

# Assessor surprised by number of appeals

By Joanne Mallazowski  
staff writer

With an increasingly healthy housing market, Farmington Hills assessor Dean Babb didn't expect as many property owners to appeal their property assessments this year. But the 681 property owners — the majority residential — that either appeared in person before the three-member Farmington Hills Assessor's Board of Review or appealed by letter, proved Babb wrong.

The average 3 percent increase in residential property assessments this year also accounted for Babb's surprise at the number of appeals before the review board. "The move (increase), in my mind, was not that severe," he said.

Of the 681 appeals, 94 were hardship cases — property owners seeking appeals based on a financial inability to pay — and 587 were non-

hardship. Of the 94 hardship appeals, 54 were reduced and 40 were upheld. Of the 587 non-hardship appeals, 287 were reduced and 300 were upheld, Babb said.

The three review board members — Harlem Morris, Gordon Meyers and Joan Lennis — met for nine days to hear appeals. That's less than last year when the review board met for 12 days to hear 750 appeals. The previous year, the board heard 970 appeals. Babb serves as the board's secretary but has no vote in board decisions.

Overall, reasons offered by property owners appealing their assessments include those who purchased houses this year for a price that when the 50-percent market value is determined is less than the city's assessment on the property. "We have a lot of that," Babb said.

BUT PROPERTY owners fail to

understand that when basing property assessment on 50 percent of the market value — generally 50 percent of the usual selling price — it is done on an area basis rather than consistently on an individual piece of property, Babb said.

For example, four of five houses sold this year within a subdivision were sold for \$100,000. The fifth house sold for \$90,000. The last house would still be assessed at the same level as the \$100,000 houses because the sales in a given area are analyzed, rather than an individual house, Babb said. Consequently, property owners' individual property assessments will be higher than 50 percent market value, he added.

Housing sales are checked in each subdivision in the city. From the subdivision level, Babb analyzes sales in areas of similar neighborhoods with similar houses to get a better perspective of sales activity.

For equalization purposes, assessors are back to using a 24-month sales study as opposed to a 30-month study, which was used in the early 1980s during Michigan's recession. The 24-month study includes housing sales in Farmington Hills during the last three quarters of 1983, all of 1984 and the first quarter of 1985, Babb said.

A second major reason offered to the review board as an argument for reducing an assessment is what property owners believe is negative impact on property values due to traffic congestion or commercial development nearby, for example, Babb said.

WHILE RESIDENTIAL assessments — and reductions before the review board — increased this year, commercial and industrial property assessments did not. By far, the majority of appeals

this year were from residential property owners. But that follows when the majority of the total 25,800 assessed parcels in Farmington Hills are residential. Commercial and industrial property assessments for the most part this year remained stable, most likely accounting for the small number of appeals.

But Babb expects the review board to be busy next year. The Oakland County Equalization Division is currently reappraising commercial and industrial properties in the city. The reappraisal, conducted under a contract with the county, is expected to be completed by the end of 1986, in time for the 1987 tax roll.



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## Hardees shuts downtown site

No space for a drive-through window, plus a shortage of parking, proved to be a detriment to a downtown Farmington fast-food restaurant, causing owners to close it last week.

Former customers of Hardees Restaurant, 33200 Grand River, now have to travel to Farmington Hills or Livonia to get their favorite fast-food burger, due to the closing last Wednesday of the downtown restaurant.

## City supports no intervention

The city of Farmington voiced unanimous support Monday, April 21, for an Oak Park resolution opposing a possible change in the city of Detroit election process and its effect on amending the Home Rule Act of Michigan. Mayor William Hartssock was absent.

Oak Park objects to the state Senate's efforts to intrude into the internal affairs of the people of Detroit, a report from Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman said. It appears there may be an attempt in the state Senate to amend

"The store is no longer viable," Farmington resident and local manager Debra Hermans said, stressing the importance of having a drive-through window for this type of business. With a building directly next door, there was no room for necessary expansion, she said. Hermans and some employees will now work at the Hardees at 33340 12 Mile, Farmington Hills. Other employees were transferred to the Livonia restaurant, she said.

The property parcel sits in the Downtown Development Authority development district, and is owned by the parent company of the same name in Rocky Mountain, N.C. Hardees also has a regional office in Troy. The Farmington restaurant was formerly a Burger Chef before the Hardees chain took over the company.

FARMINGTON CITY Manager Robert Deadman called it a "prime location," but said city officials and DDA members have not discussed potentials for the parcel. Hermans said the closing generated a lot of interest, and that she had several inquiries about possible purchase of it. Plans are to sell the building and property, Hermans said, anticipating a possibly quick sale with the interest she has seen.

Local officials heard of the closing several days before it occurred, Deadman said. "We've been told it will take 30 days" for the parent company to put the building up for sale or lease, he said.

The property is zoned commercial for the Central Business District, and any type of accepted retail store or restaurant could purchase and use the space, Deadman added. "That

type of a use would not be in question," he said.

In the past, the DDA board has discussed a sit-down restaurant or an additional comparison shopping outlet for the district. Although the DDA has the power to purchase and sell property, Deadman said it's in a "fledgling stage," and hasn't put together a financing package to allow any property negotiations such as one involving this situation.

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