

School district won't file suit against DDA

By Darrell Clem
staff writer

Walled Lake school officials have pledged not to file another lawsuit challenging Commerce Township's Downtown Development Authority.

The decision came two weeks ago, despite projections that schools will lose \$1.4 million to the DDA in 1990-91 and millions more in coming years.

An agreement averting a lawsuit was signed by the school board, the township board and the DDA board, school district spokeswoman Lois Lange said last Monday.

The agreement came five years

Walled Lake School District

after Commerce Township formed the DDA and began diverting would-be tax revenues from the school district to the DDA. The district includes northwest Farmington Hills.

The funds are being used to expand water and sewer services in the DDA area, which township officials have decided to expand in a move that sparked concerns about a revived lawsuit by school officials.

School officials lost an earlier

court battle against the DDA, a factor that apparently prompted them to seek the new agreement that brought some concessions from Commerce Township.

FOR EXAMPLE, Commerce officials have agreed not to divert funds from new school millages that may be sought and approved in coming years, Lange said.

Moreover, the township has vowed

to continue its practice of returning 25 percent of the diverted taxes to the school district on an annual basis. That resulted in the district receiving about \$275,000 last school year.

Also under the new agreement, the amount returned to the school district would increase by roughly \$175,000 a year, beginning in 1993, according to Commerce Township Supervisor Robert Long.

Though school officials agreed not to sue the township, they issued a prepared statement indicating that they still remain concerned about the DDA's impact on school funding.

The DDA "places a hardship upon

the school district by diverting millions of dollars from the schools to municipal projects," the statement said.

"As state law provides no recourse for a school district should a municipality decide to expand an existing DDA, the district is pleased to have been able to negotiate (an) agreement which limits to some extent the long-term financial effects of the DDA."

But the statement closed by noting that the loss of tax revenues "remains a concern to school officials as enrollment continues to grow and the district must add the cost of op-

erating additional classrooms and buildings to its budget."

Commerce officials appeared pleased with the agreement, though Long said "there was no question that the township had the right" to form and expand the DDA.

The latest bond issue of \$4.5 million will be paid off over a 15-year period, during which funds will be diverted from schools to pay for the DDA project.

The DDA area is roughly bounded by 14 Mile to the south, Haggerty Road to the east, Richardson Road to the north and a jagged boundary to the west.

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