

Schools worried about state cuts

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district's reserves in the next three to four years, officials said.

During recent hearings on the state school aid in Lansing, officials from neighboring out-of-formula districts in Livonia and Rochester districts blistered Sen. Dan DeGrow and his plan to cut almost all their state aid next fall.

"Your proposal would bring us to our knees," said Livonia Superintendent Joseph Marinelli, who called the measure "a well-orchestrated effort by state government" to "attack the out-of-formula school districts' local tax dollars in every way possible in the name of equity with in-formula districts."

Rochester school board member Darlene Janulis added: "We all seem to be in the same boat — a leaky one at that."

DeGrow appeared unmoved, sitting stoically through the barrage as chairman of the subcommittee on K-12 school aid.

The Part II Republican has given up hope for raising state taxes for schools and is trying to narrow the gap between districts through business tax base sharing and cutting categorical aid to better-off districts — programs he calls "equity correction."

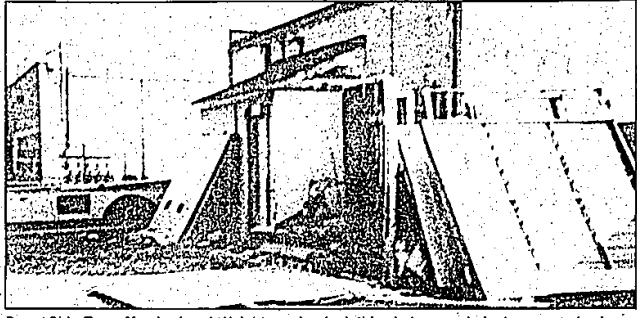
Overall, DeGrow's version of Senate Bill 226 would:

- Deduct \$107 million from the categorical aid going to out-of-formula schools, up from the current \$60 million.
- Take away state payment of \$340 million in Social Security payments over four years.
- Retain tax base sharing, under which out-of-formula districts lose half the growth in their commercial and industrial tax bases.

FOR FARMINGTON, that means taking a hard look at the coming year's budget, and future budgets as well. Assistant superintendent for finance Bruce Barrett said the Farmington school board did the right thing last year when they cut 150 staff positions and other expenses. "We believe we can weather the storm short term," he said. They made enough of a cut "for a two-year window."

But longterm, there will be consequences from all the state activity. Not only is this year's state school aid bill a concern, Barrett said, but so are this year's property tax freeze which has cut the district's budget permanently by \$3.3 million and any number of ballot proposals facing voters this fall.

Any property tax cut will directly affect out-of-formula schools like Farmington which get the majority of their funding through local property taxes.



Some Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights residents are annoyed with what they consider as blight in southeast Farmington Hills. A resident took this photo — and plenty more — to show the city council the kind of problems they face.

City offers help for blight

By Joanna Malliszowski
staff writer

City staff members want to work with Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights residents to clear up code and zoning violations in their neighborhoods, according to Farmington Hills administrators.

"We're more than willing. We want to meet with them," said Dale Countegan, director of planning and community development.

Residents are complaining of what they believe is lack of interest by city administrators, council members and staff to clean up blight in the city's older areas.

Following a meeting with neighbors, as well as a city council tour of a small section of Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights in late March, Countegan and his staff developed

recommendations to solve the problems.

City staff and representatives of the Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights Homeowners Association compiled a list of violations, which includes existing items as well as new offenses. The association is expected to be informed of the disposition of these cases by the end of April, according to a memo issued to the city council.

CITY STAFF also suggested changing the focus from getting violators to comply with zoning and code regulations to punishment. The association is encouraged to notify homeowners of the enforcement campaign that would be started on a certain date.

"I think council direction on this would be helpful to the staff," Countegan said.

The staff also wants to meet with 47th District Court officials and city attorneys regarding plans to beef up enforcement.

The recommendations, however, were not discussed by the city council when concerns were again raised a week ago about code violations and the use of a code enforcement officer — paid partially with federal block grant money — specifically for Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights.

"We want to explore programs and different approaches we can take with the problem," Countegan said.

To that end, Countegan says quarterly meetings with homeowners are planned. New programs or activities could lead from these meetings. Programs discussed already include a May 1992 cleanup with the help of the public works department, as well as newsletters covering code enforcement activities, housing rehabilitation help and a reward program for neighborhood improvement.

Countegan said the staff plans to meet again with the homeowners association in mid-May.

Residents: Codes not enforced

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"I know those people are upset," Grant said, "but I don't think they could respect me as the mayor if I allowed them to take stabs that aren't accurate. We have put a lot of effort down there. I think the city deserves some recognition for efforts they have made instead of being accused that we haven't done anything."

Grant is critical of residents' manner of drawing attention to the problem. "I feel if their method of communication was less harsh, they and the city could form a better relationship and move in a positive direction."

Ranesbottom and her neighbors say they are tired of being put on the back burner. And they wonder why their concerns must take a back seat to the city officials' efforts to present a positive front to the public and the media.

"Things are worse. Mr. Grant doesn't see anything," Ranesbottom said.

ACCORDING TO Grant, beginning August 1990, more than 180 complaints were resolved without tickets in the Old Town-Meadowbrook Heights area. Twenty-six tickets also were issued and the majority resolved. And 42 citations were issued that are awaiting some action.

If the problem is not that great, Ranesbottom said, why then use block grant money to help pay for a code enforcement officer specifically for the southeast end.

Like Ranesbottom, Old Town resident George Roberts, a member of the city's housing rehabilitation loan board, believes block grant money should not be used to help pay for the officer.

According to federal guidelines block grant money is to be used — for code enforcement, if necessary — in deteriorated or deteriorating areas.

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