

More paring of city budget is possible

By Casey Hana
staff writer

Farmington's proposed budget, already pared down to the state of the economy and declining population, will have to be trimmed even further if the state takes action to freeze property assessments.

In offering his proposed 1991-92 budget to the city council Monday, which included \$4.67 million for general operations, Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman warned council members they would have to find another \$120,000 to \$125,000 to cut from the already lean budget if state legislators pass the tax freeze.

On April 11, the state Senate approved what is, in effect, a two-year property assessment freeze; the

state House was still debating the issue Wednesday, following heavy lobbying by school and local government, concerned with the impact on their budgets.

The Senate measure would force taxing units to roll back 1991 tax rates to match 1990 levels unless the electorate votes otherwise, and to continue the same levels through 1992.

It's "probably impossible," Deadman added, "to take a vote . . . between now and July 1."

Gov. John Engler has said he would support the measure.

THE STATE action would hurt older cities like Farmington, Deadman said, because they have no new growth and, with the legislation, would have no new revenue to handle rising costs. The older communities already face a loss in state and federal revenues because of declining population noted in the 1990 census count; Farmington's population declined 8 percent over the past decade.

"They're saying this is the last time until they work out a solution," Deadman said. "The older communities with no growth are going to be hurt very badly by this."

The city council will hold special meetings at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 2, and Thursday, May 9, to analyze budget numbers and fine-tune the budget document. By law, the city council must hold public hearings and adopt a budget by June 3 for the new fiscal year which begins July 1.

Proposed for Farmington are budgets totalling \$4.67 million for the General Fund, \$1.3 million for the Highway Fund, \$1.59 million for debt service, \$130,000 for the Capital Improvement Fund and \$1.6 million for the Water and Sewer Fund.

The proposed millage rate, including operating and debt retirement, is 13.67 mills per thousand of State Equalized Value. That would be about \$1,025.25 in property taxes for a \$150,000 house with an SEV of \$75,000.

The bulk of the general operating budget comes from local property taxes, with the largest percentage to be expended for the public safety and public services departments.

OTHER BUDGET highlights include:

• The city will lose some \$75,000 in state shared revenues in the coming year, with the state recapturing some of the money already paid to the city since October because of the population decline.

• Expenses should decrease 3 percent overall, although some line items such as health insurance have jumped sharply. Residents may have to pay a utility fee to handle increased rubbish costs.

• Deadman has proposed continuing the city's millage rate at 10.65 mills per thousand of State Equalized Valuation. If the state takes action on the assessment freeze, the city council could choose to increase that rate.

• Debt service millage will increase from .98 mills to 3.62 mills

per thousand of state equalized valuation, as approved by voters last May to handle repayment for the ongoing, multi-million sewer improvement project. Deadman said that is expected to increase again in 1992-93.

Councilman William Hartsock appeared dismayed Monday to hear about legislative action and debate in Lansing and its impact on the city.

"This is not tax reform at all," he said. "This year is going to be a very difficult year for us. It sounds like they're trying to get a quick fix."

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Schools fear tax freeze

Continued from Page 1

pleaded with them to maintain the current system until they can address replacing school financing.

Farmington's school chief said he expected to be in Lansing Wednesday, as well, when House leaders were discussing the issue with the governor, and the House was scheduled to take up the issue when it went into session at 2 p.m.

Meanwhile Tuesday, there was some discussion of cuts which will occur regardless of possible state action.

Flanagan offered a laundry list of things being considered for cuts, which will show in more detail when a line-item budget is presented at the May 7 meeting:

- Up to \$640,000 in cuts are being considered in the transportation area, not including personnel cuts. Some of the reductions will include field trips, district shuttles, athletic buses, enforcement of walking poli-

cy, changing some school times, using main roads when possible and making general runs more efficient.

- Athletic programs face cuts of between \$90,000 and \$141,000 with a minimum of equipment cuts and keeping expenditures down, to the maximum of cutting ninth grade sports, combining girls and boys cross country, decreasing intramurals, and eliminating an assistant coach for swimming and track.
- Up to \$2 million cut in capital projects and building improvements are listed.
- Cuts of \$13,800 in extracurriculars, \$500,000 in instructional technology, \$188,400 in textbooks and \$47,000 in staff training days are listed for cuts.

SOME 84 TEACHERS were also pink slipped this week, and more than 30 are expected to be moved, involuntarily, from their jobs into others.

Parents who spoke at Tuesday's meeting, as well as trustee James Abernethy, said they were concerned with keeping teachers in the classroom, and that members of the teachers union should consider cutbacks in health benefits to aid in that effort.

"I think this school system can no longer afford not to look into medical and health benefits," said parent George Notarianni. "It's my understanding there's a medical-health package second to none. That's one area I think needs attention."

Abernethy said the district's \$8.5 million in health care benefits "is something we need to creatively look at."

The district is negotiating new contracts this year with four of its five unions and bargaining groups, including the teachers.

C'ville chief: Freeze plan 'horror story'

Clarencville Schools Superintendent Jerry Montecillo called the proposed statewide freeze of property taxes a "horror story" for Michigan school districts.

The 1,700-student Clarencville District includes a portion of southeastern Farmington Hills.

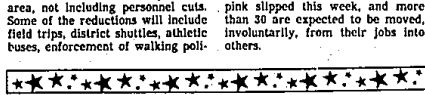
"We're all in a state of shock over this. This came out and running from the Senate like a bolt out of the blue. It flew through the Senate," Montecillo said. "It was totally unexpected. Trying to make up the \$1 million we'll lose over the two-year period will be disastrous to the district."

The Clarencville school chief said he was stunned the freeze passed the Senate so swiftly.

"We see so many plans," he said. "We say, 'What the heck?' Then we get hit with a fast-track plan like this."

School officials have estimated the state will save itself \$400 million by passing the freeze.

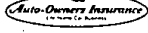
The savings reportedly will come from fewer people qualifying for the Homestead Property Tax credit. The state reimburses some residents if their property taxes rise above a certain level.



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