

Tax statement attacked

Brotherton takes mayor's heat

By Jackie Klein
staff writer

Southfield Mayor Donald Fracassi takes exception to remarks attributed to State Rep. Sandy Brotherton that "municipal politicians are criticized for assessing property at artificially low rates to gain favor from local voters."

It was reported in the Jan. 7 edition of the Observer & Eccentric that Brotherton — a Farmington Republican whose district includes Southfield

and Farmington Hills — charged that local politicians also seek to garner additional state funds.

"If Brotherton in fact did make comments like 'communities have their cake and eat it too' and that the state has less control over local tax rates than the average citizen, I'd like to rebut that," Fracassi said.

FRACASSI ALSO said Southfield has always assessed properties equitably.

"Southfield is the smallest benefactor of taxes our property owners pay," he said in an interview this week. "Schools get the bulk of the money. If the State Legislature reduced the 50 percent of true cash value assessment level to something like 35-45 percent, the state would have to reimburse Southfield and other cities for school aid."

"That would mean the state, counties, cities and schools would be forced to tighten their belts because of lost revenue. And the state wants to keep schools of education off its back." Fracassi questioned why legislators recently passed the "Truth in Assessment Rollback" if the state has no control over property tax assessments.

SOUTHFIELD RESIDENTS — due for average 6-8 percent hikes in 1982 property assessments — won't be affected by the new legislation, according to City Assessor Ernest Beren.

Under the new law, if the total 1982 state equalized value of a city exceeds its assessed value by 5 percent or more, the maximum authorized tax rate will be reduced.

The bill, Beren said, is aimed at cities assessing properties lower than 50 percent of true cash value required by state law. For the past 10 years, Beren said, Southfield's properties have been assessed to hit the 50 percent mark.

That means the state equalized value set by the county and the total assessed value reached by the city is the same, Beren said.

LEGISLATORS say the reason for the new law is to insure that the total tax levy isn't greater than the amount which could have been levied based on its assessed value.

"The Legislature is only responsible for setting the assessment level," said

Low Glazier, legislative aide to State Sen. Doug Ross, D-Southfield.

"The process of equalization is decided by the county and local government. Legislators from time to time try to fine tune that assessment process."

"The new law imposes a financial penalty on cities which for political reasons or incompetence fails to assess at the 50 percent level. Taxpayers aren't really affected. Cities spend money for services and must be responsible."

Beren, however, argues that if the state had its way, Southfield residents would get an average 15 to 18 percent property assessment boost.

"Legislators could make points by saying they passed the new assessment law to keep cities from grabbing all the property tax money," he maintained.

FRACASSI BELIEVES the answer to the dilemma is for Southfield to reduce its tax rate in proportion to increases in property assessments. The tax rate for the city, schools and county is 62 mills — \$62 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation.

"All entities would have to agree to a reduction," Fracassi said. "The city can't budget taxes. If more money is needed for services, the voters could go to the polls and decide on a millage raise."

"With more refined technology, every property assessment could be rolled back. When people get notices of assessment increases, they automatically say their taxes are going up. This wouldn't happen if we had a uniform tax rate."

"When residents appeal their assessment, they raise to the board of review, they tear down their houses and their neighborhoods. They don't say they're glad their homes are worth more. They don't take pride in that."

YMCA Highlights

The Farmington area YMCA provides a variety of services for youth and adults in the community. Further information may be obtained by calling 553-4020 between 9 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. daily.

PRESCHOOL BALLET — For boys and girls ages 3-5. Children will learn the basic positions through songs and games. Classes are available on Thursday mornings. YMCA member fee is \$14 and \$20 for non-members. Seven weeks of instruction.

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CREATIVE RELAXATION LECTURE — Dr. Deborah Bright will lecture on this topic at the Farmington YMCA from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. on Saturday, Jan. 30. Dr. Bright has taught this

MANAGE YOUR STRESS — Dr. Jeffrey Kohler is a professor of counseling, a psychotherapist, dedicated runner and author of several books. A four-week course will begin on Jan. 21 for four consecutive weeks. You will learn how to control the stress of daily living. Fee for members is \$32 and \$40 for non-members.

VALENTINE RACQUETBALL TOURNAMENT — A special St. Valentine's Racquetball Tournament will be played on Feb. 13 and 14 at the Farmington YMCA. This event is a mixed doubles competition with special rules. Tournament is for members only. Information is available from Dave Potthoff at 553-4090.

DOG OBEDIENCE — Teach your dog to listen to commands. Class meets from 7:15-8:15 p.m. on Mondays. All dogs must be at least six months old. Fee is \$32.

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