

Blizman denies project conflict

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

A Farmington Hills planning commissioner denies a conflict of interest in voting along with his fellow commissioners for the controversial Timbercrest development.

Paul Blizman said he represented developer Gary Jonna in 1986 and negotiated an agreement with residents of Forestbrook subdivision for a development for the Michigan National Corp. headquarters on the north side of I-696 west of Inkster.

Residents accepted the plan, which provided 100-foot setbacks to the south (next to the headquarters) and a 75-foot wide green belt around the development. That agreement was adopted and recorded with the county, he said.

The property had been rezoned in 1968, long before Blizman

worked for Jonna.

The headquarters project was approved before Blizman joined the planning commission. When a rezoning request by Michigan National, which had purchased the property from Jonna, came before the commission in 1987 for a 10-acre expansion, Blizman abstained from voting on it. He also abstained on a landscaping plan for the project.

Blizman, who served as chairman of the planning commission that unanimously approved a modified Timbercrest project, said that approval only came after the project was radically changed.

"I also came out against the Source Club (Jonna's first Timbercrest design that included a large retail store) and told him that he would have to come back with a redesign plan to win my approval," Blizman said.

Roads from page 1A

The city touts more than a few perks for homeowners.

Special assessments could run as high as \$7,000 for individual homeowners on future street repairs and replacement, which need to be done, city officials say.

The 1.6-mills are deductible on federal income tax; special assessments are not.

Michigan Homestead property tax credit would negate the increase for some homeowners, city officials say.

They cite an example of a person over 65 with the median home value of \$120,000 and income of \$45,000. His property tax bill for 1994 would be \$2,566.

A mill equals one dollar of tax for every \$1,000 of state assessed

property value. The millage would add \$96, starting in 1996.

A person over 65 would receive a \$991 Michigan Homestead tax credit.

Those selling points have been stressed to organizations ranging from the Farmington Ministerial Group to Neighborhood Watch.

Also, 5,000 letters went out to residents and the city prepared a 30-minute program, which is being cablecast on MetroVision.

Homeowners are a main priority. Officials have also met with seniors at Farmington Place, who are not homeowners but registered voters.

"These folks were all homeowners at one time, too," Lauboff said.

No polling has been done, but the city manager's office received 20 calls when letters went out explaining the plan.

Only two or three calls were negative, Lauboff said. The rest wanted more information.

Otherwise, Lauboff added, most people appear to favor it.

"I have been looking for the negative," Lauboff said. "If there negatives out there, we want to address them."

In Chatham Hills, homeowners are in the ninth year of a 12-year special assessment for previous road repairs. They'll still be obligated to pay the remainder regardless of whether the plan passes.

Otherwise, the millage would have to be higher, Lauboff said. Only half the roads were repaired in the subdivision. The remainder are 25 years old, and need work.

The plan calls for three replacement and repair phases. Phase one would take place during the next five years at a cost of \$2,100,000.

Phase two and three would follow at a cost of \$3,734,000 and \$1,800,000 respectively. Through preventative maintenance, the city would pay \$8 million instead of a projected \$20 million to complete the work.

"It's got to be done," Lauboff said. "Should we do it or shouldn't we do it is not the question."

New law could put jingle in DDA's pockets

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Some unexpected money from tax increment financing — better known as TIF — could become available for downtown Farmington.

That won't raise a tiff with property owners in the Farmington Central Business District. If things proceed as expected, they'll see their special assessment drop significantly during the next two years.

The Downtown Development Authority levied the 9.5-mill special assessment last year to help replace revenue — estimated at \$125,000 — which the city lost with the Proposal A reduction of

school property taxes. That reduction also cut off TIF money going to the DDA.

TIF allows authorities like the Farmington DDA to capture a portion of property taxes levied by school, city, county and state governments. Cities then use the money to pay for development projects.

When school property taxes were cut, so was the Farmington DDA's TIF revenue. The city then levied the 9.5-mill special assessment to replace that loss.

At the time, the City Council said that if more TIF money ever became available, the city would reduce the special assessment accordingly. A state law passed in July could spell relief.

Public Act 280 allows cities and DDAs to capture TIF revenue from school taxes for projects already under way. During the next

two years, the DDA could receive up to \$100,000 of that money, which would help pay for three projects.

"It (Public Act 280) was just designed in order for cities to proceed in an orderly manner to honor commitments and to complete projects," said Farmington Assistant City Manager Robert Schultz.

Downtown property owners wouldn't see a reduction until next year. Half of the special assessment money has already been collected for this fiscal year; Bills have gone out for the second portion.

Under the new law, the DDA expects to capture \$69,000 from local school taxes. That's roughly half the money generated in the Central Business District by the 18 mills levied for local schools.

The rest of the \$100,000 would

come from the intermediate school district tax and the 6-mill state school levy.

Several cities and DDAs were caught short by Proposal A, which eliminated their ability to capture TIF money from school tax revenues.

Some had sold bonds for projects and were counting on TIF money to pay them off. Others, like Farmington, had projects outlined in development plans but were unsure how to finance them.

To receive TIF money under the new law, the Farmington DDA has to sign construction contracts by December for its three projects.

Included are two streetcap improvement undertakings, for east Grand River and Liberty Street. The other involves the removal of a house on Orchard Street for additional parking.

Voters' Voice has hot line

Sharon Stein, chairwoman of Voters' Voice, a citizens group that opposes the recently approved Timbercrest development, said some people trying to get information about a recall have had trouble getting it.

A recall hot line number, 477-6673, is available for anyone

needing information about a recall petition drive against six Farmington Hills City Council members who voted for the project, Stein said.

Petitions are being safe-guarded in a safety deposit box at a bank and are not being kept in people's homes, she said.

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