

# Farmington Observer

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## Taxpayers steamed over assessments

### Hills residents storm city hall to protest hike

By MARY GNIEWEK

Phones were ringing off the hooks in the city assessor's office in Farmington Hills Monday.

Fed up with assessment hikes that averaged 20 percent over last year, homeowners lined the city hall lobby at Eleven Mile and Orchard Lake for five-minute appeals hearings before a city-appointed Board of Review.

By 11:30 a.m., the three-member board was already an hour behind schedule. With 600 requests appeals, the original three days set aside for hearings was expanded to 10 to accommodate the overflow.

At Monday's hearings, a bill-waiving attorney claimed a new-found allegiance for Headlee and Tisch, the two tax limitation amendments Michigan voters judged at the polls in 1978. The Headlee amendment won, Tisch lost.

An assessor for a nearby village questioned assessment data used to compute the tax rate for his four-bedroom Farmington Hills ranch.

Frustration centered on one theme: a shared belief among homeowners that property is assessed at more than 50 percent of market value. Assessments are based on sales figures for 1977, 1978 and the first six months of 1979, a time when Farmington Hills was recognized by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments as the number-one new growth area in the state.

LIKE MANY OTHERS, J. Michael Shaheen, a home builder, and his wife, Mary, a real estate agent, came to protest their \$48,000 assessment armed with facts and figures.

"Over the last two years, we've gone over sales figures and can't find any sale that comes close to the figure we're at," Shaheen said.

He conceded his home is overbuilt for the neighborhood, near 11 Mile and Middlebelt, but still feels he's not getting a fair shake. He cited a comparable home in the area that stayed unsold on the real estate market for six months and another that sold well below its assessed worth.

"The magnitude of the differential is what we're concerned with," Shaheen said. "I've never appealed an assessment before, but we're at more than 50 percent of market value."

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From left, Farmington Hills City Assessor Robert Roemer, and Board of Review members Jerry Pepple, Robert Beauchamp and Harlen Morris pour over assessment data that applies to the homeowners (foreground) who appealed their case Monday morning. (Staff photo by Randy Bors)

### Taxes draw fewer gripes in Farmington

By MARY GNIEWEK

The Board of Review used an egg timer to limit appeals hearings in Farmington Hills. But three miles away in Farmington City Hall, board members drank coffee and conversed in near empty city council chambers waiting up to 15 minutes between appointments.

Farmington homeowners received average 17 percent assessment hikes this year, but only 70 residents scheduled hearings to contest increases.

Assessment notices were mailed to homeowners in late February with tax bills due to follow in July. "We have a lot of regulars who come in every year whether we raise their assessment or not," said City Assessor John Sallor.

While the U.S. Department of Commerce inflation rate was set at 11.3 percent for 1980 taxes, Sallor said residential sales prices in the Farmington area jumped 17.5 percent from January 1979 to January 1980.

"Commercial-industrial property is stable. These assessments rose only 5 percent," Sallor said. "There's no value increase, no constant exchange like the housing market."

That, he says, explains why homeowners get the brunt of the assessment increase. The Headlee Amendment limits property taxes to the amount of inflation in a given year, but doesn't insure that homeowners assessment hikes won't exceed that percent.

## Affirmative action debated

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

The question of whether affirmative action for blacks results in discrimination against whites was the subject of the Monday night debate between the two attorneys who argued the Weber case before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Michael H. Gottesman, who represented the United Steelworkers of America before the Supreme Court, and Michael R. Fontham, who represented Brian F. Weber's complaint against the union, debated their case in the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills.

Weber complained that the black craft hiring goals of the Steelworkers and his employer, Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corp., discriminated against white applicants and was contrary to the Civil Rights Act.

The Supreme Court overruled two

lower courts in maintaining that the intent of the Civil Rights Act was to place blacks into the mainstream of society.

"The Supreme Court in the Weber case decided that discrimination was all right," Fontham told the Farmington Hills audience.

He lambasted the corporations and unions for deciding upon a social policy which didn't affect the top echelons of either organization but which forced the lower echelon of workers to cope with the effects of the decision.

The decision to pursue and affirm action program "carries with it a great, great social cost," he argued.

"WELL-OFF whites are not subject to affirmative action. That includes lawyers, small businessmen, executives in large corporations and executives in large unions," he said.

"Affirmative action applies to the great masses of people — secretaries, laborers, people who are trying to scratch their way up the corporate ladder."

"They have the same kind of educational and economic backgrounds as the ones who are part of the minority group," Fontham said.

