

Hills assessment hikes to be less than in past years

By Joanne Mollszewski
staff writer

Homeowners take heart. Property tax assessments in Farmington Hills are increasing in 1991, but not as much as in the last few years.

"The market is very flat," said Farmington Hills assessor Dean Babb. "In 1990 some subdivisions had larger rises, but."

Residential property tax assessments in 1991 are expected to increase an average 4 percent, compared to the average 9 percent in 1990 and 10 percent in 1989.

Mayor Aldo Vagozzi said he's hoping assessments will increase even less in 1992. "They (1991 assessments) reflect the economy. Hopefully, based on what homes are selling for, next year — if there's an increase — it will be even lower," he said.

Commercial property assessments are expected to increase an average 2 percent and industrial an average 3 percent. In 1990, both types of property increased an average 3 percent.

"I always caution people when we talk about averages. Some will be on the high side," Babb said.

Assessment notices will be mailed to property owners March 1. The assessor's three-member board of re-

view is scheduled to hear appeals March 11-13.

APPEALS must be made by March 13. Call the assessor's office, 473-9584. Hearing days may be extended based on the number of appeals.

Babb encourages appeals by telling property owners who plan to appeal assessments based on hardship are asked to call the assessor's office for a hardship form.

For assessment purposes, Babb uses a 24-month study of sales, which includes the last nine months of 1988, all of 1989 and the first three months of 1990. Babb said he's also paid attention to the current housing sales market.

"The market started flattening in 1989. We are seeing a market flat with the prices and quantity of sales. Houses are on the market longer. High-priced houses (\$200,000 and more) are flat," Babb said.

While assessments in 15 to 16 neighborhoods most likely will not change, some neighborhoods will see assessment increases of 10-13 percent. "There are still some of those out there."

Babb also expects "significant moves" of assessments on vacant residential property. "The values are low. They can look for some major increases."

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— Dean Babb

Farmington Hills assessor

The goal, he said, is to complete a land study next year of vacant land. "It's an absolutely major undertaking. It's not something we can do piecemeal."

The assessment process determines the true cash value of property for the purpose of calculating property taxes City, school and

county tax rates are levied against the assessed value of property. An assessment is generally 50 percent of the "usual selling price" of a house.

Vagozzi continues to hope that state legislators will act on property tax relief. He continues to be particularly concerned about the \$1,200 state property tax relief rebate. For

several years he has expected the state to increase that maximum rebate, which would further help senior adults and others on fixed incomes.

"The climate is not favorable in Lansing," Vagozzi said.

COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL property tax assessments have not increased in the last couple of years at the same rate as residential because a reappraisal in 1987 "brought them to the peak of the market and the market hasn't changed since then," Babb said. That reappraisal boosted commercial and industrial assessments an average 35 percent.

Unlike the last couple of years when apartment complex assessments were not increased because of heavy vacancies, 1991 will witness some change. The assessor's office conducted a rent survey and found that vacancies are not as bad as in the recent past.

Officers, however, are in a bad way because of heavy vacancies as can be seen by the high number of "for lease" signs decorating many offices in the city.

"There is a high profile of properties that are in serious problems," Babb said. "Right now, I don't see any movement in office properties."

Residential property assessments aren't affected by income. But income is used to determine commercial and industrial property tax assessments. Income for an office building will be affected by heavy vacancies.

City assessments up by less than last year

Property tax assessments in the city of Farmington will increase this year, but not to the degree they did in 1990.

Although figures for individual properties had yet to be finalized, state equalization numbers are in and show an increase, said assessor John Sauer. Residential property,

assessments will increase an average of 7 percent, commercial properties 3 percent and industrial properties 1 percent.

But that is down from the previous year, when average residential assessments increased 10 percent, commercial 6 percent and industrial 5 percent.

"With the market slowing down,

I am sure people are wondering why we're raising anything at all," Sauer said. "But we're always a step behind the market."

Single-family houses in the city will probably see an assessment increase of slightly more than 7 percent, while condominium owners will see no change. "The market on condos has really flattened out,"

Sauer said. At least one sold for under its assessed value, he added.

During the past year, several condominium projects in the city and the entire Bel Aire subdivision were re-appraised.

Assessment notices will be in the mail to Farmington property owners by the end of February, or before.

Blaze guts school bus

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until the fire was extinguished.

Farmington Hills Deputy Fire Chief Peter Baldwin called the fire a "significant" one, involving the entire front half of the bus. Two fire trucks and 10 firefighters from sta-

tion two responded to the scene about 7:12 a.m. and extinguished the fire within three minutes.

"In my experience, I've never seen a bus fire, except an electrical short. I think this is unusual," Baldwin said. "The fortunate part is no kids were on the bus."

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