

# Fixed millage faces rough road

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

A proposal that Oakland County officials say will streamline the tax allocation process and once again make efficiency a virtue, actually looks a lot like a tax increase.

A proposal calling for the establishment of a fixed, uniform 16.46-mill county-wide millage and the abolition of the tax allocation board will be on the Aug. 8 ballot.

Oakland officials are fearful that in an atmosphere where anything resembling a tax increase is likely to be shot down by the voters, their fixed millage proposal faces tough sledding.

The tax allocation board currently apportions 45 mills to the county, townships, the intermediate school districts and local school districts.

While 15 mills is considered the present limit, some Oakland County communities pay more. Some residents of Avon Township, Oakland Township, South Lyon Township and Novi Township pay 16 mills or more.

Under the fixed millage plan, county officials say, the 15-mill figure would jump to 16.46 mills—an increase of \$1.46 per every \$1,000 in state equalized valuation.

That millage would be apportioned as follows: 5.26 mills for county operations, 9.54 mills to the local school districts, 1.41 mills to townships, and .25 mill to the intermediate school district.

THOSE ALLOCATIONS, said James M. Brennan, director of management

**'We're talking about a disincentive for efficiency. That's what we've got now. If you don't spend your allocation, someone else will.'**

—County Budget Director James Brennan

and budget for Oakland, are the ceilings under which the county, townships and intermediate school districts would have to operate.

Local school districts, of course, could levy their own millages.

But, Brennan explained, local units could opt not to use all of their allocated millage and could cut the tax rate.

Oakland County could, for example, cut its 5.26-mill allocation to 5.23 mills or 5.2 mills.

"Townships and school districts can also cut their millages," said Patrick Nowak, Oakland County's expert in inter-governmental relations. "They've got the advantage of having their elected boards control their own millages."

THAT IS A drastic change, Brennan said. Under the present system, the tax allocation process, which Brennan calls "useless," determines how much each unit gets.

"We're talking about a disincentive for efficiency," Brennan said. "That's what we've got now. If you don't spend

proposed tax allocation plan a good

end. The West Bloomfield School District, for example, would get 1.4 mills more under the proposed fixed millage system. Similarly, the school districts of Birmingham, Farmington and Avondale would get 1.4-mill increases.

Brennan reminded that the school districts, like the county and intermediate school districts, did not have to levy all the additional millage. West Bloomfield has indicated that if the fixed millage proposal is approved, it will reduce its upcoming four-mill tax renewal by 1.4 mills.

BRENNAN ALSO pointed out that the incorporated cities in Oakland County would not have to pay the 1.41 mills set aside for the townships. "For many taxpayers," he said, "there's only the possibility of .65-mill increase. That's only a possibility."

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He explained that under the current tax allocation system, most units feel forced to make complete use of their annual allocations. If they don't use all of it, Brennan said, they face the chance of losing part of it the following year.

Under the present system, he said, "somebody's savings become somebody else's bonus."

Brennan conceded, though, that some school districts would find the

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