

Arts tax proposal has strong support and strong opposition

BY RUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County Commissioner Sue Ann Douglas (R-Rochester) calls the promise of more outreach programs with the approval of a half-mill arts tax "pure air."

"It is air, just pure air," she said. "Police, health department, these other functions are real."

Steve Hamp, president of Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, defended the tax proposal as essential to keep the area's cultural institutions from eroding.

"It's far more than air," he said. "It isn't air. Quality of life is not a fake or pious conceit. People live in communities and want to live in communities because they have attributes that make sense to their families."

Douglas and Hamp debated the merits of Proposal K before a group of *Observer & Eccentric* editors Friday.

Two years ago, a nearly identical proposal was narrowly defeated. What was then called Proposal A was approved by Wayne County voters but rejected in Oakland County by just 517 votes. The proposal has

to be approved by a majority in both counties to take effect.

THE PROPOSAL

In August, Wayne and Oakland County Commissions and Detroit City Council approved the incorporation of a nine-member regional cultural council and placed the millage proposal on the Nov. 7 ballot.

If approved, a half-mill property tax would be levied for 10 years in Wayne and Oakland counties. Two-thirds of the tax would be disbursed to 17 "major" not-for-profit cultural institutions.

The remaining third raised in each community will stay in that community to provide grants for arts and recreation programs.

The 17 institutions are: Wright Museum of African American History, College of Creative Studies, Cranbrook Art Museum, Cranbrook House & Garden, Cranbrook Institute of Science, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit Historical Museum, Detroit Science Center, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Zoo, Henry Ford Museum/Greenfield Village, Holocaust Memorial



Steve Hamp



Sue Ann Douglas

Center, Meadow Brook Hall, Meadow Brook Theatre, Music Hall, Michigan Opera Theatre and WTVS Public Television.

The 17 institutions will receive the same percentage of their budget but no institution would receive more than \$4 million.

The cap applies to the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Detroit Zoo and Henry Ford Museum/Greenfield Village.

The allocations will be made on the basis of averaging three years of expenses.

"This provides critical operating support for what we think has been a much improved, a much more community facing and service-oriented sector in southeast Michigan than it was 10 years ago," said Hamp. He said the cultural commu-

nity has been doing a better job of identifying its primary audiences, especially the elderly and school children, and developing outreach programs for them.

If voters approve the millage, Wayne and Oakland county school groups will receive reduced or eliminated fees, cooperative efforts with schools to match institute programs to school curricula, more outreach by performing arts groups and enhanced programs for seniors.

OUTSPOKEN OPPONENT

Douglas said she has been an outspoken opponent of the arts tax. She said she opposed the tax two years ago because she had no time to review its merits.

"This time I had time to review and this statute is a disaster," she said.

Douglas said she objects to the 10-year time limit, the manner in which the council was organized (with six of nine members from Wayne County) and the method of disbursement.

"Cranbrook in on there three times. The zoo is credited to us but it's not ours, there's not a

whole lot from Oakland County," she said.

She said that nowhere in the proposal is there a guarantee that the major institutions have to increase their outreach programs.

The biggest question, she said, is why Macomb County was left out. Hamp said Macomb wasn't included because it doesn't have a major arts institution.

He said Macomb, Washtenaw and other counties may decide to join at a later date.

Communities are looking to property taxes for support more and more," Douglas said.

"There are several communities in Oakland County that not in good shape and police and fire protection is fundamental to local government."

Douglas said the council will have all the authority of a government body and the only input from voters is on a tax that will run for 10 years.

But for Hamp the millage represents a last chance for cultural institutions to establish economic stability and to provide more programs for children.

"We'll see a diminution of some of the programs and serv-

ices created in the last 10 years that do impact the kids," Hamp said. "I think we'll see less outreach in our communities, particularly by the performing arts groups."

Douglas said she would prefer a local option sales tax to pay for arts programs because that would spread some of the cost to visitors to the counties and keep control of funds in the hands of county commissioners.

"It shouldn't just be a burden on the property owner. You have a half-mill here and a half-mill there, you're talking serious money," she said.

She said property tax demands are driving older residents from the county.

"Quality of life to me at my age and my husband, who's retired, is enjoying our home, enjoying our community and not just funding 17 organizations and having a safe community and ... not having to leave our surroundings."

Hamp countered that quality of life is based on many intangibles and that the major arts institutions contribute to that quality.

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CAMPAIGN CORNER

VALERIE'S VISION

Valerie Knol, Republican state house candidate for the 37th District in Farmington/Farmington Hills, held her next installment of Valerie's Vision press conference on Oct. 4 where she discussed her economic development plan.

"Concentrating on future economic development opportunities is important at all levels of government," said Knol. "Our communities need to work with the state to create jobs and manage growth. Together we can make a difference for residents and the small and large companies that are based in Farmington and Farmington Hills."

The Knol plan includes:
 ■ Protecting Proposal A's promise to maintain reasonable property taxes;
 ■ Reform the Detroit Water and Sewage Department to have more Oakland County

input:
 ■ Encourage performance warranties for roads;
 ■ Reducing the single business tax;
 ■ Raising the diesel tax to create parity between truckers and motorists who purchase gasoline and changing the collection method;

■ Continuing Michigan Economic Development Corporation tax incentives for businesses who relocate and/or expand in Michigan;
 ■ Redeveloping brownfield sites;

■ Investing in NextEnergy, the future of automotive technology and alternative energy research.

Knol pointed out she has been endorsed by several local and state business organizations, including: Michigan



Association.

DEMOCRATS ENDORSE

The Farmington Democratic Club recently announced their endorsement of Jim Brady in the 47th District Court election. The Club has endorsed Magistrate Brady because of his long involvement with and commitment to the community as a citizen, an attorney and a magistrate for 16 years. His broad experience in all areas of the law, his respect for

all citizens and his willingness to listen to the people who come before him has resulted in his being given the highest rating of "Outstanding" by the Oakland County Bar Association.

Chamber of Commerce, Detroit Regional Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Association of Michigan, National Federation of Independent Businesses, Michigan Restaurant Association and Western Wayne Oakland Realtors

VAGNOZZI ENDORSEMENTS

State Representative candidate Aldo Vagnozzi has won another major educational endorsement in his race to represent the Farmington/Farmington Hills 37th district. The latest endorsement comes from the faculty union at Oakland County Community College, representing the OCC faculty.

Earlier, Vagnozzi had been endorsed by the Michigan School Administrative Association, the Michigan Educational Association and the Michigan Federation of Teachers and School Related Personnel.

Surprise your sweetie with roses and a movie

Surprise someone special in your life on Sweetest Day, Saturday, Oct. 19 with a dozen boxed roses from Thrifty Flowers, and two movie tickets, compliments of Star Theatre. Simply tell us how this person has enriched your life with a thoughtful word or deed.

Send entries to Keely Kaleski, *Observer & Eccentric* Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009, fax (248) 644-1214, or e-mail kkaleski@oe.homecomm.net by Monday, Oct. 14.

Be sure to include a daytime phone number. Two prizes will be awarded, and the winner will be notified by phone. Sweetest Day was first celebrated more than 60 years

ago in Cleveland. A man who believed that the city's orphans and shut-ins were too often neglected and forgotten conceived the idea of showing them that they were remembered by distributing small gifts.

Over the years the idea of spreading cheer to the underprivileged was expanded to include everyone, and became a day for remembering others with a kind act or small gift.

Sweetest Day, according to material provided by the Retail Confectioners International, is an opportunity to remember not only the sick, aged, and orphaned, but also friends, relatives and associates whose helpfulness and kindness we have enjoyed.



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