

# Farmington Observer

Volume 95 Number 44

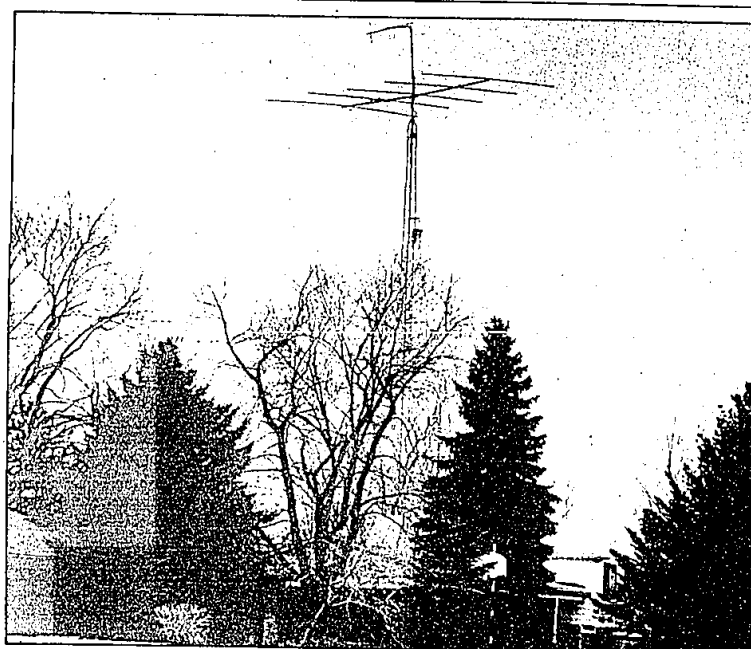
Monday, March 12, 1984

Farmington, Michigan

32 Pages

Twenty-Five Cents

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

An amateur radio antenna catches signals from high above a Farmington Hills home.

## Tempest over towers stirs up residents

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Some of Farmington Hills' subdivision associations promise to oppose a push from local amateur radio operators seeking to change the city's height restrictions for antenna towers.

When the planning commission considers amending the city's zoning ordinance at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, subdivision representatives will be present at the public hearing to make it known they don't like what is happening.

"As an association we are definitely opposed to it," said Vicki Hartsborn, Old Farm Colony Subdivision Association president, who is leading opposition among the city's neighborhoods.

If the zoning ordinance is amended, radio operators will be able to build an antenna to a maximum of 75 feet. Currently, ham operator towers are restricted to 25 feet.

HARTSHORN SENT letters to at least 60 subdivision association presidents urging them to either write to the planning commission or city council and to attend the public hearing Thursday.

"Any I have reached by phone are in opposition to it (changing radio tower height limits)," Hartsborn said.

When 24 amateur radio operators presented a petition requesting the ordinance change, council members in January voted 4-2 to refer the request, without recommendation, to the planning commission.

The council's referral allowed the petitioners to bypass the planning commission's \$400 fee that pays the administrative costs for considering and framing an ordinance amendment.

This is the second time ham radio operators have requested an ordinance change. In 1979, after planning commissioners "labored long and hard" over changing the ordinance, "it was promptly shot

**But radio operators contend that even though variances have been granted, there exists no uniformly applied standards by which applications for variances are judged.'**

down," by unanimous vote, said Hal Rowe, director of zoning.

But in the last few years, the Zoning Board of Appeals has granted at least seven variances to erect antennas taller than 25 feet.

And that is the procedure many of the city's subdivision associations want maintained.

"We at least receive notification so we can object or support (an issue)," Hartsborn said, referring to the ZBA's procedure of allowing residents to know that a variance is under consideration.

Changing the ordinance, she said, would allow radio operators to put up antennas without benefit of neighbor's input.

"They are trying to change the law to a pretty high extreme."

BUT RADIO operators contend that even though variances have been granted, "there exists no uniformly applied standard by which applications for variances are judged."

Old Farm, as well as most of the subdivisions Hartsborn contacted such as Kendallwood, are opposed to extending the height of radio antennas.

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## Now is the time for taxpayers to state beefs

By Diane Gale  
staff writer

Two weeks ago mail boxes in Farmington were filled with reminders to residents that property taxes have increased. Taxpayers will have an opportunity to argue their payments and possibly have them changed by the Board of Review this week.

From 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. today, and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday three board members will hear reasons why they should lower assessments.

An assessment is based on 50 per-

cent of market value. On an average, assessments increased 2.4 percent for residential property owners, 6.2 percent for commercial property owners and 15.8 percent for apartment owners.

Overall the city saw a 3.5 percent property tax increase, according to John Sailer, Farmington's part time city assessor.

"The city is broken up in 26 different residential neighborhoods, and we study sales in each neighborhood to see (determine) the assessments," Sailer said.

