

Commercial, industrial property values rise

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Though Babb offered percentage examples of assessment increases, he refused to name the businesses that received the biggest increases. After the Farmington Hills Board of Review meets in March, a listing of the city's top 15 commercial and industrial taxpayers will be publicly released, Babb said.

Approximately 1,350 commercial and industrial property owners received notification of assessment changes last week. The notifications are simply to let property owners know what their proposed assessments will be for 1987, Babb said.

THE NOTIFICATIONS also inform property owners that they have an opportunity to review the proposed assessments before an assessors board of review. Property owners will meet with county assessors rather than Babb and the city's three-member board of review.

"This is for the benefit of the taxpayer. This is not the board of review that meets in March," Babb said. "This does not circumvent their right to appeal at the March board of review."

The assessors board of review will give property owners an opportunity to see how county assessors derived the increased assessments. Property owners can bring in any data they have if they believe the new assessed values put their property above the 50 percent market value, Babb said.

Any necessary corrections will be made prior to the official assessment notifications that go out to all property owners — residential and non-residential — in February, Babb said.

The assessors board of review met Tuesday and Wednesday and plans to meet again 9 a.m. to noon and 1-4 p.m. Monday, Dec. 22, in Farmington Hills city council chambers.

ASSESSMENTS WILL also meet property owners in the first part of January. Appointments must be made by 4 p.m. Monday, Dec. 22, by calling Babb's office at 473-9584.

"Because it's a review process, we will try to accommodate as many property owners as we can," Babb said.

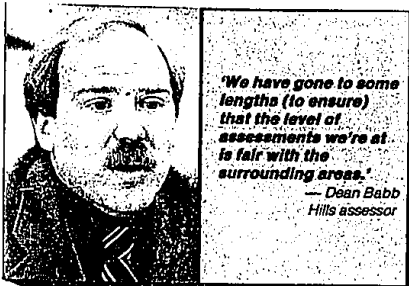
In October 1984, Oakland County put Farmington Hills on notice that commercial and industrial property assessments were far below the 50 percent market value at which the state requires all property to be assessed.

Farmington Hills officials had a choice. "If we hadn't done something they (the county) would have — a factor flatly applied," Babb said.

A county-applied factor would have been the easiest avenue for bringing assessments up to the 50 percent market level. But that would have meant that some properties would have been assessed at more than 50 percent market value, Babb said.

Rather than paying a higher price by contracting with a private firm, the city council contracted with Oakland County to conduct the reappraisal. The size of the project, which took two years to complete with the help of 15 county assessors, was too big of a project for the city assessing staff, Babb said.

Without a doubt, commercial and industrial assessments have been far below market value. Because of the incredible amount of growth in Farmington Hills — particularly since 1983 when the economy made an about-face — assessments weren't keeping pace with the amount of growth, Babb said.



"We have gone to some lengths (to ensure) that the level of assessments we're at is fair with the surrounding area."
— Dean Babb
Hills assessor

"THERE HAS been so much growth that it was all they (assessing staff) could do to put the new ones (commercial and industrial development) on the roll," he said. "It finally caught up with us."

Before 1983, there weren't enough commercial and industrial sales from which to develop trends that would prompt increased assessments, Babb said.

County equalization staff used several factors — income, market sales and costs — to determine assessments. "All recorded sales were used," Babb said.

Though Babb expects some property owners will be infuriated with the new assessments, the reappraisal was "the fairest way of distributing these increases to the property owners."

When the reappraisal was first planned, some city officials admitted they were afraid business owners would consider leaving town when they received their assessment notices.

"We have gone to some lengths (to ensure) that the level of assessments we're at is fair with the surrounding areas," Babb said.

If Farmington Hills businesses moved to other communities in the hope of obtaining lower property assessments "they would get the same burden," Babb continued.

The good news is that while assessments are increasing, it's a sign of how "fantastic" the market is, he said.

If by chance the economy makes a turn-around for the worse assessments will drop accordingly. "I think we have put enough thought into this, analyzed the market on a traditional buyer-seller-type basis, so we have a safety margin in there if things turn around," Babb said.

Even though increased assessments generally mean more money for city coffers, a dollar for dollar return is not expected. Factors, such as the Headlee constitutional tax limitation amendment, play a role in how much the city can tax.

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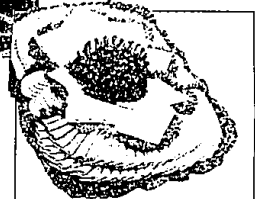
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