board members asked questions about the proposed budget, Board Secretary Emma Makinen expressed concern.

Referring to the projected increase in the district's SEV, Makinen said she would expect a drop in the school's millage rate.

"I don't see that and I am disappointed," she said. "Our budget continues to grow because of the SEV and we spend it."

But Frisk told Makinen that the proposed budget includes continuation of the district's current programs plus the addition of other programs board members approved during the year.

"We're doing nothing in the district that the board isn't aware of," Frisk said.

Makinen in turn indicated that she felt board members are not always aware of the cost of programs they are approving.

"We don't always look at the impact of those things on the budget," Makinen said. She suggested administrators begin providing the board with financial information on proposed programs.

"I think we have brought those numbers to the board," Frisk replied.

While Makinen replied that "we are at fault for not looking at those things," board Treasurer Richard Wallace disagreed.

"Speak for yourself," he said. "I have been conscious of the approximate dollars that have come up."

APPLAUDING MAKINEN'S concern about the millage rate, Wallace said he believed she used the wrong words in expressing her concern.

Board President Jack Inch and Superintendent Leon Scheukin, however, interrupted the discussion to recommend that the millage should not be reduced in 1985-86.

Pointing to capital improvements such as roof repairs, energy conservation measures, and asphalt paving, Schulman said, "these are the things that make a reduction in millage not a strong recommendation of ours."

In addition, the preliminary 1985-86

budget includes the following:

- Employment of two consultants for the elementary science program.
- New copy machines for the secondary schools to serve as alternates when the rented machines need repairs.
- Expansion of the computer application class to include North and Harrison high schools.
- Approximately \$270,000 to replace seven passenger buses and two orthopedic buses.
- An increased allocation to replace two maintenance vehicles.

• The addition of a teacher and aides for the reading and gifted program which will be split into separate programs.

• An increase of about \$280,000 in the district's capital needs account bringing it to a total of approximately \$718,000.

Projects such as expected roof repairs and major building remodeling is not included in the preliminary budget.

Administrators plan to make specific recommendations later for these projects to be financed with money in the capital improvement account.

Council favors larger library board

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Members of the Farmington Hills City Council voted unanimously Monday to expand the membership of the Library Board.

The board now consists of four members — two from Farmington and two

from Farmington Hills. The larger library board will have eight members, four from each city.

The expansion was approved unanimously by the Farmington City Council at its March 18 meeting, pending approval by the Farmington Hills council.

A district library, such as the Farmington Community Library, is orga-

nized by an agreement between municipalities, with each city council appointing library board members. A 1978 change in state law allows the additional board members to serve.

RECENT GROWTH has created a need for broader representation on the board, Farmington Hills Mayor Jan Dolan said.

"It's really a small board. It's good for the library, and it's good for all of us," she said of the expansion. "It's an important board."

At the Monday meeting, council member Ben Marks asked what the advantages are of a larger board.

"I always have a fear of more people trying to do a job," he said. "I just don't want a lot of people working on something and getting nothing done."

Some council members had expressed concern about library activities, council member Joan Dudley said. Those kinds of concerns "could better be addressed by additional input of the board," she said.

"THE LIBRARY itself has grown, not just the two cities." The expansion is no reflection on the current board's performance, Dudley said.

With the smaller board, "two people can control doing something or not doing something," council member Charles Williams said. Council member

Donn Wolf agreed that broader representation from the communities would be an improvement.

Alex Vagnozzi, a veteran council watcher, thanked council members for postponing their decision one week. (The item appeared originally on the March 18 Hills council agenda.)

"I think the whole issue has been aired quite well," Vagnozzi said. "Vagnozzi is a board member of the Friends of the Library, a volunteer support group."

VAGNOZZI HAD expressed his concern at the March 18 meeting that the expansion might represent a change in the board's role.

"I think the present board is functioning well," he said Monday.

Residents who wish to be considered for the library board positions should send a resume to either Mayor Jan Dolan in Farmington Hills or Mayor Ralph Yoder in Farmington at the respective city halls.

APPLICANTS SHOULD include a statement as to "why they think they'd make a good board member," Dolan said. "Just what they can offer and some background as to what they've done."

Involvement in community activities is an asset for applicants, she said.

oral quarrel

What's your opinion of Oscar choices?

Monday night, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences presented this year's Academy Awards. The awards, also known as the Oscars, are given to honor the year's best films. The movie "Amadeus" was named as this year's best by the academy.

To answer this question, call 477-5450 before 1 p.m. on Friday. To see how your neighbors feel about this issue, please look in Monday's Farmington Observer.

Today's Oral Quarrel question is:

what's inside

- Cable connection . . . 2A
- Community calendar . . . 2B
- Editorials . . . 18A
- Letters . . . 18A
- Obituaries . . . 10A
- Recreation news . . . 6A
- YMCA highlights . . . 9A
- Sports . . . Section C
- Suburban Life . . . Section B
- NEWSLINE . . . 477-5450
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