

THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY

**Another blood drive: For-
est Park Baptist Church is
hosting an American
Red Cross blood drive
from 2-8 p.m. Donors
must be at least 17 years
old and be in good health.
The process usually takes
about 45 minutes to com-
plete. Call 248-476-0080
for information.**

INDEX

☐ Tonto	1D
☐ Obituaries	4A
☐ Crossword	E5
☐ Classified Index	E3
Autos	H4
Home & Service	H3
Jobs	G1
Rentals	E6
☐ Sports	B1
☐ Entertainment	C1
☐ New Homes	E1

Get ready: Tax notices not far away

By JONI HUBBARD
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This time of year used to be an exciting one for Farmington Hills assessor Dean Babb.

Before state lawmakers enacted Proposal A, which capped property taxes at the rate of inflation, increases in home value meant an increase in taxes. And lots of yelling after property tax statements came out in February.

Lots and lots of yelling.

"In the old days, I used to kiss my wife good-bye in March and say, 'See you in April,'" he said. "It used to be a really contentious process. There were times we'd have to have police officers come in."

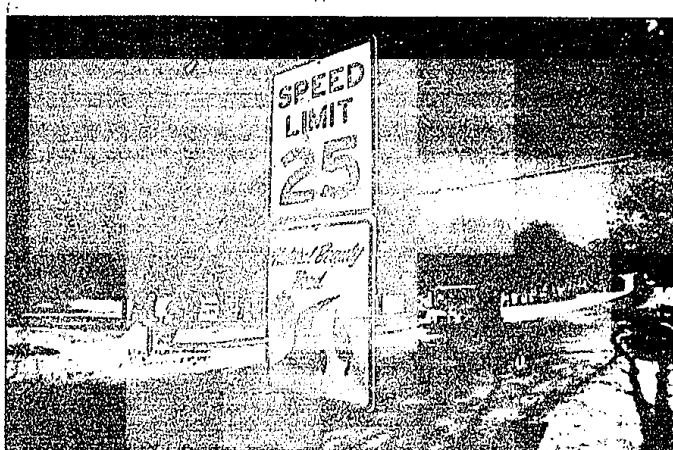
Two Boards of Review, which meet in March, used to fill up a two-week-long calendar with appointments and still sweat out meeting their March 31 deadline for clearing all protests. Now one board meets March 13-15, and sometimes members enjoy a break between appointments.

Babb said property owners don't squawk much about increases in

Please see TAX, A6



The first place to visit
when you're looking for a
new place to live?
The Real Estate ads
in today's
HomeTown Classifieds!



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRUEHLER

Promises: City officials say they will protect the existing vegetation along Power Road, a designated Natural Beauty Road, even if a sanitary sewer line is constructed along the route.

City: Natural beauty will be maintained on Power

By JONI HUBBARD
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Whether construction of a sanitary sewer line along Power Road actually moves forward, city officials have approved plans to protect the area's natural environment.

That's important to residents who turned out at a public hearing Monday to make sure city officials are on the record with promises to

protect existing vegetation, minimize construction traffic and ensure everything is put back the way it was.

Under city code, if there is a concern construction will interfere with the natural beauty elements of the road, a public hearing is required. Department of Public Services Director Thomas Binsell explained.

Utility construction is being driven by plans to build a subdivi-

sion on the west side of the road.

Complicated negotiations to reduce the density sought in a consent judgment, a court-monitored agreement, that governs utility construction and who pays for what, according to city manager Steve Brock.

Residents have kept a close eye on the project since its inception.

"One of our main concerns was the de-watering process (discharge-

Please see POWER, A6

Woman charged in death scheme

**Bond was set for \$1 million
for a Westland woman
charged in a plan to hire
someone to kill a live-in
boyfriend.**

By TIM SMITH
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A Westland woman was charged Friday with soliciting a hit man in the parking lot of the Farmington-Eight Mile Big Boy restaurant on Wednesday. Police believe the target for the \$2,000 job was her live-in boyfriend.

The "hit man" was actually an undercover Michigan State Police officer, part of a sting operation.

Lisa McIntosh, 29, who her attorney said was in an abusive relationship and pushed to the edge - was arrested outside the Farmington restaurant.

After spending two days locked up in a cell at the Farmington Public Safety Department while the state police worked on obtaining a warrant from the county prosecutor, McIntosh was arraigned late Friday afternoon in 47th District Court on a felony charge of conspiracy to commit murder. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

47th District Judge Marla Parker arraigned McIntosh, who has children ages 12 and 2 and works in a restaurant. Bond was set at \$1 million cash or surety, with a preliminary examination scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 4. Following the arraignment, she was sent to the Oakland County jail.

