

Abatement request puts Hills in battle with Japan

BY PAUL R. PACE
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It's Farmington Hills vs. Japan. Japanese automaker Nissan is planning an aggressive increase in its engineering department and local company officials at the Farmington Hills Nissan North American Technical Center want the expansion to happen at its facility on Sunrise Drive.

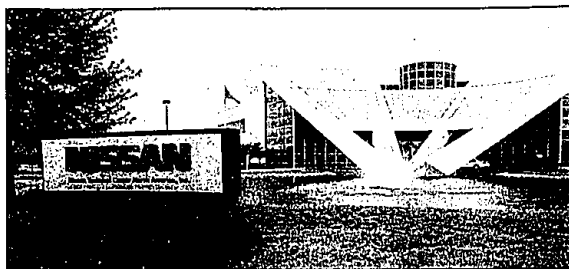
But to do so, company officials must prove to their corporate office that the expansion here would prove better than a cheaper route in Japan.

According to City Manager Steve Brock, the Michigan Economic Growth Authority is trying to get the company to expand in the state by offering it a 100-percent employee tax credit over 17 years, which would equate to roughly \$25 million in savings to the company.

The city must also offer the company a tax incentive in order to qualify for the state deal, said Brock.

So far, the plan is to make a \$36 million expansion to the company's Farmington Hills facility, adding more than 1,000,000 square feet to the west side of the building.

The Hills City Council approved the first step Monday, allowing the company a six-year tax abatement by approving the area as



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DEXLER

Expansion: Nissan is asking the Farmington Hills City Council to approve a tax abatement that would allow for an expansion at their Sunrise Drive facility.

a district for such a tax incentive Monday.

At council's next meeting, May 20, a public hearing on the abatement will take place, and the council will make a final decision to grant the request.

If approved, the city will give the company a 50 percent local tax break on the expansion. The company did not ask for an abatement of the state school tax of 6 mills.

In all, the company will save about \$810,000 in local taxes, but still pay about \$1 million in taxes for the expansion, said Teri Arbenowicz, assistant city manager.

Mayor Nancy Bates, who said she normally doesn't support tax abatements, approved the measure by saying times are different now.

"This is the first time ever I'm going to support this," she said. "It's a different time, there is unemployment."

John Calandro, director of human resources and administration for Nissan Technical Center North America, said the company will bring in 350 new workers to the area in five years' time with the expansion. The average salary will be \$60,000. The company currently has about 432 employees and 120 contract workers, he said.

"We're the fifth largest tax payer in the city," he said, adding the office in Farmington Hills is responsible for designing and engineering the Xterra and Ultima models.

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett said she doesn't support "corporate welfare," but said the state policy is the problem that needs to be corrected. She supported the abatement district, by saying she didn't want to put citizens at risk.

"Nissan has been a wonderful corporate citizen," she said.

AOL Broadband launched through Time Warner

BY JONI HUBRED
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Broadband Internet connections are nothing new, but America Online is launching a service locally that offers more than just high-speed access to the Web.

According to Lou Borrelli, AOL's Senior Vice President of Broadband, "Our content is by far and away the most complete collection."

He added the realm of Broadband content was in its early stages, but still stressed AOL's music and video content would be wide-ranging, thanks to relationships with sister companies like HBO and CNN, as well as Teen People magazine.

"It's more than just AOL being faster," Borrelli said. "It's all that you love about AOL with Broadband speed."

That speed also puts AOL in competition with Time Warner's Road Runner high-speed Internet service, even though both are part of the same company. Borrelli likened the competition, though, to selling different kinds of toothpaste under the same brand name.

"Road Runner is primarily a speed of connection service," he explained. "It's like GM. Not everyone is going to want to buy a Chevy."

Bob McCann, General Manager, Time Warner Cable, Detroit, said: "By offering the AOL High Speed Broadband service with Time Warner Cable systems, we are taking a major step to offer more convenience and value for consumers, especially existing AOL members. The ability to offer AOL to our customers — a first among Detroit's cable systems — is just the latest demonstration of Time Warner Cable's technological leadership."

The advantages of high-speed service include "instant on" capabilities, use of the home phone line while web-surfing, the ability to download large graphic, music or video clip files quickly, Borrelli said.

AOL's high-speed Broadband service has been launched through Time Warner Cable's Detroit Division, which serves Farmington, Farmington Hills, Novi, Redford and Livonia. This is the 32nd market in which AOL Broadband has been introduced. Borrelli said Time Warner's 39 divisions will all have been included by the end of the summer.

For more information about the AOL High Speed Broadband service, AOL members can visit Keywords: Cable or High Speed. Other consumers can call 1-800-874-1779.



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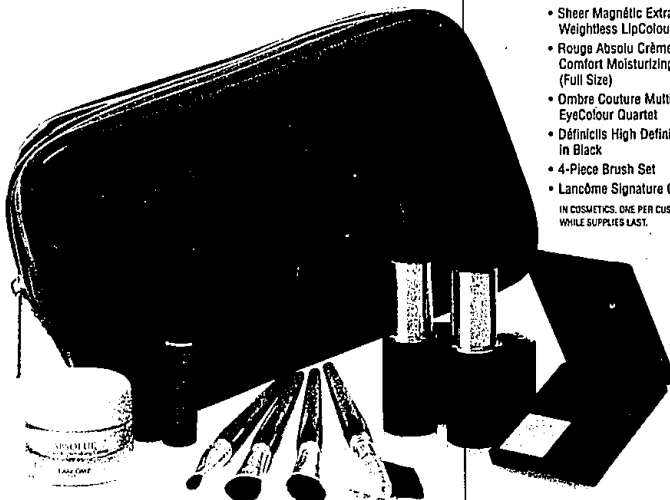
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