

Hills two-income family tax appeals up

By Joanna Mallizowski staff writer

More two-income families have appealed their property tax assessments to the Farmington Hills Board of Review this year than in previous years.

"We've always gotten some in the past. But this year, it seemed more prevalent. The mood of the taxpayer is significantly different than in the past," assessor Dean Babb said.

At this year's board of review in March, more taxpayers, particularly two-income families, complained about "the overall tax picture," Babb said.

"They're not coming in with a specific appeal. They don't care whether the assessment is right. They're angry that they're paying, for example, \$300 in taxes a month," Babb said.

The three-member board of review this year heard 1,027 appeals, slightly fewer appeals than last year. Though specific data is still unavailable, the board of review reduced more than \$10 million in assessments against the city's \$2 billion tax roll, Babb said.

This year, residential property

owners were hit with an average 9.4-percent assessment increase. The city's overall increase, including commercial and industrial property, hovered at approximately 8 percent.

OF THE assessment reductions, half were for commercial properties, such as apartment complexes, and the remaining for residential.

"We also gave away a lot of hardship dollars," Babb said.

The number of hardship cases, he said, means that the "circuit breaker," available through the 1973 Homestead Property Tax Relief Act, isn't working. The circuit breaker is a device through which taxpayers can receive a credit for an amount of their property tax that exceeds a certain percentage of household income for the year.

Among those eligible for the circuit breaker are senior adults age 65 or older or surviving spouses of taxpayers who would have been 65 prior to Dec. 31 or any given year.

THE NUMBER of appeals this year, particularly the increase in two-income families, didn't surprise the assessor.

"Some people have three years of double-digit increases in their assessments," Babb said.

Increases in assessments over the last five years are a result of the city's burgeoning housing market. Homeowners can expect at least another year of increases as assessments try to keep pace with spiraling housing prices, Babb said.

"Assessments are reactive to the market. An assessment to this day has never created market value," he said.

THOUGH HOMEOWNERS' complaints about their increasing assessments have been noticeable, Babb said that cumulatively since 1984, commercial and industrial properties have faced greater increases.

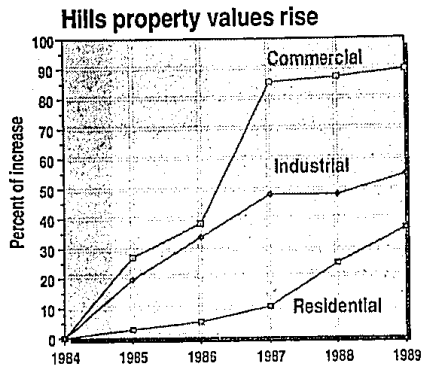
Since 1984, commercial assessments have increased a cumulative 89.6 percent, compared to 54.6 percent for industrial and 36.6 percent for residential.

Commercial and industrial assessments in the past two years did not change or increased slightly because of a major reappraisal in 1987 by the Oakland County Equalization Division. The reappraisal forced commercial and industrial assessments to increase an average 35 percent.

The sales studies are the same as used by the Oakland County Equalization Division, which told Babb that a 10-percent increase had to be made this year.

"If I don't, they will make whatever adjustment necessary to get that amount. If I do it locally, you've got a right to complain. If Oakland County does it after the board of review, basically, you can't appeal it," Babb said.

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Group fights move to dissolve C'ville

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He's also talked with school officials in the Livonia and Clarenceville districts as to how dollars spent per student would be affected by the Livonia Public Schools annexing the entire Clarenceville district.

Bowden said Livonia Public Schools per-pupil spending would drop to \$4,918, while per pupil spending in the Clarenceville district next year will be at around \$4,200, not that big a difference, he said.

"We feel annexation would never work," Bowden said, because a two-thirds majority in each school district involved would have to approve such a measure, along with each school board.

The group plans more meetings in the summer.

Disc jockey faces charge

Morning radio disc jockey Jim Johnson was ticketed last week for drunk driving following a minor accident in Bloomfield Township, police said.

Johnson, 36, who lives in Bloomfield Township, faces a hearing June 21 on a misdemeanor drinking and driving violation, according to police.