Please see CHARGED, A4

Can laptop computers stop paper chase?

By JONI HUBBARD
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It takes a stack of paper about three inches high to keep Farmington Hills City Council members abreast of background on the issues they discuss at each meeting.

Officials hope to diminish that paper blizzard soon, with a move toward "paperless" council packets. Instead of having a heavy notebook, they'll zip

through electronically delivered files of information.

The project has its origins in a long-range project developed by a committee that met in the mid-1990s to bring Farmington Hills into the Information Age, according to Council member Jon Grant.

"We've spent \$2-\$3 million over the last five years on technology," he said. "It's been my feeling for the past year or so that we need to bring that tech-

FARMINGTON HILLS

nology to the public. I think one of the ways is for council, themselves, to utilize the technology."

Grant has a larger vision, too - one that involves public computer terminals at places like City Hall, where residents could access city council min-

utes, agendas and other information. For now, though, it may be enough of a challenge to bring officials on line.

In addition to reducing paper, he believes it will save administrative staffers' time and energy.

"One of the reasons we've invested in technology," Grant said, "is to streamline and make things more efficient."

Whether that proves the case remains to be seen. City Manager

Please see PAPER, A6

Water main break halts service to homes, school

By TIM SMITH
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"No water today," read the sign on the ice-covered glass door outside Starbucks Coffee in downtown Farmington Thursday morning.

The hand-printed sign which announced the shop's temporary closure also alluded to the culprit - a water main break in the city.

Although there was a water main break at approximately 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, along Power Road between Shawwassee-10 Mile roads, it wasn't the cause of the caffeine shut-off, said Kevin Gushman, director of Farmington's public services department.

A totally unrelated problem - a frozen water meter inside Starbucks - was the reason some coffee drinkers had their morning spoiled.

But the broken water main, which took almost all night to fix, forced cancellation of classes Thursday at Our Lady of Sorrows and halted water service to about six households, Gushman said.

Water service was back to normal by 9:30 a.m. Thursday, although as of 2 p.m. that afternoon, Starbucks customers were still wondering where their next cup would come from. The coffee shop finally re-opened about 4:30 p.m. Thursday.

"Just the cold weather," said Gushman, explaining why the section of cast iron pipe burst. "As the ground freezes, it exerts pressure on the pipes and causes them to split."

■ **'On a hill (water) picks the point of least resistance... It worked its way down the hill and was coming out on the roadway at a location 30-to-40 feet where the actual break was.'**

Kevin Gushman
Public services director

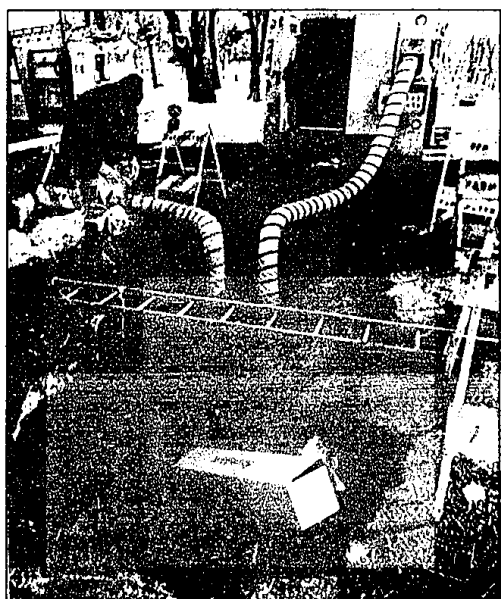
Crew members battled bitter cold and frozen ground until finally finding the source of the break, about 6 a.m. Thursday. Repairs were made by placing a clamp over the broken area.

With the main located in a hill, on the north side of Power Road, it took much longer to track where the actual break was.

"On a hill (water) picks the point of least resistance to come out," he said. "It worked its way down the hill and was coming out on the roadway at a location 30-to-40 feet where the actual break was."

Besides trying to dig through a foot-and-a-half of frost, workers needed to break out the road, "expose the pipe and see which direction the water (was) going," Gushman continued.

Because Farmington is an older community, there have been numerous water main breaks this winter. "That's something you have to expect in an aging community like Farmington," he said.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRUEHLER

Fix: Ameritech crews repaired a phone line at the site where a water main broke in Farmington Wednesday. By Thursday afternoon, users had water again.