

Farthington Observer

Volume 93 Number 54

Thursday, April 15, 1982

Farthington, Michigan

92 Pages

Twenty-five cents

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Divided council to hear public on HUD grant

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

A public hearing at 7:30 p.m. April 19 at Farmington Hills City Hall will set the stage for debate on the city's proposed entry into the federally funded Community Development Block Grant program.

The city is eligible for \$417,000 to fund public improvements and rehabilitation for low- and moderate-income housing.

Controversy has arisen among council members who disagree on how

much control, if any, the city would forfeit to HUD by accepting the money.

In a 5-2 split decision, the council last month voted to submit to HUD a housing assistance plan — the first step in applying for Community Development Block Grant funds.

Former Mayor Donn Wolf and Mayor Pro Tem William Lange dissented, while voting to submit the housing assistance plan were Mayor Jack Burwell and council members Jody Soronen, Charles Williams, Fred Hughes and Jan Dolan.

In the three-year housing assistance

plan, city officials proposed the allocation of \$230,000 towards public works improvements in the southeast portion of the city. Bounded by Middlebelt, Shawwassee, Colwell and Grand River, the area contains the city's oldest housing stock and the greatest concentration of low- and moderate-income families.

The plan earmarks another \$24,000 for sidewalk construction along 13 Mile Road from the Detroit Baptist Manor senior-citizen housing project to Orchard Lake Road and an additional \$125,000 for housing rehabilitation.

Administrative costs would consume the remaining \$38,000.

PARTICIPATION in the program portends loss of control, Lange told council members March 22.

"If we accept \$417,000, HUD has the option, which it can implement through federal regulations, of telling us in midstream how to spend every penny. I don't believe for \$417,000 we should allow encroachment. It's the first step towards relinquishing control.

"It's such a significant issue it should go on the ballot in a general election.

We reflect the people, and I don't think they want it," Lange said.

City Manager Lawrence Savage attempted to appease Lange, saying, "We've indicated what we're going to do (with the funds). If HUD doesn't accept our proposed use of funds, then we don't get into it."

Among other things, the 24 HUD regulations stipulate the grantee must:

- Accept the jurisdiction of the federal courts for the purpose of enforcement of responsibilities.
- Comply with the flood insurance purchase requirements of the Flood

Disaster Protection Act as well as the lead-based paint requirements pursuant to the Lead-Based Paint Poisoning Prevention Act.

- Give HUD and the Comptroller General or any authorized representatives access to and the right to examine all records, books, papers or documents related to the grant.

To receive the money, the council must submit to HUD by April 30 a final statement on the city's objectives and projected use of funds, and a council resolution certifying the city will comply with all regulations.

Former opponent switches sides, supports grant

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

A former leading opponent of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-funded housing projects in Farmington Hills is supporting the city's proposed participation in the HUD Community Development Block Grant program.

The issue is the subject of Monday's public hearing at 7:30 p.m. at Farmington Hills City Hall.

Julieann Hovanesian, president of Citizens for More Responsible Government in Farmington and Farmington Hills, said the program represents "a different form of subsidy and should be viewed from a fresh perspective."

The Community Block Grant program would provide the city with \$417,000 in HUD money to rehabilitate low- and middle-income housing units, make public works improvements, and to assist renters.

"HUD itself is an emotionally charged word, which is too bad. We should take each instance and study it for itself," Hovanesian said.

"I opposed the low-income-family housing project a few years back, but this is an altogether different thing. This is money coming back into our community that will help needy Farmington Hills homeowners, especially seniors, who are unable to pay for the repairs necessary to bring their homes up to code, rather than landlords who stand to make a profit on the grant."

Citizens for More Responsible Government sent to 200 homeowners association presidents and various organizations a detailed report on the Community Block Grant program in an effort to increase attendance at Monday's public hearing.

Members of the organization's board of directors will attend the public hearing.

ing, one of whom probably will serve as a spokesperson for the group, Hovanesian said.

"Our feeling as a citizens' group was that maybe we had to have more facts about HUD. When there's division among council members, that's something that ought to be cleared up so people know what they're voting for," she said.

ANTI-HUD SENTIMENT in Farmington Hills traditionally has been strong because participation in HUD programs means reams of red tape and excessive federal regulation, Hovanesian added.

"All that was printed in the paper (the city's legal notice in the Observer April 1 regarding the public hearing) listed the 24 federal regulations Hills must comply with upon acceptance of funds was enough to frighten anyone from having to do anything with HUD," Hovanesian said.

"But people in this community have nothing to fear, only something to gain. Right now funds are getting to be less and less available, and also HUD formalities in the handling of Community Development Block Grant money has relaxed greatly.

The present administration is allowing a lot more local decisions from the city itself on how to use the money," she said.

Residents who vote based on their emotions as opposed to the facts defeat the whole purpose of our system, added Hovanesian.

"Just the superficial name of the grant scares people. Fear is a very powerful source of energy that can work in a very negative way," Hovanesian said. "Fear of the unknown is worse than the simple truth. The truth here is that the grant program will benefit some very needy people."



