

OBSERVATION POINT

Assessment Methods Need Overhaul

By Philip H. Power



Let's say you buy a house out here in a new development. You pay, say, \$35,000 for the house and land; maybe you feel you got a good deal.

You move in with your family. You get the lawn fixed up, plant some trees, get the backyard barbecue set up.

Then your tax bill arrives and you find that your half-acre lot has an assessed value of \$10,000 per acre or \$5,000 for your parcel. So your property taxes are based on this assessment.

Then you find out that the large farm across the road on identical land, and all ready for development is assessed at \$1,000 per acre. And then you find out from a real estate friend that this farm would sell on the open market for between \$6,000 and \$8,000 per acre.

Is this fair? Should you pay taxes on land assessed at \$10,000 per acre, while the farmer next door pays taxes on identical but undeveloped land at an assessed rate of \$1,000 per acre, well below the market price?

No, it isn't fair. And that's why there's no chance of getting any useful tax reform in Michigan unless they straighten out assessment procedures.

GOV. MILLIKEN'S tax and education reform program involves replacement of the jumble of locally-passed millages with a state-wide flat-rate property tax.

That sounds all right. But property taxes are levied against the state equalized valuation (SEV) of a parcel of land, which is supposed to be exactly 50% of the actual market value of the property.

But how is the market value of your property determined? By assessment. The assessor comes around and says what your property is worth on the open market. That figure is the assessed value, and it's that value that determines what the SEV is going to be, and thereby what your taxes will be.

The assessor is the key figure in determining just how much money we will pay in property taxes.

BUT CONSIDER the following facts:

1) "Property assessment practices in Michigan do not produce a uniform relationship between the assessed valuation or state equalized valuation and the true market value of property. The state equalized valuation in Michigan ranges from less than 10% to more than 50% of market value," according to the Governor's Educational Reform Commission.

This means that in some areas, assessment values are higher than they should be and lower in others. There is no uniformity in standards of assessment.

This in turn means that while someone in Osceola County may be getting away with an SEV of 10% of market value, a guy living in Livonia may be paying taxes based on

an SEV of 50% market value.

This isn't fair. 2) Although the State Tax Commission sends out books telling local assessors how to determine the true market value of property, there is very little actual training or professionalization of assessors in Michigan.

This problem is particularly acute in townships, where the township supervisor is often the assessor. This is true in Farmington and Plymouth Townships in this area; the assessor in Redford Township is a political appointee of the township board.

This is not to suggest that assessors in this area are consciously unfair or even hacks. But they are very busy men, with no required training or professional standards for certification.

Sen. Harry DeMaso (R-Battle Creek) has introduced a bill to create a State Assessors Board, establish training courses leading to certification of assessors, and set up standards for assessment against which local assessors will be judged.

This bill has not yet passed the Legislature.

THE PROBLEM is particularly acute in suburban areas, where people move into new houses and are socked for a darn big tax bill, while the old-time farmer across the road gets away with a low assessment.

As long as assessment of

undeveloped but valuable land does not keep up with actual market values, you get tax favoritism for speculators and an undue burden to owners of developed property.

It also means that hard-pressed suburban communities aren't getting the kind of money

they need to pay their bills. Robert Purnell, chairman of the Tax Assessment Division of the Michigan State Treasury Department, has estimated that \$140 million to \$200 million taxes could be realized if fair, uniform and equitable assessment practices were followed state-wide.

WE'RE IN THE PALM OF HIS HAND.



Tim Richard writes

Fairness Is A Must In College Talks

It's still popular, among national writers who don't pay much attention to detail, to refer to suburbia as "a cultural wasteland," a region dominated by lawns at day and television at night.

In Observerland that view was never corrected to begin with, and it will be less true than ever now that Schoolcraft College's Cultural Affairs Committee will have \$30,000 to spend on speakers and entertainment during the 1970-71 school year.

Yet if the program is to be successful, that committee, to be headed by history instructor Stuart Bloom, will have to be managed carefully and with—let us say—political fairness. And this is perhaps the proper time to urge the committee to use political fairness.

IN OUTLINING their plans recently to the college trustees, committee members noted two famous speakers already booked this year—Dr. Harold Taylor, an educator, and Sen. Philip Hart, who has one of the most ultra-liberal voting records in Congress.

It talked of such future possibilities as Theodore Bikel, actor and musician (and far left political activist); Vance Packard, author and critic of commerce; Rev. Jesse Jackson, civil rights leader; Sen. Gaylord Nelson,

who's about as liberal as Hart; Rep. Julian Bond, Georgia legislator and Vietnam war opponent; and Abe Fortas, former Supreme Court justice.

A good lineup, scholastically, but there's one little problem. They all come from one end of the political spectrum.

Ah, yes, there was one concession to the right wing—conservative columnist Russell Kirk. But the presence of Kirk on the list just emphasizes the opposite orientation of the rest of the speakers.

WHAT ABOUT SOMEONE from the middle of the political spectrum, Mr. Chairman?

How about balancing Hart with, say, Sen. Bob Griffin or

that whiz-bang young congressman from Flint, Don Riegle?

And to add a bit of depth to Vance Packard's discussion of sociology, why not see if William Whyte, author of "The Organization Man," is still around?

And instead of the cloud-covered Abe Fortas, couldn't you maybe balance Sen. Nelson's left views with Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart?

John Lindsay might be tough to get, but how about taking a crack at inviting Sen. Mark Hatfield or Chuck Percy?

And if you're going to try for a firebrand like Julian Bond, why not also put in a pitch for the moderate Sen. Ed Brooke?

