

# Farmington Observer

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## Hills \$10 million budget calls for tax hike

Farmington Hills residents are going to be hit with a tax increase. But they don't know how much the taxes will go up. Farmington Hills Council has to decide whether to go for a one mill or 3/4-mill increase, and that decision will be made within the next two weeks.

Residents will have a crack at the budget during a public hearing on May 30 at 7:30 p.m. in city hall, Orchard Lake and Eleven Miles.

The current budget stands at 7 1/4 mills and is estimated to be \$8.5 million in expenditures by the end of the fiscal year in June. Contrasted to that is the proposed 1978-79 budget which administration has recommended stand at \$10 million.

For weeks city council members have met in budget study sessions hammering away at department head recommendations in an attempt to chisel down the budget.

Councilmembers hope to chop off another 1/4-mill, making it an eight mill budget in time for budget approval on June 5.

Total property taxes collected would be \$4,150,000.

Other revenue sources would be \$5,500 from business licenses and permits; \$468,000 from non-business permits; \$1,736,000 from federal grants; \$1,670,000 from state shared revenue; \$27,500 from collection of fees; and \$68,400 from sales of such items as maps and publications, police auction, vital statistics and fixed assets sale.

Other revenue sources would include \$179,000 from fines and bond forfeitures; \$820,000 from investment income, road fund contributions and revenue sharing contributions; \$12,000 from rebates and refunds and \$337,000 from recreation revenue.

For the current year budget (collecting 7 1/4 mills), the city has collected \$3,260,000 in property taxes. Under the 8 1/4 millage, the city would collect \$4,120,000.

The administration recommended budget has attempted to counter some major increases with decreases in other areas.

The police department, with a 1977-78 budget of \$2,429,510, is recommended to be \$2,651,235 for next fiscal year, a \$221,725 increase. Salary and wage expense account for the majority of the increase, according to city officials.

The city's fire fighting unit also would receive an increase. The present budget outlines that \$619,860 be spent for 1977-78. The new budget recommendation calls for \$786,940 to be spent, a \$166,880 increase.

Payroll in this department is up \$150,000, of which \$75,000 represents costs of adding four new full-time firefighters. The increase also reflects an increased number of service calls and training, according to the official recommended budget report.

Presently, the city's fire fighting unit is being overhauled under the leadership of its first fulltime fire chief.

The department primarily is a paid volunteer unit.

THE ENGINEERING Department is asking for a \$122,170 increase, from \$10,840 to \$33,010. The increase is due to the proposed addition of three staff members and overtime expenses of \$20,000.

Boards and commissions would receive a \$109,555 increase, from \$794,185 to \$903,740. Corporation council, the city's legal eyes, would

receive an \$18,800 raise, from \$94,550 to \$113,350.

Countering these increases would be a \$510,025 recommended decrease in road maintenance, from \$1,612,530 in 1977-78 to \$1,102,435 for next year.

This decrease is because the storm sewer construction is now budgeted under the community improvement section and capital outlays include \$85,000 transfer to major roads for construction improvements.

Building and code enforcement will be reduced by \$55,020, even though an

added supervisor has been recommended. That cost is offset by transfer of \$93,000 for loans and grants to the community improvement budget.

The community improvement budget will total \$97,750 for the coming year, if approved. This is a new budget category to control all reimbursable expenditures.

THE PARKS and recreation division has asked for an increase of \$196,005, from \$359,030 last year to \$555,035 this year.

Among reason for the suggested increase is for operation of the newly acquired San Marino Golf Course which would cost city taxpayers \$86,000. The senior adult program would increase \$31,000. Another \$32,000 has been added for miscellaneous expenses.

The city clerk's office will see a \$66,940 reduction, from \$260,530 to \$193,590. This is due primarily because last year the city purchased new voting machines.

## Middle schools promise change

By LYNN ORR

Economics and burgeoning school enrollments prompted the introduction of mini high schools—junior high—into school structures more than two decades ago.

Currently, economics and shrinking enrollments are two of the catalysts behind middle schools, education's latest restructuring alternative.

Farmington schools will spend two years preparing to usher in middle schools for sixth, seventh and eighth grade students, while ninth graders will be moved into the senior highs.

The economic motivation lies in maximizing enrollments at the larger and more expensive schools, while retaining variation in the curriculum for the older students.

Thus when it's time to ax another school to maintain utilization of buildings, it's the smaller elementary school that bites the dust.

Last week, the Farmington school board directed administrators and staff to begin preparations for the wide-sweeping changes to be executed in the fall of 1980. Lynn Nutter, assistant superintendent of secondary education, was appointed to oversee the task.

