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Forest on Old Timber
Farmington Hills is a suburb. As such, its residents value the grass and trees available to persons living outside a metropolitan city. Rolling Oaks subdivision shares a border with West Bloomfield Township, and both retain many of the original trees. Looking west on Old Timber Road and staring at the sky and trees, the scene seems just a little farther away, and keeps Farmington Hills residents a little closer to the city's rural history. (Photo by Craig Newman)

Board of review hears requests for tax relief

FARMINGTON HILLS — Every year about this time, a three-man commission must do its business. The board of review, which meets for three days each year, hears taxpayers' pleas for property assessment reductions and, at times, grants those requests.

This year's board of review will be in session March 17-19.

Andrew Sroka, Robert Dingman and Harold Larson serve three-year staggered terms on the board. They are appointed by the mayor with the council's approval.

LAST YEAR'S board heard 200 reduction requests and received 20 written requests from property owners who live outside the city, said Robert Romer, city assessor. Of those requests, 145 received reductions meaning a loss of \$316,200 to the city.

The reasons for reduction requests vary, Romer said. Some are hardship cases, while others have reduction requests on changes in their neighborhoods.

This is the one time that property owners can object to their taxes and seek a change in assessment, Romer said.

The changes are not retroactive, he said. The tax is based on the assessed value of the property as of Dec. 31.

LETTERS HAVE been going out in the past several weeks to property owners whose assessments have changed.

A factor of 1.11 per cent was applied to property in the city this year, Romer said. If a resident believes the assessment is more than 50 per cent of the value as a result of the factor, he can object.

From the city administration's standpoint, there is little that can be done to provide taxpayer relief to property owners.

There is little we can do relative to professional staff when people complain that taxes are too high," said Rick Reingold, city finance director.

The last total reassessment, a two-year ordeal, was undertaken in 1959 when Farmington Township reassessed its property.

Romer's office is continually updating its assessments, however. Building permits provide one source of information for his department.

ROMER SAID the three-man panel is well-qualified.

Sroka is an appraiser for a financial institution. Dingman is an engineer and Larson is an attorney.

The board's sessions are scheduled 9 a.m. to noon and 1-5 p.m. on March 17, 18 and 19.

Property owners are asked to call the assessor's office for an appointment.

THEY CAN come to the board armed with as much information as they want to help prove their case for a reduction. Some will bring attorneys, Romer said.

The board tries to hear five cases an hour, he said. The board will meet for additional days if required.

"Everybody will be heard," he said.

If the property owner is not satisfied with the decision of the board of review, he has 30 days to appeal to the Michigan Tax Tribunal. This appeal must be made in writing.

If the taxpayer makes no attempt to object when the board of review meets, then he is shut off from further appeal, Reingold said.

If there is a gripe, set up an appointment and come in on talk show," he said. "If you don't, you lose your opportunity until next year."



ROBERT ROMER RICK REINGOLD

Board studies budget options

By SUSAN AVERILL

FARMINGTON—Of the three alternate budgets presented to the board of education Tuesday night, two were based on additional income from millage and one was an austerity budget, to be used in the event of millage failure.

Business manager William C. Prisk presented an alternative "A" budget, based on the 1.6% mill increase necessary to carry present programs into the 1975-76 school year.

The "A" budget would avoid all reductions listed on the austerity budget and would allow for cost increases. The "B" budget would bring the function of the school system back to its 1973-74 school year level and would require the levy of 3.79 mills.

Millage amounts required to maintain the "B" budget include the 1.6% needed to support the "A" plan.

The austerity budget was a modification of the first budget introduced to the board in January. Banking on additional income from state aid, it included several items formerly struck out from the plan.

STATE AID of \$220,000 is expected although Prisk warned that a cut of \$200,000 may be expected from the same source. The possible cuts were not figured into the budgets.

If the austerity budget is put into effect, Farmington high school students will graduate from their auditoriums and gymnasiums on alternate nights rather than Ford Auditorium.

A vocal music consultant and an art consultant would be (claimed at the elementary level) as would seven reading consultants.

Office staff in the elementary building would be reduced, and less money would be spent to replace worn, ripped textbooks. In the past, expenditure allowances per student were weighted in favor of elementary students. They were divided more equitably between the secondary and elementary levels within the austerity budget.

Secondary schools would retain three assistant principals, three teachers and four reading specialists. The B-1 schedule (extracurricular activities) would be reduced, but not eliminated.

TESTING PROGRAMS, transportation expenditures and the number of office employees also would be cut. Additional items included increased employee fringe benefits, but did not include the restoration of the class day, which would be cut to five hours.

