

Wayne County's 1-mill crime tax proposal faces fight on local front

An Observer Roundup

A one mill tax for beefed-up police services proposed at the Wayne County level is proving unpopular with Observerland cities and townships.

Most local governments here would receive less money from the tax split proposed by County Board Chairman Robert FitzPatrick than if they were to levy an equivalent amount of millage themselves.

The county board's general government committee will hold a public hearing on the suggestion Thursday at 7:30 p.m. in the Westland City Hall, 3601 Ford Road.

As FitzPatrick (D-Detroit) suggested it, the county would ask voters to levy a one mill property tax (\$1 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation. The county would keep 20 per cent and return 80 per cent to the 43 cities and townships on a formula basis.

Half the local share would be distributed on the basis of each unit's 1970 population — a boon to those units with stable or declining populations. The other half would be distributed on the basis of each unit's total valuation.

Garden City and Westland would appear to gain by the formula; Redford Township, Livonia, the two Plymouths and Canton Township to lose. While FitzPatrick argues that residents would bear less than half the burden of the proposed one mill tax because industry would be required to pick up a large portion, that argument applies more to the heavily industrialized communities than to the more residential Observerland cities and townships.

If the public safety tax plan is successful, this is what the formula allocation of money will mean to local communities:

• In Garden City, \$100,000 could be returned to the city. This is actually \$32,000 more than the city would get if it levied the millage itself. Garden City officials, who are in the middle of police union negotiations, are optimistic about the benefits.

• In Livonia, however, the picture is not nearly as bright. That city stands to receive almost \$120,000 less from a county imposed millage than if it were to collect the equivalent tax on its own. Mayor Edward H. McManara refused to take a position in opposition to the county proposal, but said that he's "not really convinced that it's good for our community." Livonia "absolutely" needs the money, he said, but admitted that "the so-called 'have' districts ... would, in a sense, be penalized."

In Redford Township, officials rejected negatively. That community would receive about \$25,000 less under the county plan than if it were to levy the mill on its own. Supervisor Bill Robbins said the plan ends up subsidizing the City of Detroit, which, he admits, does need the funding, but also benefits communities (such as Dearborn) which don't. Under the plan, Detroit would gain about \$711,000 and Dearborn would gain nearly \$202,000 over a self-taxation plan.

• Westland is the only other Observerland community which would come out on top if the county plan is approved, but even Westland officials are reticent about the proposal.

Westland stands to come out ahead by about \$36,500 if the county plan is adopted over a self-imposed 0.8 of a mill. But Mayor Eugene McKinney says he has mixed feelings about the proposal. "The county plan is basically a county revenue sharing plan," McKinney said, "but I question a formula which gives Dearborn \$600,000 and Westland \$300,000." The two cities are about the same size.

In addition, McKinney is also hesitant because his city is already planning a local police millage proposal this summer.

• Plymouth Mayor Beverly McAninch believes the commission is "going to have a

hard time selling" the one mill proposal, and in that city, which will receive nearly \$7,500 less under the county plan than it would by levying the millage locally, she may be right.

• In Plymouth Township, the county plan would result in nearly 30 per cent less money being returned than if the township levied on its own. The community would receive \$100,000 from the county, but could raise \$125,500 locally at the same cost to residents. Clerk Helen Richardson feels that while the proposal may "bail out the county" she does not see what it will do for the township.

• Also on the short end would be Canton Township, which could raise \$91,500 if left to its own devices, but would get only \$67,800 under the county plan — a loss of \$23,700.

Spokesmen for most communities were willing to advise that more money for police services was necessary both in their own communities and at the county level, but most are concerned that the formula proposal isn't the way to proceed.

Westland's mayor hopes to see some change in the formula for the distribution of the millage and in the duration of the millage (a 10-year period is now part of the proposal) before he could support the package. Livonia's mayor, too, remains unconvinced.

The Redford Township supervisor and the Plymouth Township clerk believe that the proposal to bring the matter to the voters in a special election is unwise and would be costly.



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