

District lays off 7 teachers

The word "regrettable" was repeated several times by Farmington school district officials during Tuesday's meeting, when a decision to lay off seven teachers was approved.

But "temporary" might be another appropriate word to describe the layoffs, which were done to comply with the Farmington Education Association collective bargaining contract, said Larry Lobert, executive director of personnel.

The school board OK'd the layoffs to meet an April 30 notification deadline, informing each teacher that there currently isn't a specific job available for him or her in 1998-99. It is likely that most, if not all, of the teachers will be brought back at some point next year — although possibly not in the same positions.

"We hope the names on this list will be recalled," Superintendent

Bob Maxfield said to board members before the layoffs were authorized. "It (the layoff list) is regrettable submitted for your approval."

All of the teachers have less than two years experience in Farmington schools, though some started their teaching careers in other districts. The teachers, all in the high schools, were notified on Wednesday, Lobert said.

Lobert stressed after the meeting that the layoffs were not done as a cost-cutting measure. The combined salaries of the seven teachers were not disclosed.

"This is not a cost-cutting issue but a staffing issue," Lobert said, adding that the teachers "probably will be called back."

He said the district has an obligation to, by the end of

April, contact any teacher who does not have a specific job identified for the following year.

Lobert said some of the recalls could begin very soon, after teachers who intend to retire notify the district.

"But, in our district, the contract does not provide that we get a real early notification on retirements," Lobert said. And a teacher could actually hold off until late summer before making that decision.

According to Sue Zurvalec, assistant superintendent of staff and community services, it is difficult to inform anybody that they are being laid off. But she asked for some perspective.

"About 150 positions were cut in the district in 1990 due to an overnight \$6 million recapture that the state took away from us right before July 1," Zurvalec said.

\$9.5 million?

Mix 'n' match plan returns some, spends some

Alice Toroyan, a 22-year resident of Farmington Public Schools, is nearing retirement age and lives on a fixed income. But she would rather see the school board put its \$9.5 million windfall to educational use instead of seeing annual tax rebate checks of \$15, \$20 or \$25.

And Toroyan, who spoke to the Farmington school board Tuesday night about what should be done with the one-time payback from the so-called Durant lawsuit, insists she isn't alone.

"You'll probably be hearing from more of us," said Toroyan to board members during the meeting at the Farmington Training Center.

Board President Linda Enberg and Treasurer Joe Svoke, who heads up the board's finance committee, both thanked Toroyan for her comments. Both also reiterated that the decision on what to do with the money won't be made until the 1998-99 budget is completed next month. On Tuesday, the board set a budget public hearing for Tuesday, May 19.

Asked about her position later, Toroyan said she favored seeing the board put the Durant money in an interest-generating fund and use it for special endeavors such as after-school programs, summer programs and tutoring at the teen centers. She would not want to see money used for regularly budgeted district operations or be returned to residents.

"We're a rich enough commu-

nity," said Toroyan, whose three children went through Farmington Public Schools. "The \$20 isn't going to make that much of a difference in my taxes."

According to Toroyan, it makes more sense to take the money and do something that would have a long-lasting, positive effect on teenage students, many who live in families where both parents work.

The school board now is considering using up to \$9.5 million of the Durant money to reduce the amount of bonds that must be sold to complete \$26 million worth of projects from last September's bond issue. Residents could receive annual tax rebates of \$12 over 19 years under that plan.

"We need to take care of the community after school... We're starting to address it, but we feel this money could help address this issue" even more, Toroyan said.

Farmington schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield later called Toroyan's suggestion "a legitimate option. Clearly, there is sentiment to return every penny, and there's the other end of the spectrum. This is a one-time infusion of money. There may be unique projects."

A "mix and match" compromise is possible. "The board feels very strongly that at least a portion be returned" to residents in some way, Maxfield said.

If the money is put aside for district-related projects or pro-

grams, the board must be "extremely specific" about how it will be used, Maxfield said.

Under the so-called "mix and match" option, about two-thirds of the money would be returned to taxpayers (via the rebates), with the rest set aside for designated projects.

"There's a package of site improvements we identified but were never part of the bond issue," Maxfield said.

Those include improvements to elementary school playgrounds to make them handicapped accessible and enhancements to parking lot lights at the high schools.

Another \$1.2 million could be used to establish two endowment funds of \$600,000 each, Maxfield said. One could be used to support tutoring programs in the four teen centers operated by the city of Farmington Hills.

The other fund could be used to support a tuition program for summer programming for disadvantaged children.

Each fund would generate an estimated \$30,000 in interest each year, enough to keep those programs going without reducing the principal.

Farmington is one of 84 Michigan public school districts awarded a total of \$212 million by the Michigan Supreme Court. The districts sued the state in 1980 for not providing enough aid for state-mandated special education programs. The state must fully pay for programs that it requires.

AGENDA

Farmington Hills
City Council meeting
City Hall 474-0116
7:30 p.m. Monday, April 27

Agenda Items Include:

- Consider cost hearing for road improvement and drainage improvement for Ridgewood Drive.
- Consider contract for the pavement rehabilitation and drainage improvement project for Kimberley Subdivision, to

Oakland Excavating Company, Inc. for \$1.13 million.

of \$32,600 anticipated fund balance from the 1997/98 sidewalk program funds.

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