

School study eyes blueprints of future

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change to begin in the classroom and expand out — not to be mandated.

"The goal is to have them (staff) look at all the recommendations and hopefully design their own program. The way they implement it (in each school) could be totally different," explained Judith White, assistant superintendent for curriculum and staff development, who worked with both high school and middle school committees.

"IT GENERATES from the core of people who served on it (the committee). We will get small pilots going and then, internally, things will get going."

School board members were briefed on the middle school report at a June 4 school board curriculum committee meeting, and they adopted recommendations on June 18. Parents and interested residents will get a chance to hear details of the report at a Fall School/Community Forum meeting.

East Middle School principal Bill Martin, who co-chaired the study

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Babb has doubts about freeze

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"Will limit the board of review in 1992 to the type of appeals it can hear."

"Will prevent assessors, such as Babb, from considering 1991 sales for the 1992 assessment."

While an assessment freeze sounds great, Babb says it can have far-reaching effects on the property owner.

Let's say you're accustomed to appealing your assessment to the board of review. In 1992, you might have a hard time doing that. The board can hear appeals on hardship, new construction and property assessments that weren't appealed in 1991. If you appealed your assessment in 1991, forget about doing it in 1992, Babb said.

THE FREEZE also prevents Babb from considering sales in 1991 for 1992 assessments.

"According to the law, anything in 1991 affecting value isn't going to be considered for the 1992 assessment. As assessors we just can't consider it until 1993," Babb said.

For property tax assessments this year, Babb said, the 24-month study of sales, which included the last nine months of 1988, all of 1989 and the first three months of 1990. He also paid attention to the existing housing sales market.

Suppose you bought a house assessed at \$120,000. That gives it a market value of

\$240,000. Remember, the property assessment freeze is in effect. If you only paid \$220,000, you're out of luck in 1992 to argue that the assessment should be decreased. The reverse would also be true, Babb said.

"The legislation has precluded me from considering changes in the market up or down," Babb said.

An assessment is 50 percent of the usual selling price of the house, for example. The assessment process determines the true cash value of property for the purpose of calculating property taxes. City, school and county tax rates are levied against the assessed value of property.

The assessor said he is also precluded from doing any reappraisals — up or down. "If you're in a tough market environment right now, you got problems. You also have to live with them for a year without an appeal," Babb said.

THE LEGISLATION also requires assessors to send out assessment notices to all property owners. In the past, assessors only had to send notices to property owners whose assessments increased.

In 1992, voters also will have the opportunity to vote on a constitutional amendment that, if passed, would limit property tax assessment increases on residential property only to 5 percent

or the rate of inflation, whichever is less.

If a house is sold, according to the amendment, the property would be assessed at 50 percent of the true cash value.

Babb is convinced that if the amendment is passed, the longstanding principles of assessing would be destroyed and inequities would creep in. "Five years after this, you're going to have ridiculous assessments," he said. "The cornerstone of the whole assessing process is uniformity. They will be treating every piece of property the same. To me, that's a cardinal sin."

Consider any neighborhood. One house could be assessed at 50 percent of market value, another at 50 percent and another at 40 percent. This scenario, Babb said, could happen if two of those houses aren't sold, but one is. The one that's sold will be assessed at 50 percent of market value.

The amendment, if passed, would affect only the homestead. "But what defines a homestead?" Babb asked. What if you have two houses, one on a lake. The lakefront house is increasing rapidly in value, the house in town is not.

There's a possibility the homeowner will say the lakefront house — with increasing values — is his homestead. That way, the assessment would be limited to a 5 percent increase or the inflation rate, whichever is lower.

"Nobody disputes the need for property tax reform, but this isn't it," Babb said.

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