

Blanchard's tax plan brings new questions

By Joanna Mallazowski
staff writer

Confusion and skepticism mark Farmington-area reaction to Gov. James Blanchard's proposal to limit homeowners' property tax assessments to the annual rate of inflation with reimbursement only to school districts for any resulting loss in property taxes. "This may help retired people on fixed incomes. But we still need to get away from heavy reliance on property taxes," said Farmington Hills city councilman Aldo Vagnozzi. But he acknowledged it's a start. "We have been running twice the cost of living, inflation. It would give some relief. It recognizes people are hurting."

tall of how the cap would work. Almost two years ago, Vagnozzi drafted a resolution asking the state Legislature to increase the maximum \$1,200 state property tax rebate to a figure based on increases that have taken place in property values and assessments. Vagnozzi's resolution followed complaints from older, particularly retired, long-term residents, who felt they are being edged out of Farmington Hills by the spiraling costs of "Yuppie" housing. AT FIRST glance, Farmington and Farmington Hills assessors are skeptical that tying the assessment rate to inflation will provide uniformity or equity among homeowners within a jurisdiction. "I see it as potentially creating inequities. It could be between neighborhoods. It could be between cities," Farmington Hills assessor Dean Babb said. Assessors question whether market value,

used to base assessments, would still play a role. The assessment process determines the true cash value of property for the purpose of calculating property taxes. City, school and county tax rates are levied against the assessed value of property. An assessment is generally 50 percent of the "usual selling price" of a house. Assessors also question whether any change in assessments, especially tied to inflation, would be across the board. For example, would homeowners in expensive houses pay the same assessment increase that homeowners in homes that are not as valuable on the sales market pay? Babb asked. "Does this mean that an individual (assessment) cannot go up more than the inflation rate?" Babb added. FARMINGTON ASSESSOR John Sallor had similar concerns. "I think this is a lot of rhetoric. The big

concern is equity. Depending on how it is implemented, it could be a benefit to the affluent," Sallor said. Last year, Farmington Hills single-family residential assessments increased an average 9.4 percent. The city's overall increase, including commercial and industrial property, hovered at about 6 percent. Farmington residential assessments increased an average 9.3 percent. State treasurer Robert Bowman said it's undecided whether to 1) reimburse homeowners for excess taxes due to inflated assessments or 2) reduce local tax bills and reimburse school districts for the lost revenue. Apparently though, counties, cities, townships and villages that receive and operate on property taxes wouldn't be reimbursed for the lost revenue. "They (municipal units) rely on the property tax the same as schools do," Babb said.

"Controlling assessments doesn't necessarily control tax rates." FARMINGTON PUBLIC Schools Superintendent Michael Flanagan is skeptical about any plan to reimburse the district for a resulting loss of revenue from the assessment cap. As an out-of-formula district, Farmington is often given reimbursements "on paper" but in reality, the reimbursement never comes because the district is among those that receives more from local taxes than it would from state aid. For example, Farmington is supposed to be reimbursed its Social Security costs. In reality, the district already has lost \$1 million in the reimbursements it doesn't get. "The net result is that we probably wouldn't be reimbursed for this either," Flanagan added.

Bar owner asks for leniency in liquor law sweeps

By Joanna Mallazowski
staff writer

Marmaduke's Tavern owner Robert Matley would like Farmington Hills police to give liquor licensees a gift: one chance to make a mistake in selling alcohol to undercover police cadets younger than 21 during liquor law crackdowns. "If it's Operation/Cooperation, let one of them be a gift," he said. Operation/Cooperation is Farmington Hills' new venture among police, the city, the schools and liquor licensees to step up the fight against underage drinking. "I know it isn't entrapment," Matley continued. "Everyone in that bar is supposed to have ID on them to get liquor. Let's do it. Let's cooperate with each other." With \$450,000 invested in his restaurant in the Country Ridge shopping center, southeast of Haggerty and 14 Mile, Matley is concerned about losing his liquor license in the wake of two tickets since November 1988. The Michigan Liquor Control

Commission is required to suspend or revoke liquor licenses for licensees who have eeked up three violations in 24 months. BUT CITY officials seem unwilling to accept Matley's suggestion. They believe the best way to avoid being ticketed for selling to minors is to ask everyone who wants to buy alcoholic drinks for identification. "If you card your people, you will not be in a situation like this," Mayor Jean Fox said. Matley was ticketed in the police department's latest undercover liquor law enforcement sweep, Dec. 15, for selling to a cadet younger than 21, the state's legal drinking age. He was first ticketed in a similar undercover operation in November 1988. Licensees are cited under state liquor laws as well as local ordinances. "I feel as a business... cooperate with me, I'll cooperate with you," Matley said. Matley criticized procedures police used in the Dec. 15 operation, in

liquor to patrons is another matter. "You can lead the horse to water but you can't make them drink," Matley said about ensuring compliance from employees. But former mayor Terry Sever, who accompanied police on the latest undercover operation, isn't buying that argument. He suggested that after servers take orders, they should ask the patrons to produce identification. Patrons younger than 21 won't be served. "This is an employee-management problem, not a city enforcement problem," Sever said. "IF YOU don't have ID, what do you do with those two drinks?" Matley asked. Taking a loss on the drinks is far safer than being subject to fines in the hundreds of dollars and perhaps losing a liquor license, Sever said. Still, the former mayor was impressed that Matley took the time to publicly address the city council last Monday on his concerns about the undercover operations and the po-

potential for losing his liquor license. "Someone like him shows he's sensitive to the issue and concerned. It shows he cares," Sever said. The 16 licensees ticketed in the December operation were sent letters. "Their (licensees) actions are interpreted as a blatant disregard for the law," the former mayor said. Other than Matley's public complaints, Sever said he's received two or three calls from other licensees ticketed in December. "They are showing remorse. Gee, we didn't mean to do it." "I know it isn't entrapment. Everyone in that bar is supposed to have ID on them to get liquor. Let's do it. Let's cooperate with each other." — Robert Matley
lavern owner

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School board approves \$1.2 million budget hike

Farmington school board members approved a net \$1.2 million budget increase this month to offset state Social Security benefits the district must now pay, and increases due to negotiated salary increases during recent contract negotiations. The decision moves spending for the 1989-90 budget year up from

\$88.1 million to \$89.3 million. We, in fact, have lost, and are paying this year \$1 million (the employer's share of Social Security taxes) we've never had to pay before," said superintendent Michael Flanagan. "We fully expected this. I anticipate that the full \$4 million will be

ours to pay, maybe as soon as next year. Dollars for the recent change come from the district's cash reserves, or fund equity. Flanagan warned of the impending increases during the past year, telling board members that Social Security money, formerly paid by the state of

Michigan, would now be forced as an expense on local districts. This year, it is being treated by recapture of state aid. Budgets are done each spring in the district, and approved by the school board in early June. They are then amended as needed throughout the year.

clarification
A headline and a pullout quote accompanying a story Monday about Farmington Hills' Employee of the Year, Shirley Shottroff, had inaccuracies. Shottroff is secretary to public services director Tom Biasell, whose first name was wrong in the pullout quote.

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Monthly Allergy Tip
If you never stop fighting the cold war, it's time to question if it's really a cold you are fighting!
Coughs and chest congestion are usually caused by respiratory infections. But if symptoms appear too frequently or are difficult to control, they may not be caused by a cold or bronchitis. It may be that allergies or asthma are involved.
Why suffer time after time? Find out if indeed it is an allergy or asthma that causes you so much discomfort so often. See us. We may be able to help!
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