Why go so heavily into politicians and people who deal with words? Why not get some-

one from an industrial outfit like Xerox or Burroughs or IBM?

And do we have to stick to speakers on national affairs? Glenn S. Allen, state budget director, is one of the most knowledgeable and progressive men to be drawn into state government in 20 years—and probably a better speaker than half the people on the existing list.

It would indeed be sad, and no contribution to suburban culture, if Schoolcraft's list of speakers were drawn solidly from the ranks of the left wing with only the likes of the conservative Kirk thrown in for token ideological integration.

Let's think about that, Mr. Chairman.

R.T. Thompson writes

Door Opens For Second Vote On Daylight Savings Time

With an affirmative opinion from Atty. Gen. Frank Kelley, the wheels are beginning to roll for a second vote by Michigan electors on putting the state on daylight saving time.

The question of whether either state or federal law prohibits use of initiative petition for a second try was asked of Kelley by State Senator Raymond Dziedzic, one of the leaders of the almost successful fight for fast time in 1968.

Kelley's answer was that in his opinion "neither state nor federal law inhibits change by initiative petition in the current Michigan law exempting the state from the daylight saving time provision of the uniform time act."

And that spells out to Dziedzic that there is no legal roadblock for trying again.

The Michigan State Chamber of Commerce and the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce are carrying the ball this time in getting out petitions asking for a second vote on the proposition of daylight saving time.

That automatically means most every local Chamber of Commerce in the populous sections of the state will join in the campaign.

The Farmington Chamber of Commerce already has taken action to support daylight time. Plymouth is studying the matter and hopes to make a recommendation soon and the story is the same in Redford Township, Livonia and Garden City.

Petitions already are being circulated in most of the Observ-

erland communities with the hope of getting enough signatures to have the matter placed on the ballot for a second vote.

It will be recalled that daylight saving time failed by the slimmest of margins in the 1968 poll, perhaps there has been enough of a change of heart to have it pass on a second try.

Sense And Nonsense

Ho! Ho! Ho! And a merry Christmas to you, Secretary of State James Hare. Especially after your most recent statement that the 1970 license plates may be used as many as three years.

The head of the Michigan State Police and of the Michigan Police Chiefs Association aren't the only ones that can't clearly distinguish the new plates—plenty of car owners have trouble reading the numbers of their licenses from 20 paces let alone the more than 100 feet Hare claims.

There is still time to re-evaluate the situation and decide to issue new plates with contrasting colors in 1971.

FOR THE BENEFIT of those interested in having daylight saving time adopted in Michigan, here is the percentage of voters against DST in 1968 in the six county area: Wayne, 46 percent; Oakland, 41 percent; Macomb, 45 percent; Monroe, 49 percent; Washtenaw, 43 percent and Livingston, 52 percent.

From this viewpoint, it appears as if the backers will have to build up a much larger plurality for the proposition to overcome the opposition in such counties as Livingston and the "no" vote in many of the smaller rural communities.

It will be interesting to see how well the various Chambers of Commerce can sell their story and get signatures on the petitions in the next few months.

DISSENT

View points expressed in DISSENT do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Newspapers Inc., but are presented in the belief that publication of all segments of thought on a public issue is a prerequisite to understanding and progress.

Sees Need For More Police \$\$

By John Guettler
Plymouth

There is a need for greater police funding in the Plymouth area. Higher salaries will eventually be a practical requirement, but the subject here is greater numbers of police officers, so as to obtain more thorough surveillance.

Local business operators, as I happen to be, will understand the content of these comments, but I suggest that the average homeowner will be affected eventually, directly or indirectly, by the same problems: property damage, higher merchandise and service costs, etc. to reflect costs of vandalism.

A few years ago, a University of Michigan sociologist discussed with me certain aspects of studies in which he was currently engaged, and predicted that Plymouth's entire nature would change within 10 years or so; that the increasing industrial population would be one factor in bringing about an accompanying higher crime and vandalism rate of noticeable proportions.

It's here now.

I have been personally called out—usually at night—to inspect break-ins and make up "damage reports" enough times to have some idea of what this is all about. Believe it or not, you're next. Think about that.

My own view is that the police role is not to report damage after the fact but initial prevention. This can probably be achieved only through greater numbers of officers on duty at a given time.

A call or letter to your city manager, Richard Blodgett, or a commissioner might help in this respect.

Engaged in a business which deals to some extent with the so-called "younger generation," I can say that many show more presence and awareness than some of our adult customers, while others are out-and-out dropouts in every sense.

It is the latter, of course, that we are dealing with here.

I happen to understand the long hair, free dress, and a few of the other things the kids are doing, but I don't go for pointless destructiveness.

A starting point might be for parents to get more involved. For openers, involved with your own kids.

Meanwhile, there is a need for greater preventive police control of the other element, both among teen-agers and older offenders. It may just be a fact of life that this can only be achieved by greater police numbers.

It'll cost you, but then it's costing you now.

John Guettler
Plymouth

Sense And Nonsense

Talk about a communications gap.

It stuck out like a sore thumb at a recent meeting of Livonia's Burton Hollow Civic Association when 90% of the parents there admitted they didn't know who (or what) the MC's was or that the rock group so popular in this area was once headed by hippie king John Sinclair, one-time head of the White Panthers now in prison on a narcotics conviction.

School officials, who were there to answer questions about Stevenson High School students smoking pot, were visibly shook.

Funny part was that most of "The Establishment" there that night looked hip and definitely on the youngish side.

Editorial & Opinion

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