

Questions tax understanding of state proposals

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

So far, the local response to the school funding and tax reform ballot proposal seems lukewarm at best.

Deputy state treasurer and Farmington resident Madhu Anderson spoke about the difference in the state ballot proposal and the fall-back proposal at a Farmington Area Chamber of Commerce luncheon Jan. 28.

Although reaction varied, questions about the effects of either proposal on businesses and tax-

payers and the manner in which the Legislature and governor came up with the plan lingered. Anderson described the process whereby lawmakers arrived at the two-option tax plan as a "marathon, hellish session."

Unlike many of the plans to change the way the state pays for public education, the proposal voters will decide March 16 will not mean staying with the current property-tax-based system if it fails. The state would then revert to a system that would increase the income tax and single busi-

ness taxes as well as keep a 12-mill property tax provision.

"There is no going back," Anderson told the audience of about 50 business and civic leaders at the Holiday Inn.

The ballot proposal would increase the sales tax by 2 percent but would lower the income tax and roll back property taxes to 6 mills.

"This would give us a more balanced tax structure," said Anderson, who graduated from the University of California at Berkeley

before earning a master's in public policy from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. "We are the ninth-highest in taxes in the nation, and we have the highest flat rate of income tax," she said.

But Anderson is battling a perception among many that the choice is the lesser of two evils pushed on voters by a state government that did not do its job.

"I'm not impressed with either plan," said Farmington Hills City Councilwoman Cheryl Oliverio. "I don't know how I'll vote. I still

don't think they've addressed the quality of schools issue."

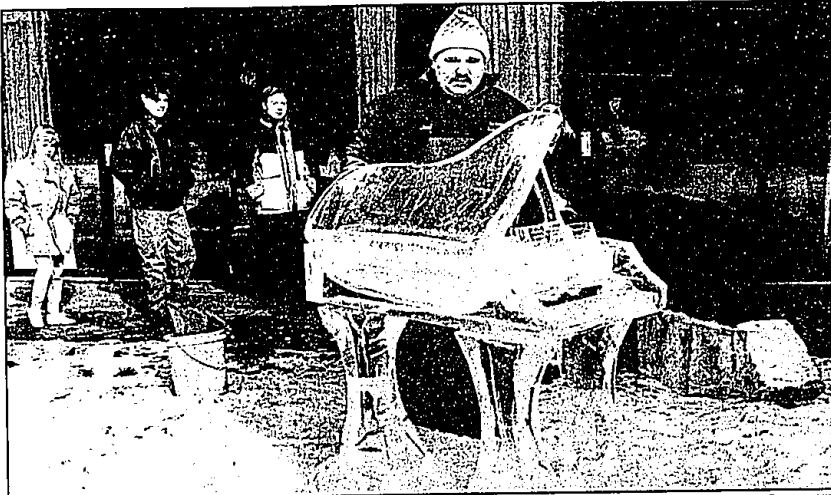
Hills Mayor Larry Lichtman said although he would probably vote for the ballot proposal, the Legislature had fallen down on the job.

"Personally, I think the ballot proposal is a better choice," he said. "It lowers the income tax, maintains the current single business tax and increases the sales tax, which spreads the load. But I'm disappointed. The Legislature did a poor job."

The proposal was first billed as property tax reform, then school financing reform, Lichtman said. That flip-flop won't improve its chances with voters, he said. Although the ballot proposal would help outstate districts, it probably would not do much for most districts in Oakland County, including Farmington, Lichtman said.

Hills city manager Bill Costick said he believes the issues of revenue sharing for cities and the mechanics of implementing either plan will not be a problem.

A little ice music



JOHN STORME/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Cold creation: Ice sculptor Jim Nadeau puts finishing touches on his grand piano creation as part of a fund-raising brunch Sunday at the Botsford Inn to benefit the Farmington Area Philharmonic. For story on the philharmonic and its performances, see Page 3C.

Sentencing set in sex assault on boy

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

After a year, the ordeal of a Farmington Hills boy should end with the sentencing of the Livonia man convicted of sexually abusing him.

Gerald Joseph Bauer Jr., 32, will be sentenced Feb. 7 in Oakland Circuit Court by Judge Denise Langford-Morris for the criminal sexual assault of the boy, now 12. Bauer pleaded no contest on Jan. 10.

"It's been agonizing for both him and his family and friends who have supported him," said Bauer's attorney David Gorceyca. "He wants to go on with his life and, believe it or not, he wants (the boy) to not have to go through the process of a trial."

Bauer, who taught sixth grade at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Northville at the time of the incident in January of 1993, has since resigned his position and taken another job in a non-teaching profession, Gorceyca said.

Bauer pleaded no contest to the charges because, although for sentencing purposes it serves as a guilty plea, it is not an admission of guilt.

But Pamela Maas, assistant prosecutor and unit coordinator for child sexual assault for Oak-

land County, said there was no doubt that Bauer had committed the crimes.

"Absolutely!" she said. "He sexually assaulted a child and there was penetration."