The blueprint plan is the extensive final report of the Task Force on School Organizational Structure (SOS), which wound up more than a year of study by recommending the adoption of middle school structure and philosophy.

THAT BLUEPRINT involves more than pushing sixth graders into junior highs and ninth graders into high school. The 100-page report calls for two years of planning, including extensive training for staff members, student and parent orientation, staff resignations, changes in feeder patterns of elementary and middle school students, and building remodeling.

Imperative on the task force's list of recommendations is a plan for a middle school philosophy to accompany an estimated \$128,000 in expenditures. The final price tag will be determined by separate board motions.

While the board hasn't adopted the task force report as gospel, it's a good bet that many of its recommendations will be accepted and initiated in the years ahead. And those recommendations will filter throughout the district, quite possibly encompassing a major alteration for students as well as staff.

Fifth and eighth graders will be at the top of the heap in elementary and middle schools, while ninth graders will be able to take advantage of a wider range of classes. Senior high students in general may benefit from completing an orientation year as ninth graders, with three full years ahead to settle into the high school experience.

HOWEVER, the middle school philosophy itself may alleviate the strains of adolescent years. Using student, teacher and parent assessment sur-

## Analysis

veys, visits to other districts with middle schools, administrative interviews and two sessions of public hearings, the task force prepared an extensive evaluation of curriculum needs.

Normally a middle school rejects the junior high concept of mini high schools where students go from class to class with different teachers and subject-orientated teaching. The middle school philosophy emphasizes transition from the security of one teacher in elementary school to the variety of subjects and teachers in high school.

The SOS Task Force recognized the need for blocks of time for sequential learning, such as literature, composition and humanities, rather than a first hour of science, a second hour of English and a third hour of math.

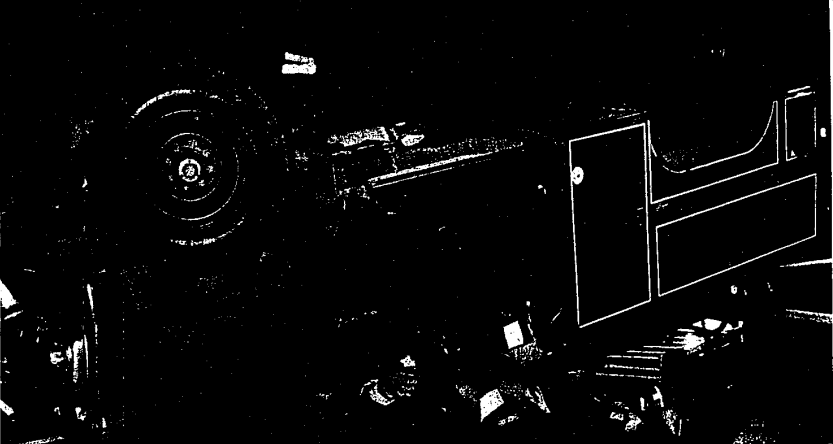
The team teaching, involving two or more teachers, also is emphasized, recognizing the younger students' need to work more closely with instructors.

The SOS Task Force incorporated these recommendations, along with an emphasis on career awareness and reading and writing skills curriculum.

The task force also recommends that evaluation practices be reviewed to determine if they are impeding student growth, to make sure the students are progressing before entering the more competitive and less secure atmosphere of high school.

ECONOMICALLY, the adoption of middle schools will provide better utilization of school buildings. Projected enrollments indicate that without some change in school structure, at least one high school in Farmington could be closed by 1981. While many parents of elementary children are reluctant to see Farmington move away from the neighborhood school concept, it's obvious that a shrinking student population, which means fewer bucks from Lansing, requires changes. The task force recommendations will mean the closing of more elementary schools in Farmington, but hopefully, the curriculum at the high school level can be preserved. It's hard to substantiate teaching a highly technical class to five high school students. But by increasing the high school population, the district will preserve those classes along with a wider variety of experiences for teenagers.

At the same time, the middle school philosophy may alleviate the discipline, drop-out and teaching problems for 11, 12 and 13-year-olds. Adolescence is a crucial time in the maturation process, and junior highs have been called the step-child of the school system. Certainly the problems at the junior high level are severe. A change in philosophy may be the breath of fresh air needed in a state environment that now fails to respond to student needs.



