

Sewer project Farmington's biggest, costliest

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Mayor Shirley Richardson called the planned \$12 million sewer separation and improvement project "the largest in Farmington history and also the most costly."

The project must be done, she said, to eliminate untreated sewage discharges into the Rouge and to improve the river's water quality.

At issue is how to pay for new storm and sanitary sewers, a new retention tank and improvements to other sanitary lines and pump stations.

In a special election Tuesday, May 22, voters will decide how to pay for the massive project, a necessary component of Farmington's efforts to comply with federal and state mandates to clean up the Rouge.

A yes vote will mean higher property taxes to pay off construction bonds. A no vote will mean higher sewer rates.

Farmington is one of 47 Michigan communities in the three-county Rouge River Basin that must come to grips with the river's pollution. "Everybody is doing something a little different," said Robert Deadman, city manager.

Estimated total cost to separate sanitary and storm sewers and make other sewer improvements to clean up the Rouge: \$900 million.

Construction could start in late fall. Work is expected to take 18 months. Cleanup will take another six months.

The project will separate older combined sewers, improve other parts of the sewer system citywide and provide a 3.3-million-gallon concrete retention tank on the dirt stretch of Nine Mile to hold storm/sewer

water until it can be sent to Detroit for treatment.

The project will cost each household \$120 to \$212 per year for the next 20 years, depending on:

- Whether voters approve the sale of general obligation bonds.

- Whether the city receives a low-interest state loan.

- How much water each household uses if the bonds are not approved and a user fee is tacked onto water and sewer rates.

FARMINGTON WOULD save \$7.5 million over the life of the bonds if it qualifies for a 2-percent state loan compared to borrowing at the market rate of 7.3 percent, Deadman said.

The lower interest rate is made possible by a \$800 million state bond issue approved two years ago. The lower rates will expire

June 30; thereafter, the interest rate will float.

Farmington's current sewer rate for sewage disposal is \$1.34 per 1,000 gallons. If voters opt for a higher sewer rate to pay for the bonds, it would be an additional \$1.51 per 1,000 gallons, Deadman said.

"The average water user in this community uses between 80,000-100,000 gallons of water annually. The positive is you pay for what you use. The negative is that this is a service charge, not a tax, and is not deductible on income tax."

As an example, residents who use 80,000 gallons of water per year would pay an additional \$121.

THE PROPERTY tax option is deductible on the federal tax return for taxpayers who itemize. The state circuit breaker applies for taxpayers who qualify. A tax of 3

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mills (\$3 per \$1,000 of state equalized value) would be levied the first year, declining thereafter as property assessments rise, Deadman said.

In Farmington, water usage roughly correlates with house price, Deadman said. People with a house worth \$80,000 would pay \$120 annually.

Ailing paper closes

Continued from Page 1

whether we will begin publishing again."

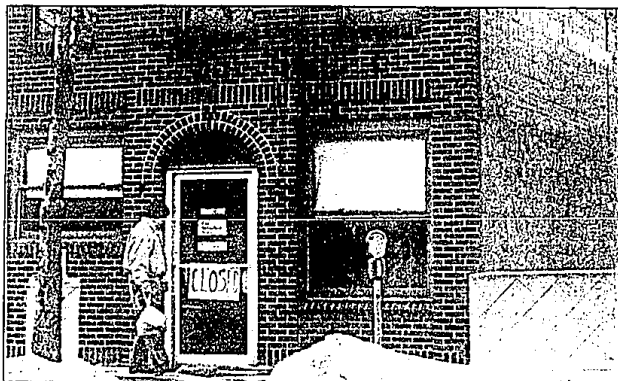
One Suburban News employee said Wednesday that the newspaper has suspended publication but wouldn't be at liberty to say anything more.

A Suburban News staff writer of more than 25 years, who asked not to be named, said Friday that MacGriff informed employees Monday that he couldn't continue to publish.

But MacGriff said that he hoped to be back in a position at some point to publish again, the reporter said.

"Business has been difficult," the reporter said. "I knew this was coming but it's still a shock. Most of the staff is out looking for work but he retained a couple employees to handle business matters."

TOWNSHIP CLERK Marilyn Heidenbrand said a member of the



JIM JAGDFELD/staff photographer

A man reads the 'closed' sign at the Suburban News headquarters in Old Redford.

Suburban News staff called her Monday to inform her that the newspaper's office doors would be closed as of Wednesday.

All of the township's paid public notices that had been submitted to appear in the paper were returned Tuesday with a final bill, she said.

"I remember he filed for bank-

ruptcy about two years ago, but the paper's closing came out of the blue," Heidenbrand said. "He continued printing after he filed for bankruptcy in the past. He has reorganized before, but he never closed his office doors."

All of the township's public notices will be published in the Red-

ford Observer until further notice, she said.

The Suburban News was founded in 1900 by Anna Lahser, according to MacGriff, who said he took over as publisher in the 1970s.

MacGriff's parents built up the paper's circulation before he became publisher, an employee said.

Plan spurs questions about construction

Increased sewer rates could cause some dropoff in water usage, but it would likely recover soon after, said city manager Robert Deadman in an answer to former Mayor John Richardson's question.

In the 1970s, consumers used less when sewer rates rose 400 percent, but soon leveled off again, Deadman said.

Resident Ken Chiara of Shiawassee questioned if last summer's downpour would have been handled efficiently by the proposed sewer improvements. Deadman said even with that level of rain, flooding was isolated in the city.

"Everytime we have a rain, I

wade around in my basement," said resident Stanley Thomas of Cass. "That never occurred before the improvements (10 years ago). And that is very discouraging."

Deadman said Thomas may have an isolated, individual problem.

Responding to a question by resident Judy Miller of Twin Valley Court, project manager Thomas Korpela said 48,000 to 50,000 feet of new lineal pipe will be laid, causing roads to be torn up.

The answer was affirmative to Shiawassee resident Carl Woodruff's query if a videotape would be made of the project in case future liability questions arose.

Seniors entertain students

Twenty-two senior adults from three American Houses Retirement Residences in Farmington Hills and Royal Oak entertained students at Forest Elementary School Feb. 8.

This program was an ongoing community/school project sponsored by the School Services Project Committee of the Forest PTO to promote interaction between the chil-

dren and seniors in the area.

On April 5, seniors from residences in the area will visit the school's Farmington Hills classrooms in a one-on-one program entitled "That Was Then . . . This Is Now."

Last year, Forest students participated in a pen pal program with Farmington Hills seniors.

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