"There is no significant decrease in

assessments in any neighborhood," he said.

The board of review has the authority to decrease, and in rare cases increase, assessments.

"We want to be fair, and if we overassessed a particular property (area) and a lot of people come in, we can change all the property (assessments) in that area," Sailer said.

"It could work the other way, and the board could increase the assessments if an area is found to be underassessed," Sailer said. He added this is an uncommon happening.

"PROPERTIES ARE selling, real estate is doing much better than a year and a half ago and interest rates are down," Sailer said in explaining the assessment increases.

"As long as there isn't a shocking figure, they're willing to accept and might expect the increases," he said.

At the board of review taxpayers may claim "hardship," which means they say they can't afford to pay their property taxes. They are given a lengthy form to complete, and are requested to present a copy of their 1983 income tax return.

"If people request a hardship the

previous year, we send out a form the following year, because we don't want them to forget or miss it," he said.

Approximately 25 people receive the hardship request form each year.

Sailer estimates 90 people will present arguments against the payments. Last year 109 residents disputed the assessments at the board of review hearings.

"When there's a greater demand for housing, you'll get more sales and prices start rising and you get better prices," he said.

THE ASSESSOR suggests residents study comparable sales in their neighborhood.

"Just because you're assessment value increased by a certain percent, it doesn't mean necessarily that the property value increased that much that year," he said. "But a lot of times the assessed value isn't exactly half of the market value for the previous year."

Sailer said in previous years the assessments could have been off. And during that time the city was privy to more information about sales in the area. This causes the assessments to change.

"We get a lot of people who just want to come in and complain about taxes," Sailer said. "If the assessment is at 50

percent or less, there is nothing the board of review can do to change it. The board of review isn't the place to direct these comments."

THE BOARD of review is made up of three Farmington property owners who were appointed by the city council. William Bilis, a long-time real estate appraiser, is chairman. The other members include Del Cornwell, real estate property manager, and Joan Sundt, real estate saleswoman. Sailer will act as secretary, but won't take part in the decision-making process.

"Usually two weeks after the hearing we have all the notices sent out concerning changes made by the board of review," Sailer said.

Once the board of review completes its changes, the total assessed value is sent to each taxing unit. They determine the rates. The tax bills will go out to property owners in July. The taxes are due by Aug. 31, and after that date there is a penalty fee.

"We encourage people to come in and ask questions, but a lot of times they moan and groan to neighbors, but they won't come in and talk to us," Sailer said. "If people understand it, it becomes a little easier to accept."

## Hills homeowners have chance, too

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

Property assessments for 1984 in Farmington Hills increased 1 to 2 percent on the average. This was largely due to improved housing sales.

That's the word from the city's assessing office that last week mailed out the 1984 property assessment notices.

"Changes from year to year will be based on recorded sales," said Ted Hindman, assistant city assessor.

But that doesn't mean all property owners will have increased assessments.

"Some will go up, some will stay the same and some will go down," Hindman said.

Property owners who disagree with their 1984 property assessment may

appeal to the Board of Review in person either Thursday or Friday or Monday, March 19.

The Board of Review will also accept appeals by letter as long as they are received in the assessing office by 4:30 p.m. March 19.

The three-member review board will meet from 9 a.m. to noon, and again 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on both Thursday and Friday. They will meet again from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. March 19.

Property owners who prefer to appeal their assessments in person should call the assessing office to make an appointment to appear before the review board.

"There is nothing specific to bring," Hindman said. "But residents should bring along anything they feel will support their position."

LAST YEAR when the city, overall, experienced a 4 percent drop in assessments, approximately 900 property owners appealed their assessments, Hindman said. Most property owners claim hardship or argue that their assessment is unjustified. "The board will allow the people five-to-10 minutes to state their case," Hindman said.

After the Board of Review has heard the appeals, they will within two weeks notify property owners by letter of

their decision, Hindman said.

If a property owner does not agree with the board's decision, he said, assessments can be further appealed to the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

Any assessments reduced by the Board of Review are pending only for the year they are given. Taxpayers will receive their bills in July and must pay them by March. This year's tax rate is still undetermined.

## Cable will run for free

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

After a long-fought battle, residents seeking free cable installation have won their fight and will get it before June 1.

"Due to the number of inquiries regarding the availability of cable television pursuant to the approved extension policy, we are making available a timetable on an individual basis for those residents requesting additional information," said MetroVision General Manager Bob McCann, in a press release issued last week.

Since "it is prohibitive to list every street address that will be affected," residents who want a detailed estimate



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

## Stutter-free

Candace Simon, a speech pathologist for the Farmington Public Schools, believes she can help children cure — not just control — the problem of stuttering. "We teach the child and

adult how to speak fluently, not how to control the problem," she said. For a story and more photos, see Page 1B.

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