

# School bond bid may cover more projects

By Casey Hans  
Staff writer

A fall bond issue seeking money for a new elementary school may ask Farmington-area voters to approve additional projects.

School officials say they may request additional money for building improvements, although such a measure has not yet been approved by the school board.

Application has been made to hold

a bond election in the fall, asking voters for approval to build a new elementary school on the district's west side.

"Some people have this feeling that we're doing all these wonderful things for the west side of the district," said superintendent Graham Lewis. "In every part of the district, there's work to be done."

Trustee Susan Rennels raised the issue at a public meeting Tuesday, reassuring parents their individual

building needs would not be ignored as the district planned for a new elementary.

"It's been in the talking stage . . . to look at all of our schools," she said. "The bonding will probably include funding for renovating all elementary."

CHANGES WERE also recommended for other buildings, specifically Farmington High School, where ground will be broken this

summer for a new media center that will cost between \$300,000 and \$1 million. The recommendation came from deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan, who said, "long-range improvements relating to media should not be implemented without other changes in the school."

Construction of the actual media center will be done through the district's Capital Improvement Fund, with money obtained from the 1985 sale of school property to Little Ca-

sars. The recommended building improvements come from a list compiled over the past several years, detailing more than \$10 million in needed physical improvements in all school buildings. The survey was done with building principals and supervisors, who gathered needs from their staff members. Several million dollars has already been budgeted through the general fund to handle some of the needs.

"WE'RE NO longer a new community," said Lewis. "It's no longer a roof that leaks. It's poor drainage, things you can't see. They're things you can't cover with paint anymore."

"We can't do that out of our budget."

Lewis said if any building additions become necessary, the district may also request money for these on the fall bond issue.

## Senate puts reform proposal on ballot

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• School operating property taxes would no longer be based on assessments of 50 percent of market value. Instead, residential taxes would be based on 25 percent of market value and business taxes on 35 percent. For homeowners, it would be a 50 percent cut.

(Other property taxes — city, township, county, community college, school bond, etc. — would continue to be based on 50 percent of market value.)

• The sales tax would go up to 6 percent, from the current 4 percent.

• A greater chunk of the state budget would go to schools — 12 percent instead of 10.7 percent.

In an unusual step, the Senate set no election date. A Senate staff member said nearly all such elections are in November, which senators prefer, but House leaders prefer the August primary. Gov. James J. Blanchard also wants it on the Aug. 2 ballot to give schools time to plan budgets based on the results.

"AS CITIZENS hear about it, they'll realize it's a net tax increase of \$130 million," said Nichols. "The

property tax is reduced, but the sales tax is increased."

Under the new federal income tax law, he said, the sales tax is no longer deductible from taxable income, although property taxes still are.

Nichols' third objection is that a 1 percent sales tax increase would stand a better chance of voter approval than the proposed 2 percent.

His fourth objection is that the plan fails to address the problem of wide variations between school districts in per-pupil spending.

"But at least we get the ball rolling — that's the silver lining, (House

Speaker Gary) Owen thought we'd started something," Nichols said. The proposal now is in a House committee.

OTHERS THOUGHT just the opposite about the lack of a solution to the per-pupil spending problem.

Faxon said earlier reform proposals did nothing to help out-of-formula school districts (those with high property tax bases receiving no state appropriations). "This gives everybody tax relief," he said.

Geake, the Northville Republican whose district includes Livonia,

Plymouth, Canton and Redford, voted yes even though "it's not a good proposal. But people should have the right to vote and decide."

Out-of-formula districts such as Livonia and South Redford have "nothing to gain," in Geake's view. "Plymouth-Canton, Clarencerville and Redford Union probably would benefit in their school budgets."

Geake recalled voters rejected three earlier proposals to shift from property taxes to sales or other taxes. He agreed that the state sales tax wouldn't be deductible under the federal income tax law.

Geake said one good effect of the sales tax increase was that "a certain percentage will be paid by non-residents, but we don't know how much."

MOST ENTHUSIASTIC was Cruce, whose district includes Birmingham as well as Troy.

"In my district, there have been significant increases in assessments. That (SJR K) is a hefty property tax decrease," he said.

By Cruce's calculations, a household with a \$3,000 total property tax bill would see a savings of \$1,000. With a \$50,000 household income, it would spend \$15,000 on items subject to the sales tax. A 2 percent



Sen. Jack Faxon  
cleaner plan

sales tax rate hike would cost that household \$300.

Even allowing for federal taxes, Cruce said, such a household would see a tax break under SJR K.

"It's a very good proposal to accomplish the objectives we set — lower property taxes, a change in the method to fund public education, and closing the gap from district to district," Cruce said.

Festler, whose district includes West Bloomfield and the Bloomfield area, and Hart, whose district includes Garden City, couldn't be reached for comment.

## Schools are cautious about tax plan

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As it reads, the Senate proposal would be a break-even proposition for Farmington schools, Flanagan said. "It only works if they guarantee us what we currently get."

"In present form, it's great."

FARMINGTON SCHOOL officials, especially Flanagan, have taken a realistic look at school finance reform during the past year. The deputy superintendent has repeatedly warned that equity in school finance reform is coming, "whether it's legislated, or done through the courts."

Prutow concurs. "We're going to have to face it — changes are going

to have to be made," she said. What frightens school officials, Prutow said, is that reform will force education everywhere to become "mediocre."

"They're starting to address the quality (in education) issue," she added.

FINANCE REFORM is meant to equalize the dollars spent on each child in Michigan. In high property tax districts such as Farmington, the state aid is received because they are outside of formula parameters for state aid. Most of Farmington's school financing comes from local property taxes.

Many of these taxes come from

the business community. Under the Senate proposal, both business and residential property owners would receive tax relief. Commercial properties would be assessed on 35 percent of their value; residential properties at 25 percent. They are currently assessed at 50 percent.

Jonathan Grant, president of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, recently attended the Governor's Conference on Small Businesses in his role as a local business owner.

If the issues discussed are any indication, the proposal may receive support from the business community.

Property tax reform was one of the main issues discussed, he said.

IF PROPERTY taxes are cut, "we know the revenues have to come from somewhere," Grant added, "and the increase to the sales tax was a very possible vehicle. We didn't get into the specifics of how to do it."

State Rep. Wilbur Brotherton, R-Farmington, said the Senate proposal "has some merit" but he does not believe it will pass the House in its current form.

"We're going to tinker around with it; I don't know how it will come out," he added.

Brotherton also said he doubts voters would pass a two-cent sales tax increase.

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