

Public relations firm will pitch sewer project

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Farmington city officials plan to spend \$9,000 to hire a public relations firm to create a public information program for an \$11.2 million sewer separation project already approved by the council.

In addition, the city would spend about \$4,000 in printing and mailing costs if three direct mail pieces are used.

The campaign relates to a special May 22 bond election, approved by the council Monday pending approval from the county elections commission. The project is expected to cost every household more than \$100 a year.

Council members were divided during their discussion concerning contracting with Marketing Communications Counsel Inc., a Farmington Hills firm. The 9-year-old company also is involved in a similar project for Lathrup Village.

In the end, though, a motion Monday by council member William

Hartsock to authorize the marketing proposal with a cap at \$9,000 was approved by council with a no vote from Richard Tupper.

"It is our belief that this consultant would not have to begin from scratch in learning about the problem and the solutions pertaining to combined sewer overflows, as they are already well-acquainted with the issue," said city manager Robert Deadman.

Marketing Communications Counsel consultant Ron Baker prepared a proposal for council's consideration. He divided the work into several classifications:

- Planning and Counseling — create a timeline schedule and assignments, \$500.
- Outreach — counseling on an "as needed" basis, including outreach presentation counseling at an estimated 20 hours at \$80 an hour.
- Media Relations — fact sheet and background material, \$800; editorial meetings, \$240; and public services announcements, \$240.
- Citizens' Educational Literature

— a four-panel newsletter/masthead/logo, design/write/edit, not including printing, \$2,800.

• Video script — write/edit script and counsel for presentation, \$1,000.

• Slide presentation — create and design slide presentation of 25 slides. Does not include mechanical creation of slides.

• Direct mail literature — write two letters to be sent to Farmington citizens, not including printing, \$1,000.

THE VIDEO script and slide preparation may not be necessary because the city may have its own resources in this area, Deadman said.

"However, until we begin receiving public input on the issue it is difficult to evaluate how much effort will need to be put forth. Another thing I would not like to have happen is a five percent turnout," he added.

But Tupper questioned the necessity of the marketing program: "I have not talked to anyone in this community yet who has any objec-

tion to it." Tupper said he would be more comfortable with a \$5,000 budget figure.

Underlock said the city would be remiss not to educate its residents, and would be wrong to assume that residents will come to the ballot box and know specifically that they are going to be taxed one way or another and the benefits of selecting one method over another.

"Let's keep in mind that we are talking about a \$12 million project and we are nickel and diming this thing," Hartsock said. "This is ludicrous. We have no idea what the support for this project is."

Hartsock said the price could be monitored.

Deadman agreed with Hartsock that not everyone in the community fully understands the scope of the project. Both Deadman and Mayor Shirley Richardson view local newspaper coverage as only accomplishing part of the job to inform because not everyone subscribes to the Farmington Observer.

Richardson wants a scaled-down

Ballot language set

Ballot language for the May 22 special election for the Farmington sewer improvement project will read:

"Shall the City of Farmington, County of Oakland, Michigan, borrow the principal amount of not to exceed Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000) and issue its general obligation unlimited tax bonds therefor, for the purpose of paying all or a part of

the cost of acquiring and constructing improvements to the City's sewage disposal system consisting generally of an approximately 3.2 million gallon retention facility, new sanitary and storm sewer lines, and repair and upgrade of existing sanitary lines and existing sewerage pump stations in the city of Farmington together with all appurtenances and attachments reasonably necessary therefor?"

public relations project and questioned both the cost of mailing two letters and why city staff could not write its own letters.

Consultant Norma Raglan, who spoke at Monday's meeting, said that the marketing firm is flexible.

Council member JoAnne McShane asked if there could be a compromise on costs and questioned the need to create another logo.

Council member Ralph Yoder suggested that the firm's promotional costs not exceed \$9,080.

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Bond proposal to go to voters

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offered to provide the money necessary to construct the project at an interest rate of 2 percent based on a 20-year maturity schedule, Deadman said in a memo.

Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, the city's bond attorneys, have developed a debt service schedule that begins with interest only payments during construction and with interest and principal payments beginning in the 1991-92 budget year.

THERE ARE two methods to raise the revenues to meet the requirements of the bond maturity schedule, according to Deadman. One of the methods would be to raise the sewer rates in an amount sufficient to meet the required payments and reserves.

The second method would be to receive voter approval on a general obligation bond issue. In this method, the local property tax rate would be

adjusted in an amount sufficient to meet the bond payment requirements.

Based on an analysis of estimated sewer usage in Farmington, the city has determined that it will take a 10 percent increase of \$1.41 per 1,000 gallons of water used to meet the bond payment requirements.

"If general obligation property taxes were used to meet the bond payment requirement we estimate that the local tax rate requirement would be 2.8 mill," Deadman said in a memo.

"This rate would decline in the future as property values increase."

THE PROS of each system vary depending on individual circumstances of the rate payer, Deadman said.

Under the system of increased sewer rates, customers would pay a rate based on water used. Therefore, those who used more water would



RANDY BORGSTADT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Farmington city manager Robert Deadman (right) and public services director Earl Billing take a look at the site where a 3.2-million-gallon underground retention tank will be built as

part of the city's \$11.2 million sewer project. The land is on the north side of Nine Mile Road's dirt section between Freedom and Grand River.

have higher costs.

Under the property tax method, those who had higher value properties would pay higher costs.

The benefit of the property tax system, according to Deadman, is that for taxpayers who itemize their federal income tax deduction, property tax is an allowable deduction

whereas sewer rate charges are not deductible.

IN REVIEWING per usage by class of property — residential, commercial and industrial — there appears to be a close correlation between property values by class and water usage, he said.

Therefore either method, increas-

ing the sewer rates or property taxes, appears to distribute fairly the cost of proposed improvements, he said.

Although the project is estimated to cost \$11.2 million, the city is requesting \$12 million to allow flexibility, Deadman said.

"If they say no on this, the other is automatic."

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