

Independence idea stirs debate

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Like most library people, Wibby favors independence, which would allow the library to levy its own millage the same way that most school districts do.

"As far as the library board is concerned, I think we're in general agreement that, if we have complete support of the cities and the various political leaders in town to go independent, it would be in the best interest of the library.

"If nothing else, we'd get our full millage."

BUT FINANCIAL independence for the library has little support among officials and council persons of both cities.

"If it isn't broken, don't fix it — I think that's how our council feels about it," said Farmington City Manager Bob Deadman.

"I think our council believes in the checks and balances we have with the council reviewing the budget. This system has worked for a long time. Our council feels that the proof is in the excellent library facilities we have."

Farmington Mayor Ralph Yoder spoke of a "lack of communication" between the two city councils and the library board.

"There's been some talk about getting together to talk about philosophy," he said. "I don't know that we should get involved with what they (the library officials) do with their money. But there has to be an understanding that we control the bottom line."

Concerning the independence plan, Yoder said, "Part of the problem before (in the 1978 election) was that they wanted to be autonomous so they could go for their own millage. But, if I recall correctly, if their millage failed, the two city councils were still responsible for the funding."

"It was a little like having your cake and eating it too. I wasn't too thrilled about that."

JOAN DUDLEY, who sits on the Farmington Hills Council, supports the status quo.

"The library is part of the services that determine the quality of life in this community," said Dudley, who described herself as a heavy library user. "I feel that it's the responsibility of

both councils to address things in that category as well as the essentials, like sewers.

"It's our job to address all the needs of the community."

Lewis, the library director, said he doesn't want the funding disagreement to develop into a city-versus-library feud.

"There has been some improvement," he said. "There has been an increased awareness by members of both city councils of the special needs of the library."

At any rate, a vote for library independence won't appear on the ballot until the fall of 1985, "if at all," according to Ernie Sauter, who has served on

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Farmington Mayor

the library board for the past 29 years.

Why the delay?

"We need time to get our story out to the folks and to be sure that everybody understands it," Sauter said. "We thought we did that the last time (in 1978), but apparently we didn't do a good enough job."

"I'd certainly want to be sure we spoke to every PTA group and civic group that wanted to hear us, to hear the quote library story unquote."

Voters failed to approve the plan in 1978 "because the folks really didn't understand what they were voting on," Sauter said. "I think they saw it as a tax increase when actually it was a tax transfer."



Tracey Anderson, a 13-year-old Farmington resident, studies at the Farmington branch.

Farmington Library 'very heavily used'

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teer workers. According to library records, volunteers logged 8,771 hours equal to 4.2 staff members and \$60,000 worth of work last year.

Salaries and fringe benefits account for 57 percent of the total library budget, according to Lewis, and the anticipated library payroll is \$842,000.

In 1968, when Farmington Hills was Farmington Township, voters passed one mill for operating the library for 20 years. Today, the mill translates into about \$1 million.

The library has received "various amounts" over the last three years, but not the entire one mill from the cities, according to Lewis.

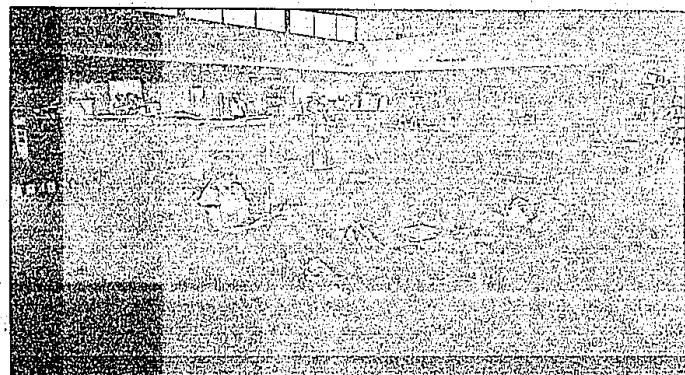
"This has impacted on the book budget," he said. "The funding has remained stable or gone down, while the cost of books has risen 25 percent since 1980."

As Lewis sees it, the library is the victim of decisions made by people who don't always understand the library and its special needs.

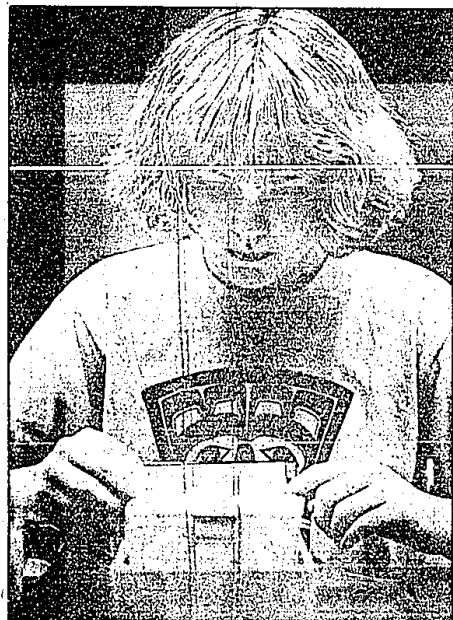
"The funding of schools and libraries is different than other municipal services," he said. "If you get fewer dollars for street paving, you pave fewer streets."

"But libraries have exceedingly high costs because of the buildings involved. We have 50,000 square feet in two buildings and four floors. The costs of running these facilities are not fixed, nor do they go down. They go up."

Lewis said the library's anticipated utility costs, including telephones, will be about \$120,000 this year.



Patrons relax in easy chairs in the main room of the Farmington branch of the Farmington Community Library.



Library scenes

The Farmington Community Library is a busy place during business hours. In two typical library scenes at the Farmington Hills branch, Mary Beth O'Sullivan (left) of Farmington checks the card catalog, while library assistant Anna Pacitto (below) faces a line of patrons from behind her desk. One of Oakland County's busier libraries, Farmington Community checks out around half a million items a year, according to director Gordon Lewis.

Photos by Randy Borst



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