But Gottesman saw a difference between the black worker trying to scratch his way to the top and a white worker embarked on the same task.

"Some say that when you put race as the deciding factor, it is discrimination and you are unraveling a basic and fundamental principle of our society," he said.

"But others say that the non-discriminatory society is a fiction. If race hadn't been a factor in our society we wouldn't have to take it into account now."

Blacks have been subject to poor food, poor housing and discrimination in the work place. These conditions have had an adverse effect on black family life, according to Gottesman.

When equal hiring practices were adopted 10 years ago, their intent wasn't to prefer or disadvantage blacks, he said.

IN 10 YEARS there hasn't been much of a change in the situation. Black employment has become more of a problem, he added.

"When you start people off one way behind the other and say, 'Now you're going to start the race,' one doesn't make it to the finish line with the others," Gottesman said.

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INSTEAD, the combined averages of homeowners, industrial and commercial assessments must not exceed the rate of inflation.

"Headlee relates to the total roll-back; the original intent was to put a limit on the amount each government unit can collect," the assessor said.

"If both the city and the school district were up 16 percent, they'd have to cut back to 11.3 percent."

By law, assessments should equal 50 percent of the market value of the property, he explained.

"What I don't like is being compared to the guy down the street who put \$13,000 worth of improvements into his home," said one Farmington resident who lives in the city's historical district.

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## OCC produces a 'movie mogul'

By MARY GNIEWEK

Imagine Oakland Community College and a Farmington Hills subdivision as the backdrop for a full-length suspense motion picture.

You won't see it on television or in local movie houses, but following a by-invitation-only premiere at the Farmington Players Barn March 22, "The Suburbanites" (What else to call a movie filmed in Farmington Hills?) may be shown at the Farmington library.

The movie mogul behind "The Suburbanites" is Brian Belanger, who is scriptwriter, musical composer, director, cameraman, editor, ad infinitum.

Belanger, a jack-of-all-movie trades at age 20, is wrapping up an associate's degree in audio visual technology at OCC, then hopes to study filmmaking at the University of Southern California in the heart of the movie industry.

"The Suburbanites," 70 minutes of finished product shot in Super-8 with magnetic sound and featuring music of the Oakway Symphony and actors from the Farmington Players, is the story of a modern day witch hunt in Scottsboro, USA.

Doug (Mark Honeyman), an average Joe College student, takes up residence with an elderly couple played by Anthony Reed and Hope Nabstoll who are portrayed as paranoid religious fanatics.

THEY ACCUSE their bewildered houseguest of being a witch after he turns water into blood. A more objective viewer would note that he

simply turns on the kitchen tap and gets a rusty flow of mineral laden water.

But the witch hunters are an anxious pair, fervently looking for some evil-doing. "It's about paranoia, like the witch trials in the 1600s and the witch trials during the McCarthy era," Belanger explains.

"It's not like 'The Exorcist' or 'The Omen.' This is down to earth."

Despite the theme, Belanger says he's not making a social statement.

"It's an audience pleaser," he said.

Belanger spent two years on "The Suburbanites," scriptwriting, casting, filming, composing a soundtrack, syncing dialogue and whitening down film footage to the finished product.

"FOR EVERY foot of film I used, there's five I didn't use," he says, wondering what to do with the garbage bags full of edited scraps in the basement of the Farmington Hills home he shares with his parents and sister.

A longtime movie maker, this is his most ambitious product to date and Belanger estimates it cost him \$1,500, a drop in the film budget compared to the multi-million dollar sets of the now defunct TV series "Battlestar Galactica" he toured at Universal Studios last summer.

Belanger hopes "The Suburbanites" will earn him a \$15,000 grant from the Arts for his next project, a fantasy film.

If not, "I'll add a well-rounded piece to his portfolio."



Brian Belanger: "I'd like to direct feature films. I know I'm shooting big, but I think I can do it."

## Sports policy: intramural and interscholastic

By MARY GNIEWEK

A combined interscholastic-intramural sports program for middle schools scored its first victory Tuesday.

The curriculum committee of the Farmington Board of Education agreed unanimously to recommend adoption of Athletic Director Jack Cotton's plan to the full board next Tuesday.

Cotton's plan is a combination of interscholastic (competition between teams from different schools in the district) and intramurals (squads in the same school) for seventh and eighth grade. Sixth graders would be limited to intramurals only. Sports to be included are football, basketball, wrestling, cross country, volleyball and track in interscholastic competition.

Two controversial proposals — the accepted plan drafted by Jack Cotton and another by Sean Whalen, Warner Junior High physical education teacher — were debated by a standing-room-

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