RANDY BORSI/staff photographer

House calls

August Jafano (left) receives instructions from visiting nurse Janice Lawrence on the proper method for injecting insulin. To read more

about the Visiting Nurses Association, please turn to today's Suburban Life section.

Lawmakers see different roads to state's financial security

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Lawmakers representing the Farmington area disagree on Governor William Milliken's assessment of Michigan's falling financial health.

Milliken has said the state is facing a crisis that "if not met forcefully and courageously, will cripple this state for years and years to come."

He exercised sufficient political muscle during an all-night legislative session last week to win the House of Representatives' support for a 1-per-cent income tax hike.

State Rep. Sandy Brotherton, R-Farmington, was not among the governor's supporters. He voted against the tax increase because "personally, I didn't feel we should be raising the income tax, and I received probably in the neighborhood of 75 to 80 letters, postcards and phone calls from people in the district who were adamantly opposed to it."

In addition, the state has failed to sufficiently reduce its own expenses, Brotherton said.

It is estimated the income tax hike, as approved by the House, would cost the average Michigan family about \$70 during the six-month period it will be in effect. The Senate is expected to vote on the increase April 20 following the holiday recess.

State Sen. Doug Ross, D-Southfield, said he will "under no circumstances support a permanent increase in the income tax."

Toss, however, maintains the state "is in a very real crisis, and if we don't deal with it responsibly, we could end up facing bankruptcy."

"I think we're involved in a temporary crisis, and at this point I would support a temporary increase. The senator this week has been going door to door gathering constituents' opinions. He says residents could buy the temporary increase if given some

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assurance it would indeed be temporary.

"I share many taxpayers' skepticism about so-called temporary taxes, so before I could support it I would need more concrete assurances than are currently provided in the House bill," Ross said.

The bill as passed by the House does ensure the expiration of the tax, Brotherton said.

"There were a number of different proposals put in, but the one that finally was endorsed by the Republican leadership is one that said it would be a six-month tax expiring Oct. 31, just prior to the election."

The governor agreed he would refuse to support any attempt to reimpose the tax after the general election, and even agreed to veto any such proposal following the election, Brotherton added.

Ross plans to bolster those assurances.

"I certainly will attempt to offer some assurances, perhaps by requiring that the bill goes on the ballot so voters will have a say as to whether the tax is temporary or permanent."

It would give voters direct control over its termination, something that has never been done before, Ross said.

which has held down spending and made reductions where they're needed."

Brotherton claims colleges and universities, unlike elementary and secondary educational institutions, have failed to adjust to declining enrollment.

"We don't have that many kids going through the system any more, and teachers have had to swallow hard and deal with tough issues and accept layoffs."

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"Colleges and universities don't seem to be willing to do that so far. As a result, universities are having a devil of a time due to cost and general change in attitudes about college education."

Brotherton would like to see the state work with educators to avoid duplicate programs, cut down and cut back.

"They're going to have to do it eventually. It would be nice to do it on a planned basis instead of on the basis of an emergency."

The state's payroll constitutes another major problem, contends Brotherton.

"The number of people we have on the payroll has grown twice as much as the cost of living, the population, or any measuring stick you want to use."

"We're really not biting the bullet. The governor has said budget cuts

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Supermarket move is a step closer

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

A scaled-down version of a shopping center planned at the southeast corner of Farmington Road and Nine Mile won unanimous approval Monday night from the Farmington Planning Commission.

Previously stated plans to build a large Perry Drugs and ACO Hardware store on the site have been dropped, according to the developer. The plans were dropped in response to complaints by merchants and citizens in Farmington who feared similar downtown businesses would suffer if Perry or Aco were allowed in the center.

What remains of the proposed project — which still must receive City Council approval — is a 41,000-square-foot Farmer Jack supermarket and attached 20,800-square-foot block of retail stores facing Farmington Road. Space also has been allowed at the corner of the intersection for a 5,000-square-foot restaurant.

The restaurant, planning commissioners said, would have to be a "sit-down, family-style restaurant" as opposed to a fast-food take-out facility.

Planning commissioners said Monday night that major revisions were recommended last month when the developer, Wetherford/Walker Co., and the major shopping center tenant, Bor-

man Foods, Inc., owners of Farmer Jack supermarkets, met with planning commission members.

While the developers control 14 acres at the corner of Nine Mile and Farmington Road, less than seven acres was sought for rezoning. Planning commissioners recommended Monday night that city commissioners grant the developer a C-2 zoning designation.

Initially, the developer requested C-3 zoning for the site, which would allow heavy commercial uses such as recreation, vehicle storage, nursery sales and arcades — uses which are prohibited in C-2 commercial zones.

"THIS DEVELOPMENT has been developed in conjunction with the needs of the community as perceived by city planners," said Rick Walker, partner in Wetherford/Walker Developers. "Our proposal was developed by working backwards from the standpoint of what's the minimum number of square footage we need to be economically viable."

So when planners asked his firm to scale down the proposal it wasn't difficult to do, Walker said.

Despite a 35,000-square-foot reduction from the original plan, many residents spoke out against the scaled-down project at the planning meeting.

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