Gorceyca said that his client called off a predisposition investigation in May that would have predicted his possible sentence.

"They wanted him to admit to things that he did not do," Gorceyca said.

The no contest plea sometimes is used to avoid civil prosecution in criminal matters, but Gorceyca said that was not his client's reason for the plea.

Bauer was convicted of one count of first degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of second degree criminal sexual conduct. Although he could face up to life for the first-degree conviction, Bauer has no criminal history and is employed. The sentencing guidelines call for 36 to 96 months, Gorceyca said.

Maas said she thought those guidelines were appropriate, although the judge does not have to follow them.

She rejected previous claims that the child's parents had not been getting along and that the boy wanted attention.

DDA plans lunch to chew on business group's future

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

The Downtown Development Authority and Downtown Farmington Business Association plan to have lunch soon to discuss whether they'll be having lunch in the future.

Some are wondering about the viability of the DFBA, which is a voluntary group started by business owners and merchants in 1986 to market and promote downtown.

DFBA vice president and DDA board member Michelle Jakacki said only six people attended the last DFBA meeting.

Some see the authority and DFBA as duplicating efforts, especially with the DDA recently forming its own promotions committee.

"It's the same people," said Jakacki, who is also a member of the six-person promotions committee. "It's the same people going to the same meetings."

Added to that is the DDA's recent special assessment on downtown businesses, which is earmarked for promotion and marketing. The assessment was enacted in December to make up lost tax increment finance (TIF) money with the state abolishing school property tax.

DFBA members are already paying \$150 — \$100 of which goes to promotion — in addition to the special assessment.

DDA board members urged DFBA not to be too hasty; They want the group to continue. At

■ **'It's the same people going to the same meetings.'**

Michelle Jakacki
DFBA vice president,
DDA board member

Tuesday's DDA meeting, the board agreed to send a letter to DFBA members expressing support prior to their Feb. 22 luncheon.

"I think it's too premature to say you don't need a DFBA because of the special assessment," said Farmington city manager Frank Lauhoff. "I think it is important for the DFBA to continue. I think they bring a different perspective at times."

"I don't want to see government take over the whole interests of downtown."

DDA board president Robert Fitzpatrick said the DFBA's support is still needed. The special assessment doesn't mean the DDA has more money for promotions, he added.

The DFBA develops its promotional ideas, a majority of which are paid for through the DDA, Jakacki said.

DDA director Judy Downey said the promotions committee wasn't formed with the intention of doing away with DFBA. She wanted the DDA to be accountable to downtown merchants, especially with the new special assessment.

The committee, which includes many DFBA members, met for the first time Jan. 21.

Members of the DDA promotions group include: Jerry Wingerter, owner of the Bon Ton Shoppe; Dennis Page, owner of Page's Restaurant; Sandy McClelland, owner of Carousel Kids; Greg Hohler, owner of the Civic Theatre; and Jakacki, owner of Focal Point Studios.

"I wanted to have a cross section of merchants to give input . . . I want merchants in the district to know they have more of a say in what's going on," Downey said.

Jakacki and other members don't see the DFBA disbanding, but rather redefining its role.

DFBA and DDA board member Craig Grace said the group could evolve into more of a social outlet. The \$150 annual dues could be scaled down to reflect the change, he said.

Grace feels the DDA's special assessment was only one reason for the DFBA's purpose to be questioned. He said recently lack of membership was causing the businesses owners in the service industry to make decisions for retail merchants.

Another problem was chain stores such as T.J. Maxx, Pier One and Dress Barn couldn't participate in the DFBA because their corporate offices wouldn't let them, he added.

"The main voices we were looking for, we couldn't capture them," Grace said.

Drug abuse prevention program set

Alexander Hamilton Life will bring the Spencer Haywood Foundation drug abuse prevention program, "Choices," to Harrison High School at 8:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 4.

About 750 students and Hamilton employees will gather at Harrison High School, on 12 Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road, to watch "Choices." The two-hour program features Spencer Haywood, former NBA superstar, who succumbed to a dual addiction of cocaine and alcohol, and Walt Maddox, lead singer of the Marcels, famous for their '60s hit, the "bom-bom" version of "Blue

Moon." Maddox's musical message — "Find your dream and make it happen" — is presented along with Haywood's powerful telling of the choices which led to his loss of \$10 million in contracts and endorsements, a championship ring, and five years of his life.

Hamilton was instrumental in bringing Haywood and Maddox to thousands of Detroit-area students in 1993.

"We feel that our success is in the hands of local young people," said Gary Gilmer, president and CEO of the Farmington Hills-

based firm.

"Our future employees attend K-12th grades in the area school systems. If they fail, we fail. Right now they're struggling with drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, violence and poor academic skills. Because of this we must make certain our dollars are spent properly in these areas."

The Harrison High site for "Choices" will mark the end of two weeks in 15 Detroit elementary and middle schools. It will also be the first chance Hamilton employees will have to witness their philanthropic dollars at work in their home community.