The austerity budget would close an elementary and a junior high school.

The "A" budget would restore the elementary and junior high to the system, including two principals, two administrative assistants, an art and music consultant. If elementary teachers add four reading specialists for elementary students.

Also included would be two librarians, 17 noon aides, 10 office employees and 23 secondary teachers. The restoration of the 23 teaching positions would allow the high schools to renege six-hour days.

In elementary schools, the supply allowance per student would increase to \$1, an \$11.89 would be used to increase the metrics program already approved by the board.

SUPPLY ALLOWANCES for junior high students would be increased 35 cents and senior high students would be allotted \$1.13 per student for supplies.

Replacement texts could be purchased, two eighth year old vans could be replaced and a transportation supervisor maintained.

Graduation would be moved back to Ford Auditorium.

This year's projected deficit and possible loss of some state aid money are included in the "A" budget.

The "B" budget would give elementary children three additional art consultants, three more music consultants and a physical education instructor. The schools could afford more replacement texts in addition to several pilot programs and a new science and language program already approved by the board. More money would be available for travel expenses.

At the secondary level, another counselor would be added for junior high. The full B-1 schedule would be reinstated, more replacement texts purchased and a pilot program instituted.

Money would be allotted for field trips for elementary and secondary students.

The board will seek action on millage requests Tuesday.

State aid of \$220,000 is expected although Prisk warned that a cut of \$260,000 can be expected from the same source.

Languages survive cuts

When school administrators gather to pare peripheral courses from the high school curriculum, they will chop just about everything besides English, math, science, social studies and foreign languages.

Although such offshoot courses as drama, film, novel, public speaking, radio and film may be included in the cuts, foreign languages will stay alongside the basics, said school superintendent Marinus VanAmeijde.

The board of education is considering slicing the high school day to five hours and making sizeable cutbacks in class offerings should a millage election fail.

Emphasis on a well-rounded education has been worked in favor of languages, though they are no longer requirements for most college degrees.

"WE ARE looking at incoming 10th graders and asking ourselves what kind of experiences they will have. It's their 10th grade experiences that will affect their 11th and 12th grade performances," VanAmeijde said.

"Even if worse comes to worst, we want them to be able to graduate and have choices, whether it's in work or whether they're college-bound."

But that doesn't mean languages will be totally unaffected.

Since fewer colleges require languages, enrollment has decreased, and some of the third- and fourth-year-level classes have been combined in some high schools.

In such cases, classroom studies may essentially be the same, with a middle-of-the-road level halfway between the two classes. But the language lab sessions should help to individualize the two classes, VanAmeijde said.

Language teachers may be affected, too.

BECAUSE OF staff realignment, a former language teacher may be asked to teach her minor, depending on her qualifications, he said. Many foreign language teachers have teaching majors in English, social studies and related fields.

"If we need a teacher in one field where another has been squeezed out, we may look for her in the language department. If she has the necessary qualifications, she may be asked to teach the other subject," VanAmeijde said.

He foresees a swell in the number of independent study courses for those who want to go beyond the fourth, and in some cases, even the third years of their language.

Gloria Cunningham, head of the foreign language department at North Farmington High School, agreed and thought the five-hour day might hurt the advanced classes.

"Most of those students taking foreign languages today are the better students. They're there out of interest, not because they had to be," she said.

If the school board does cut an hour from the school day, these students will be forced to stick to the bare basics, just to make their entrance requirements for college. This may hurt the programs, she said.

WHEN SHE FIRST came to the district five years ago, Mrs. Cunningham worked with two other full-time Spanish teachers, one French teacher and a German instructor. German and Spanish classes have held their own, while French, she said, seems to have diminished.

Marjorie Cramer, Spanish teacher at Farmington High School, agreed. Spanish is the most popular there. Latin and French are also taught at the high school.

As languages go in the Farmington district, Spanish is the most popular, with French and German nearly equal.

Harrison High School's German teacher, Maria Schuster, said universities are encouraging students to learn other languages.

"I THINK languages are working their way up. People are finding out they need them for jobs like stewardesses, publishers, researching, government officers, buyers and secretaries," she said.

More people are traveling, too, and should have a knowledge of the language of the country they're visiting.

"Americans come across as just the most impatient people. I think we owe it to other people to learn their languages," she said.

An added benefit of learning foreign languages is that Americans learn to use English better. It's a matter of developing a grasp of grammar and word usage, she said.

She agreed with the other teachers that growing independent study figures will become a thing of the future for students who want to progress past third-year language proficiency.

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