Johnson is known as "J.J." on the WLLZ-FM morning show, "J.J. and the Morning Crew." WLLZ is located in Farmington Hills.

Bloomfield Township Police Lt. James Anas said Johnson was involved in an accident with another car about 2 a.m. Wednesday at Lone Pine and Echo roads.

There were no injuries and minor damage in the accident, he said.

"During the investigation of the accident, the officer... felt alcohol was a factor," said Anas.

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

- EXAM WAIVED**
A Farmington Hills teenager is one of two men facing trial in connection with a break-in at Eric's Food Mart, 115 Commerce Road, Union Lake, May 29.
Joseph Mitchell Miller, 19, of Farmington Hills, and Brian Kelly Evans, 22, of Walled Lake, waived their right to a preliminary exam Wednesday in 52nd District Court, Walled Lake.
They were arraigned May 30 before Magistrate Robert McKenney of Walled Lake on charges of breaking and entering a building. No pleas were entered on the felony charges. McKenney set cash or surety bond at \$5,000.
The defendants will be arraigned in Oakland County Circuit Court June 19 before Judge Barry Howard. A trial date then will be set. The defendants face up to 10 years in prison if convicted.
- Deputies responding to a silent alarm at 2:15 a.m. May 29 arrested one man inside the market and another man outside the market, according to the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

- June 5 arrested a 14-year-old Farmington Hills boy running from a rear doorwall. Damage to the doorwall was estimated at \$100, police said.
At an Oakland County Probate Court Juvenile Division hearing Tuesday, the boy was charged with breaking and entering of an occupied dwelling with intent to commit larceny. He then was conditionally released to his father's custody, said Farmington Hills Sgt. Charles Nebus.
The next day, the boy was arrested in connection with a break-in at Cross Creek Apartments, Middlebelt and Grayfield, at 8:30 a.m. Wednesday. He was arrested Wednesday night after witnesses to the morning break-in gave police information that led them to the boy. The boy is being held in Oakland County Children's Village pending further court hearings, Nebus said.
In each case, the burglar pried a window. Early indications are that the burglar took less than \$10 worth of property in each break-in, Nebus said.
- HOUSE FIRE**
An electrical fire caused about \$45,000 in damage to the structure and contents of a two-story house on the 21900 block of Heatheridge Lane at 2:45 p.m. June 5.

- No one was home at the time. The fire was discovered by a 12-year-old girl on her way home from school, according to a Farmington Hills fire report.
- PARK VIOLATION**
A 19-year-old Redford Township man was ticketed for possessing alcohol in Shilohwasee Park at 6:55 p.m. Thursday.
He was seen with beer, according to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report.
- OIL SPILL**
The Farmington Hills Department of Public Works had to spread sand when a 55-gallon barrel of used cooking grease fell from a flat-bed truck turning from the eastbound M-102 exit ramp to westbound Grand River at 8 p.m. Tuesday.
The driver stopped, got out, saw the spill, then drove away, according to a Farmington Hills police report.
- THEFTS REPORTED**
An 18-foot aluminum canoe valued at \$550 was reported stolen from a yard on Oakerest Court, Farmington Hills, between May 25 and June 7.
A lawnmower, a chainsaw, a weed whip and a snowblower valued at \$1,070 were reported stolen from a shed on the 31300 block of Nine Mile, Farmington Hills, June 3-8.
Cash and dress pants valued at \$145 were reported stolen from an apartment at Boisfort Terrace Apartments on Independence, Farmington Hills, June 6.
About \$140 was reported stolen from a coin container in an apartment at Farmington Manor on Nine Mile, Farmington Hills, June 7. Several similar thefts have been reported at the apartment complex.
Twelve stainless-steel support brackets valued at \$7,200 were reported stolen from a fenced yard at Titus Welding, 20750 Sunnydale, Farmington Hills, June 7.
Four cases of pop and nine cases of empty bottles valued at \$115 were reported stolen from a shed at the Clark gas station, 22145 Farmington Road, Farmington, June 8.
A VCR, stereo equipment and a bicycle valued at \$4,100 were reported stolen from a house on Albion, Farmington Hills, June 8.

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