

20 have say on spending \$9.5 million

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

Monday night's public hearing about how Farmington Public Schools should spend its \$9.5 million share of the Durant lawsuit settlement brought out numerous opinions and viewpoints.

While a slight majority approved giving the money back to taxpayers, nothing was decided and probably won't be, until April at the earliest, said school board President Linda Enberg.

She said about 20 people spoke on the issue, with representation for each of three main alternatives for how the money can be spent.

"It was very fruitful," said Enberg about the state-required public hearing, which took place during a special meeting at the Louis Schulman Administration Building. "We very much enjoyed hearing what the public thinks."

The turnout showed "the variety of opinions that are out there on this," Enberg added.

Enberg emphasized that the window is still open for more public input as the school board and administrators make a decision about the money. She suggested calling or faxing district officials at (248) 489-3300 or (248) 489-3348, respectively.

Farmington and 83 other Michigan public school districts will receive their Durant dollars in single lump-sum payments around April 15. Farmington will likely decide that month how to spend it, even though Enberg said there is no deadline for such a decision.

The Durant case, filed in 1980, stemmed from the 84 districts' claims that the state was not

meeting financial obligations for mandatory programs such as special education.

Apparently, most of the comments Monday night were regarding the option to directly return Durant money to taxpayers. Enberg said seven or eight people spoke about that option.

Several ways to do that included: putting the \$9.5 million into the current series of bonds, to lower the millage over the next 1 1/2 years. Enberg said that would "be a temporary thing."

The money also could be earmarked for: paying off the bond issue sooner; reducing the next purchase of bonds from \$26 million to \$16.4 million.

About the latter, Cheryl Cannon, the district's assistant superintendent for business and finance, said the owner of a \$165,000 home in the district could expect a savings of \$17 annually over 19 years.

As for the suggestion of directly sending rebate checks to residents and businesses, Enberg said it would probably be next to impossible to accomplish.

"That would be extremely difficult," she said. "Although it sounds very clean and neat, it would be difficult to pull off."

Homeowners are changing all the time.

"A much easier and cleaner way to do it would be to just reduce the debt millage that is charged to that business or home."

Several other suggestions included the following:

- Three people at the hearing supported setting up an endowment fund, using the interest for special projects.
- Cannon said improving playgrounds, installing football field lights and providing "equitable access to enrichment programs to all students" may be ways such a fund could be used.
- Putting the money into a donor-controlled fund to be operated by the Farmington-Farmington Hills Foundation for Children, Youth and Families.
- Giving money back to special education. Enberg reiterated that the program is fully funded, with the district using general fund money to keep special ed afloat.

Meanwhile, the previously stated option for the district to establish a "wait and see" period before deciding what to do with the money drew no public support, Enberg said.

Pool plan isn't making a splash with all neighbors

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Road residents John Anderson and Skip Eichhorn don't want the city to allow a non-competitive swimming pool to be built at the Farmington Tennis Club because they say it would hurt property values.

It also would be a noisy nuisance, said others who spoke out during a recent Farmington Planning Commission public hearing on the subject. The fumes and traffic would also worsen, said others. One resident even said she'd sell her condo if the request to build a pool were approved.

Not to worry, at least for a while. The tennis club's bid to obtain a special exception use and site plan approval for the outdoor pool and recreation area was tabled by the planning commission.

Before the matter can be taken up again, perhaps as soon as March 9, tennis club management and its architects (Allen & Laux, Inc.) must meet with nearby residents to reach a compromise. Most of the residents who spoke against the plan live in the 23000 block of Farmington, in condominiums not far from the tennis club at 22777 Farmington.

Commissioners also want more detailed information about when, and how loud, music is to be played.

Allen & Laux must also revise its landscape plan for the north side of the tennis club property, to screen residents from the pool area.

The pool, to be built on club-owned property northeast of the existing tennis club, would range from 3 to 7 feet. A hot tub, 29 new parking spaces and a water slide are other highlights of the plan.

David Cornwell, representing the tennis club, told commissioners the architects designed a secluded facility with a landscape barrier and that there would not be a public address system, such as at nearby Farmington Glen Aquatic Center.

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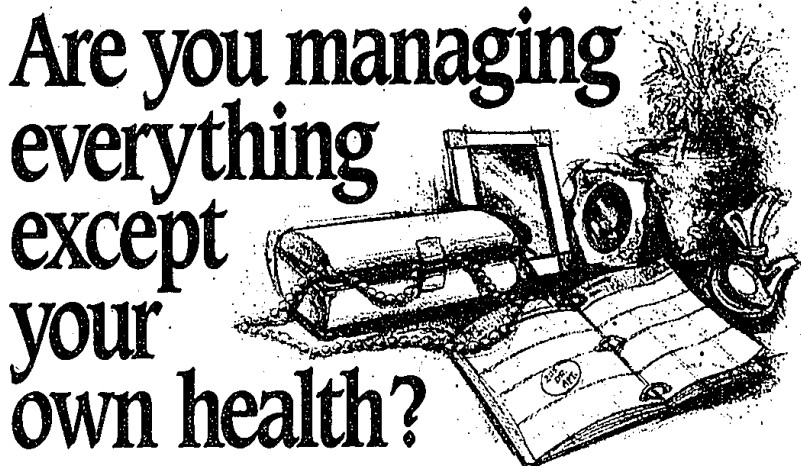
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