

# Automation plan moves Hills forward

By Casey Hane  
staff writer

A personal computer network for city departments and employee training are key elements to Farmington Hills' future.

These and other recommendations were stressed by the city's computer consultant Al Stahl in a recent report and presentation of a long-term automation plan for the city.

Stahl's 5-year Strategic Office Automation Plan — designed to lead Farmington Hills more efficiently into the future — was read and filed July 28, by city council. Development of the plan by Stahl's company, Creative Ideas, was authorized by the council last January.

"Currently, the city has an excellent computer hardware base," city

officials told council in a report. The city recently purchased an IBM System 36 super mini computer, 12 personal computers (of which 10 are compatible with the 36), and four terminals linked directly to the 36, according to the plan.

An initial plan recommending the purchase of this equipment was developed by the accounting firm of Plante & Moran, based on a 1983 survey of city operations, and was approved by the council in 1985.

According to details of the plan, "It is likely that the full storage memory of the System 36 could be consumed within the year," Stahl said the improvements proposed in the 5-year plan will make the System 36 "adequate for city operations" in lieu of purchasing a second

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— Al Stahl  
Hills Computer Consultant

System 36, a mainframe computer, or other type of computer expansion.

"THIS YEAR we hope to expand upon that solid beginning with the development of departmental data bases, the addition of personal computers into new offices, improved hard disc storage for some PCs, remote communications, and the be-

ginning of a citywide data base," the city report added.

Similar to the Farmington Hills Capital Improvement Plan, the computer plan will be analyzed each year and major automation improvements considered at budget time, said city officials.

The city will grow during the next five years as its remaining 20 per-

cent of unused land is developed. By 1991, a leveling off and acceleration of city services, common in a mature community will be in place, the plan said.

"Because the tax base for a mature community tends to be fairly constant, it is unlikely that the city will . . . increase its staff count between 1986 and 1991, or thereafter," Stahl said in the plan. He calls for "maximizing efforts of current employees by investigating office automation tools that would permit employees to become even more productive."

The five year automation plan offers 18 individual recommendations during the current budget year, another 11 for 1987-88, nine for the third year, four in the fourth and two in the plan's final year.

developing of a public works inventory.

Although the report recommends a trial period for departmental computer clusters this year, they will be fully developed during the plan's second year in the finance, police, public services and engineering departments and the city manager's office.

Within the clusters, each computer would have access to the System 36, but could operate independently — an advantage if there were a problem with the System 36, Stahl said.

"This will permit more efficient operation of existing units, increase file security and still allow sharing of selected files," according to the plan. Stahl calls the cluster networking for the city "most cost efficient over time."

Networking is proposed because of the tremendous computer space usage currently occurring in the city and it can be done in a "progressive fashion."

Future suggestions include improved storage capacity for the city's System 36, acquisition of a laser printer and flat-bed plotter, coordination of fire department dispatching through the proposed E-911 county system.

## New cash registers are part of the plan

A cash register system expected to save \$10,000 in outside data entry costs was approved for purchase by the Farmington Hills City Council July 28.

The new hardware and software package will cost \$40,000, and will interface with the city's IBM System 36 computer, as well as the service bureau's computer. Finance Director Charles Rosch said.

The acquisition of the system is part of a 5-year plan recently adopted by the city council.

The two IBM cash registers will be placed in the finance office, replacing obsolete models which will be transferred to the police and special services departments.

The new equipment was introduced last April, and has the capabilities of storing more data, transferring data to other computers, integrating cash receipts, automatically printing receipts, and allows a

variety of cash management and investment functions.

"Replacement . . . with state-of-the-art equipment will be quite beneficial, has in fact become necessary, due to recent developments in cash control techniques and technology," said a city report. The new system will eliminate 20 percent of the time presently required to prepare cash reports, tax receipt batching and various daily, weekly and monthly cash reports."

City officials expect the time

saved due to the new system will allow more time for dealing with residents and revenue collection functions.

The city is taking advantage of a state discount for this purchase, which includes two registers, one printer, a personal computer unit for storage and transmissions, operating software, and a software application package to formulate the needed reports.

Hardware and operating software will be purchased from IBM at a

cost of \$22,620; applications software will be purchased from Advantage Systems for \$15,000. Money will be taken from the following sources: \$9,000 from the 1986-87 budget; \$13,000 in unexpended funds from the 1985-86 budget; and \$17,400 from the city's fund balance.

In addition, a contingency fund of \$2,380 was authorized for "the purchase of any unforeseen equipment or software necessary for the operation of the system."

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