## A bad day at work

A Farmington Hills firefighter checks out a rescue unit which flipped over Saturday while on an emergency call at Orchard Lake Road and College, south of Twelve Mile. Taken to Botsford Hospital, examined and released were David Ewart, 29, the vehicle's driver and Paul Slater, 31, both Farmington Hills firefighters. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

## Couple offers hope to retarded boys

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

A man and woman who refuse to acknowledge the limitations of clinical labels are helping four young retarded men achieve some degree of independence.

When Martha and Wade Dickerson of Farmington decided four years ago to begin a second family, they opened their home to retarded boys from the Macomb-Oakland Regional Training Center of Lapeer.

The choice was a logical one for the Dickersons, who have been married 35 years. Mrs. Dickerson works with the retarded and their families as a social worker affiliated with the University of Michigan. She has counseled families of the retarded residents of Opportunity House in Plymouth.

"We really do love kids," said Mrs. Dickerson. "Our own children had grown and we have one grandchild. We thought about the severely retarded from the point we knew we wanted to become foster parents."

That point was reached when her husband Wade, a self-employed businessman, decided to opt for an early retirement. It was Dickerson who managed the daily routine in the family and taught the boys new skills.

HE WAS instrumental in selecting which boys would become part of their family. Once they became part of the Dickerson home, he stubbornly refused to accept all the limitations they were said to have.

"My husband doesn't give a damn about labels," said Mrs. Dickerson. "These boys can do the things they do today because a middle-aged man would not support the limits of a label," she said with fierce pride.

"I know two of those boys would not have made it if it wasn't for this man," she said.

When the first of their four boys, ranging in age from 15 to 19, arrived, the Dickersons had some second thoughts about their plan.

One of the original two boys was afraid to go out of the house. He was afraid of the animals in the Detroit Zoo. The 11-year-old also was fearful in front of new people.

Today, he shakes hands on the first meeting and rides his bike down a short street behind the Dickerson house.

"Wade chose him because he seemed to have lots of fight. He

needed someone to care about him," she said.

ONE OF the reasons the boy managed to overcome his apprehension about new experiences was his great need to be like other youngsters, according to Mrs. Dickerson.

"He wants to be accepted. But he's anxious and it's difficult to live with him," she said.

Another boy arrived at the Dickersons with the habit of screaming to obtain attention. He called everyone by the same name although he knew the difference between people, according to Mrs. Dickerson.

The first two objectives with the boy were to teach him everyone's name and to speak quietly.

All four boys were faced with a transition from institutional life to family living. They made the change from keeping their belongings in a small nook to scattering their possessions around a house.

In an institution where the first boy at the closet is the best dressed, there was little chance to acquire a sense of property.

At the Dickersons', they began to accumulate their own clothing and possessions. The first day they were in Farmington, Dickerson bought lunch boxes for them. For the next six months, the lunch boxes were carefully tucked in with them at night. The boys were afraid the boxes would be taken from them.

"NOW, things are strewn all over the place, the way it's supposed to be," said Mrs. Dickerson.

The four also have discovered ways to compensate for things they are unable to do. One boy is unable to comprehend numbers beyond two. When asked to fetch something for the family, he will give each object the name of a family member and come up with the correct number.

Another boy is unable to read. Instead, he uses his memory to match objects. Mrs. Dickerson will show him a car she wants and he will pick out the correct item by matching the pictures on the package.

Lacking a grasp of numbers, one boy relates the days of the week to activities he will participate in during the day.

The oldest boy, 19, is learning simple language now. Using an audio-visual machine, he is learning to recognize 50

## THEIR RECREATIONAL activities

are geared to games they will look natural playing when they are 35 or 40 years old. Basketball, biking, swimming and pool are among the games they play.

Pool has been helpful in teaching the boys coordination and numbers.

"A lot of lessons have been taught at that pool table," Mrs. Dickerson said. "They think it's so grown up and so macho. They think it's so cool to play pool," she smiled.

When they play against Dickerson, he has to hold his own against them.

"Now they play to kill. There's no messing around. And they're delighted when they skunk him," she said.

After four years, the Dickersons are a family. Once they leave the rambling structure that housed three generations of Dickersons in Farmington, the boys probably will enter into semi-independent apartment living or a sheltered workshop.

"There aren't a hell of a lot of options," admitted Mrs. Dickerson.

After Dickerson began to manage the house and the boys, Mrs. Dickerson noticed that many of the techniques he was using at home were seeping into her own work.

SHE began to use her husband's (Continued on Page 10A)

of the most essential words, such as "stop" and "help." The voices on the machine are those of Mr. and Mrs. Dickerson.

Although he is just learning to print his name, the oldest boy enjoys hooking rugs to be used as wall hangings.



MARTHA DICKERSON

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