

Stringing along:



TOM HANLEY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Clarification: A photograph on page 3A of the Nov. 27 Farmington Observer should have shown Katrina DeSantis (above), a 5-year-old kindergartner at Wooddale Elementary School, getting acquainted with a ukulele. The story was about a music program at the Farmington Hills school.

Fitzgerald: Better for Hills to receive

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Dennis Fitzgerald is hoping the city of Farmington Hills will take some financial advice from a professional.

Fitzgerald, a longtime volunteer with the city's parks and recreation commission and first time candidate for city council, is also a registered investment representative for CIGNA Financial Advisors in Southfield.

And after shepherding the investments of hundreds of clients over the years, he has found some lessons that could save, or more properly, make the city some money.

"The council budget process is spending oriented," he said. "They may try to find ways to spend less, but it's only one side of the budget."

Fitzgerald, who used to teach business and accounting at North Farmington High School, said

worrying about revenue sources the city can't control is not as productive as finding additional ways to get revenue.

About 20 percent of the city's revenue comes from sources other than taxes. The effect of Proposal A to cut property taxes and the unpredictability of state revenue sharing make it more important to increase user fees and other revenue sources.

Fitzgerald said the city should consider asking departments within the city to come up with a way to increase revenues by 20 percent within the department.

"It wouldn't be possible in every department," he said. "But it would give them a revenue oriented approach."

Fitzgerald said there are several specific ways to increase revenues now available to the city. Those recommendations include:

■ Using the fire department as the city's EMS response unit instead of contracting with a private

company as it now does.

■ Enforcing weight restrictions on trucks. That would save roads and make more money for the city.

■ Increasing the fee, which has been at \$25 for 10 years, for those entering the court's community service program.

■ Look at increasing costs for day care through the parks and recreation department.

■ Consider renting space at the Farmington Hills Activities Center for conventions and other events more aggressively than is now being done.

■ Selling memberships to the city's golf course at San Marino. Members could have some preferential tee times and/or discounts in return for signing on.

■ The library could look at selling some of its services, especially to out-of-town businesses that use it.

■ A defined benefit retirement plan should be looked at for city

employees. It could save the city money and better tailor retirement plans to the needs of those city workers affected.

■ Use city property that would be hard to sell as an RV park, which could raise money through rents while posing little hazard to the property.

Those are some suggestions, but Fitzgerald said city departments probably could come up with a good list themselves if so directed.

In any case, the city council should consider increasing revenues through fees and other means before raising taxes. That would also ease the pressure of depending on taxes over which the city has little control, such as state revenue sharing.

"Trying to plan a budget around somebody else's wallet... is not good business," he said. "The city council is trying to spend wisely, and that's their job. But that's only part of the job."

Hills tax bills delayed due to error

Farmington Hills property tax bills will be mailed approximately two weeks later than usual this year.

An error in the county tax rate was discovered after tax bills had been printed, stuffed and prepared for the usual Dec. 1 mailing date, said deputy treasurer Larry Williams.

"They gave us a rate which turned out to be a tentative rate," Williams said.

About 3,000 of the inaccurate bills were in the mail to outstate and out-of-state property owners before the mistake was detected. Williams said no local tax bill went out with the wrong information.

"Anyone who has received a bill has an incorrectly calculated bill," Williams said. "We'll send out the new bills (to the out-of-state and outstate taxpayers) with them

stamped 'corrected bill.'"

The old bills, printed in red ink, are being replaced by new bills printed in green ink.

The computer files in the treasurer's office have been updated, according to Williams. Anyone who wishes to pay the bill can do so at any time by coming into the office and picking up a statement. The new bills should be ready for mailing around Dec. 16.

Fines from page 1A

"Stop signs don't slow people down," he said. "They actually increase their speed between stop signs. There's an increased risk of accidents at stop signs."

Farmington police regularly use a SMART device on streets, which gives a digital reading to motorists as to how fast they are traveling. However, as soon as the machine is removed, speeds tend to increase.

"What's going on is we've built our cars to be real comfortable," Goss said. "As a result, people don't realize how fast they're

going."

Gill Road is often used as an alternative to Farmington Road, Aldrich said. The width of the road makes it appealing to motorists looking for a way around stop lights.

The petition is one of several efforts by Gill Road residents to thwart speeders, Aldrich said. He's not sold on the city's solution.

"I don't think it was the solution we were looking for," Aldrich said. "I don't have a lot of faith it's going to work."

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