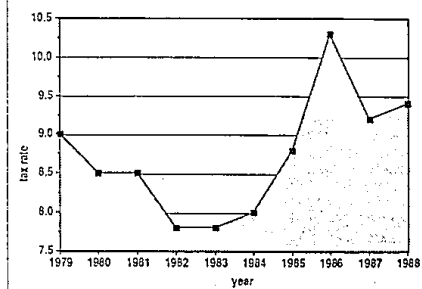


Budget review becomes political

Tax rate ups and downs in Farmington Hills



City manager William Costick told residents part of the city's financial dilemma is that the 1987-88 9.259-mill tax rate is a reduction from the 10.3-mill tax rate in 1986-87. "If we hadn't done that last year, we wouldn't be having a problem now," Costick said.

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Debate on Farmington Hills' proposed 1988-89 \$24 million budget evolved into a political, often-heated forum Monday.

State House candidate Paul Weldon of Farmington Hills said he was representing the views of many city residents. But not everyone was happy with his decision to criticize the Farmington Hills City Council on the proposed 1988-89 budget and tax increase at Monday's Truth-in-Taxation hearing.

"What I really resent is for someone to come up here and use this as a political platform," said resident Masha Silver, referring to Weldon's urging of council to avoid increasing taxes.

Silver, a Democratic precinct delegate, also criticized councilwoman Jean Fox's decision to read former councilman and anti-tax advocate Donna Wolf's letter to the council from the podium in council chambers.

"Is it appropriate for one of my council people to step down here and read something for another person

running for office?" Silver asked. She failed to get a response from Mayor Jody Soronen, who said she would not comment.

Republican Weldon is seeking election to the 69th state House seat now held by veteran Rep. Wilbur "Sandy" Brotherton, R-Farmington, who is retiring. Councilwoman Jan Dolan will be one of Weldon's opponents in the Aug. 2 Republican primary. Weldon is a planning commissioner.

WOLF IS seeking election to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners 27th District seat now held by veteran commissioner Jack McDonald, R-Farmington Hills, who is seeking election as Oakland County prosecutor. Soronen will face Wolf in the Aug. 2 Republican primary.

Both Weldon and Wolf voiced similar opinions about the council's proposed 1988-89 mill increase of less than .25.

"I'm here tonight to urge the council to reject the proposed tax increase," Weldon said. "Senior citizens are particularly concerned about this issue because they simply can't afford it."

Wolf lobbied for a public vote on whether taxes should or should not be increased. "Just because some council (actually the charter commission) some 20 years ago came up with an arbitrary 10-mill charter maximum, does not in my estimation mean that you can juggle figures and laws around to impose a tax on our residents without their express approval."

Wolf, who was not in attendance Monday, could not be directly questioned about his comments. But questions were fired at Weldon, who urged "fiscal discipline" and suggested that the budget be further trimmed.

When councilman Aldo Vagnozzi asked Weldon where the budget should be cut, the state House candidate said he didn't know and would have to study the matter.

IN AN uncharacteristic move, city manager William Costick asked Weldon whether he was aware of the implications of his comments.

Costick, too, asked Weldon what cuts should be made. "If you get up and make statements, you ought to come up with solutions," Costick said. "We have the same concerns as you do about assessments, tax rates."

Weldon continued to insist that parts of the proposed budget "could be a bit leaner."

But when Costick asked Weldon if he had read the more than 200-page budget, Weldon responded: "Not in its entirety."

In response to Wolf's written statements, some council members defended charter commissioners' decision for a 10-mill maximum charter limit.

Frustrations rise with assessments

Continued from Page 1

were the pleas for relief from increased property tax assessments, that the proposed budget and tax rate increase took a back seat.

"I guess my problem is with the increased assessment of my house," said Old Bedford resident Bob Doran.

HIS CONCERNS were echoed by other residents, who maintained that increased housing sales at inflated prices are driving up the value of their homes. Long-term residents — those who bought in the community before high prices — can no longer afford their taxes, based on increased assessments, residents said.

"It'd like council to recognize quite a few people in the city are old. . . . But the council would lose something if we become strictly Yuppie in the sense that Yuppies are the only ones

who could afford to pay the taxes. I believe the city would suffer," said 23-year resident Dan Davis of Old Colony Circle.

"One of the things that's traumatic for people is to be in a city for X number of years and have to leave that city because they can't afford their homes. I don't think we ever should lose sight of that," Davis continued, urging council to keep tax rate increases to a bare minimum.

Council members acknowledged residents' concerns about assessments but said they had no control over property values. Residential property tax assessments this year increased an average of 12-15 percent, with some as high as 20 percent.

Residents questioned why there is a need to increase taxes in 1988-89 with the community's growth and projected state equalized value of \$1.7 billion.

Much of the benefit from the growth goes to school districts, not the city, even though it is the city that collects tax revenues for other taxing jurisdictions.

"All that growth is developing a strong tax base for the schools and that's where your money is," councilwoman Jan Dolan said.

FEW RESIDENTS attended the school district's May 17 public hearing on the 1988-89 \$74 million budget supported by 30.65 mills, Dolan said. "How many of you bothered to go to the school board to hear their budget?"

In the 1987-88, 18 percent (or 9.258 mills) of the 51 mills paid by Hills taxpayers living in the Farmington school district, went to the city of Farmington Hills. The remaining percentage of the 51 mills went primarily to the school district, followed by Oakland County, Oakland Intermediate Schools and Oakland

Community College.

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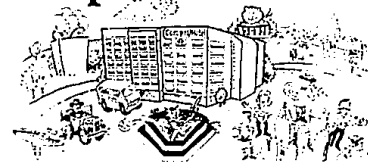
"The bottom line," councilman Joe Alkateeb said, is that Farmington Hills levies the seventh lowest tax rate in Oakland County. In 1987, six communities had lower tax rates and three of those didn't provide refuse collection.

In 1987-88, Southfield levied 17.14 mills and charged an additional \$105 per residential property owner for garbage pickup, finance director Charles Rosch said.

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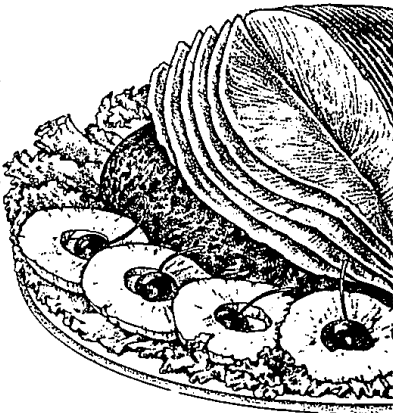
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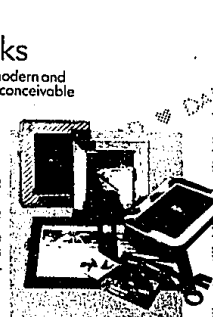
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