

Taking his turn at the microphone at a press briefing at the Heritage Park visitors center Monday afternoon, Patrick Anderson, an economist with Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. of America, says he supports the Farmington Hills proposed half-mill tax.



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Parks tax wins backing

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Each resident who spoke at the briefing represented facets of the eight-year parks and recreation plan.

"I was a critic, a watchdog," resident Roy Lindhardt said. "I think we've created a win-win situation."

LINDARDT AND resident Joe Derck, both of whom criticized the parks plan in the past, declared their support of the millage.

"We haven't been silenced," Lindhardt said. "We haven't been appraised or catered to for what we want to hear. I'm proud to be part of a city that listens to its citizens."

The consensus came after the city council on April 8 reaffirmed its intention to buy more land to satisfy the youth sports needs and also reaffirmed its intention to develop the controversial Peltz-MDOT land only with an entrance road, parking, nature trails and small picnic area.

The council at that time also reserved acreage on the Peltz property, west of Farmington Road, south of I-696, for a new library if voters in the future agree to finance such a project.

The city's millage is an additional tax because the previous half-mill levy for five years ran out last July and voters are asked to amend the charter.

The millage proposal has been endorsed by Richard Headlee and Patrick Anderson of Alexander Hamil-

ton Life Insurance Co. of America.

"We see the money was wisely spent," Anderson said, referring to the city's first half-mill parks and recreation levy. "Happily do you see five years later projects that live up with the results."

Of the 10 projects promised with the first half-mill levy, all but one have been completed. Parks and recreation officials are still working on an outdoor arboretum for Heritage Park.

ANDERSON ALSO lauded the parks and recreation commission for levying less than the Headlee Constitutional Tax Limitation Amendment would allow in the last two years. If approved, the half-mill will be levied in the first year at the full rate.

In subsequent years, the tax will be subject to the Headlee amendment. That means the rate must be rolled back to generate the same amount of money the city would have received if property tax assessments had risen at the same percentage as inflation.

By law, city officials may levy the full half-mill beyond the state-required rollback if they have a public hearing and announce their intentions.

If approved, the half-mill levy will generate \$9.6 million to help pay for the \$10.9 million parks and recreation projects over eight years. Grants are expected to help pay the difference.

There has been some confusion

over whether the half-mill is an increase. City officials call the millage a renewal because its for the same amount requested in the first five-year parks and recreation plan. The half-mill levy is above and beyond the 10-mill city charter limit.

Parks and recreation officials decided to go for an eight-year plan instead of sticking with the original five-year plan because of the projects that must be completed.

"To do what we have to do you can't do with a five-year program," Fitzgerald said.

Soccer coach Tom Farro told of the need for more sports fields, including baseball, which is a top priority in the eight-year plan.

Seniors would benefit from parks tax money

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

If Farmington Hills taxpayers give their blessings to a half-mill request for parks and recreation Tuesday, almost a third of the taxes generated will be devoted to senior adults.

"The millage program for the first time recognizes the needs of senior adults in this community," Farmington Hills special services director Dan Potter said. "Of the nine points of the parks and recreation plan, two are directed at senior adults."

If approved, the half-mill tax will generate \$9.6 million over eight years to support a \$10.9-million parks and recreation program. Grants are expected to pay the difference.

Of that total, senior adults are expected to benefit from \$3.4 million for a dedicated lease at Mercy Center on 11 Mile, and another \$270,000 to buy vans and a bus for the transportation needs of senior adults.

A dedicated lease at Mercy Center — which would also be used for the community's cultural arts needs — would change life for the city's senior adult program and its participants.

"We would be doing what neighboring communities would be doing. A lot of Farmington Hills residents have to go to other communities for special activities," said Loretta Conway, senior adult supervisor.

IF THE MILLAGE passes, a dedicated lease would provide 50,000 square feet of space seven days a week, 24 hours a day, for senior adults. That's compared to the 13,000 square feet five days a week the city now rents at Mercy. A dedicated lease would provide the Mercy swimming pool and gym all day.

"The goal is to make this a gerontology center for our community," Potter said.

Parks and recreation officials who developed the eight-year plan accompanying the millage request turned their attention to senior adults for good reason. The population of the community is getting older.

"More adults are taking care of parents than parents are taking care of children," Potter said. "With expanded facilities and transportation, we'll be able to reach out to senior adults in the community."

If the millage passes, Conway says the options avail-

able for space and programs is endless. Senior adult program officials are thinking about a beauty/barber service, a movie/video room, a loan program for wheelchairs, canes and walkers, and a place for support groups to meet. That's not to mention space for a lawyer who lends time to help senior adults, or maybe a podiatrist, Conway said.

"We turn down wonderful gifts, like pianos, kilns and pool tables, because we just don't have the room," Conway said.

Daily, the senior adult program serves about 100-200 senior adults, depending on which activities are scheduled. Approximately 5,000 senior adults are registered with the program, Conway said.

SENIOR ADULT staff are long accustomed to carrying all the things they need for programs and activities on a cart. A dedicated lease and more space means there will be more staff room where things can be permanently stored.

"We're just totally transient," said Maggie Lorida, senior adult specialist. "Everyone likes to put their stamp of ownership where they are. We've never been able to do that. We can't even hang up a picture."

Considering options, Mary DiManno, nutrition services coordinator for the senior adult program, says passage of the millage will mean having the kitchen, now shared by Mercy.

That means she and other officials have a choice of whether to contract an outside caterer or to hire a caterer to prepare the meals served to senior adults who come to Mercy as well as the Meals on Wheels program. With a kitchen, there's the possibility of dinner dances, Sunday dinners and card parties.

And there will be more space for community service, which brings senior adults with creative talents together to make quilts and other crafts items. With more space, there'll be room for woodworking, which might draw in more men, senior adult officials said.

If the millage passes, Yvonne Singer, transportation coordinator, plans to buy at least two vans that are equipped to transport people with handicaps. A full-size bus is another thing on the shopping list.

"It will provide senior adults with more opportunities. Not everyone drives. And though there is the subsidized cab program, not everyone has enough money," Singer said.

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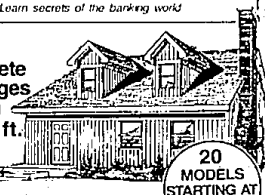
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