

Issue sparks mixed emotions

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

Anthony Flanz has no use for recycling. He says he has nothing to recycle.

Margaret Black says recyclables are trash. And trash is what the city — through taxpayers' money — picks up as part of what cities do.

Blair Algie just wants a chance to vote on how the Farmington Hills recycling program is financed.

"It is garbage. It's trash. It's special trash. That's all it is," said Black, an Eldridge Street resident. "It's a public service. It's something a city does for its people. The goal is not to make a profit, but to better manage the waste stream."

"On the average, most of the 12 people who offered their opinions to

RECYCLING

the city council Wednesday about recycling support the program, but want another way to pay for it.

Joann Nicodemus said she always went to the recycling center. "I used to do it for fun." Now economic times are tough for everyone and the city wants its money for the program.

"That's a pair of shoes or something for the kids. It's kind of tight these days," she said.

Resident Ken Perrin opposes the recycling fee. He prefers to pay for the recycling program within the city's charter millage limit. If a tax outside the limit is levied for recycling, "People will say, 'Hey, we

don't want it."

If the recycling program uses up millage within the charter, then city officials have some decisions to make. "It would fortify," Perrin said.

Algie said he believes the city should absorb the costs of recycling, as the city has long paid for garbage collection and disposal with tax money. The city has collected increased taxes over the years that exceeded the cost of living, he said.

A representative of the Southeast Michigan Builders Association in Farmington Hills asked the city council to establish a special assessment district so the business community would not be forced to pay for recycling, which businesses do not use.

Developer Mel Kaufman, who owns apartments in the city that are not part of the recycling program, agreed. "If you want to make this fair and people want a tax, you're supposed to pick up all our garbage or establish a special assessment district."

"I believe in recycling, but I also believe I have a right to determine where my money is spent," said a resident of the Springdale subdivision. "I won't pay for it."

Another resident asked when a fee had never been assessed before for garbage pickup and disposal and now there's a recycling fee which should be part of the garbage program.

While the recycling center remains open, the amount of recyclables collected compared to the 10-year-old curbside program is "indefinite," said City Manager William Costick. In less than a year, the recycling program has reduced the waste stream 30 percent, he said.

Participation in the recycling program has reached about 90 percent and payment of the recycling fees is about 93 percent, Costick said.

Like many others, Flanz opposes the recycling fee. "Wake up. It should be a tax. This business of fees is for the birds." But Flanz said he just doesn't have anything to recycle and doesn't want to pay for it.

"When I'm forced to pay for something, that's a way for you to steal. That's fraud."

Tax from page 1A

According to the proposed 1992-93 budget with the recycling fee, single family homeowners would pay \$50 and condo owners \$36.60.

"All that I ask is that this council would keep faith with its citizens, keep faith with the constitution. If you go with a tax, put it on the ballot," said Patrick Anderson, assistant vice president of government affairs with Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance, Farmington Hills.

Anderson, a director of Taxpayers United for the Michigan Constitu-

tion, has opposed the city's quarterly recycling fee, which he believes is actually a tax because it is mandatory, paid by people who may not use the program, and results in a property tax lien if not paid.

City attorney Dominick disagreed. A lien is not indicative of a tax. "A lien can be filed by a mechanic for failure to pay your mechanic," Dominick said.

He also criticized the city because the fee — as a tax — was not approved by voters, as required of all new taxes under the 1978 Headlee

Amendment. Anderson did not recommend what action the council should take. But he suggested a true user fee where "only if you use it do you pay."

City Manager William Costick expressed concern about levying a tax within the city's 10-mill operating charter limit, which with required rollbacks is now at 8.5 mills.

"I'm fearful that if we ever had a calamity in this community we would have to address, we wouldn't have the flexibility," said Costick.

Board from page 1A

and less to administration — something he has pushed for since running for the board.

He also takes seriously the money being lost to the state due to changes in state aid formulas in recent years, but believes the district can do more with the money it has.

"I'm not happy about losing — we'll probably lose more next year," he said. "But we still will have one of the highest budgets in the state. We should make the best use of what we have."

"This should be a cakewalk," he said, if elected, he would

Board from page 1A

spend time in Lansing lobbying for Farmington and believe elected officials should do more of that.

He said he will also demand better measures of school programs, especially new ones being introduced and piloted.

DeVries is married, has three children, the youngest of whom will be in the class of 2006. Since 1990, he has gotten particularly involved in community activities, including homeowners' association and the Council of Homeowners Associations of Farmington Hills, in scouting and in a number of area Republican groups.



Richard DeVries

Meetings from page 1A

Challenger Svoke, said he felt board meetings were well-published and residents given a chance to comment. "I have not seen any particular evidence of it (meeting violations)," he said.

Parents on board

The issue of whether parents should be better represented on the board was also an issue of debate raised by DeVries.

"Parents need more voice on the school board," he said, adding that currently only one trustee has children in the system. DeVries has three children, two of whom attend Hillside Elementary School.

Pratow countered, saying that "80 percent of our public do not have children in the schools and our board is reflective of that. I don't think you have to have children there to have an interest in all of our children's education." Pralow has two sons who are graduates of North Farmington High School.

Svoke, who has four children at various levels of the school system, said he has been impressed with the current board's involvement in various schools, including some trustees "adopting" individual schools.

District's strengths

The candidates offered slightly different views on district strengths.

Svoke said he feels the district's administrative leadership, teacher and staff support of the students were all strengths and the "firm belief we're not really satisfied with today and looking toward tomorrow," is also a positive.

Pralow lists Superintendent Michael Flanagan at the top of her list of strengths, followed by the students and parents involved with the schools, and the diversity of the community.

DeVries believes the "good stable families" in the area are a strength. And, despite cuts, he said, the district has "ample resources" for education. We are also "a community that cares about our children," he added.

Other highlights

Some other highlights of Wednesday's forum:

• In the area of finances, none of the candidates spoke in favor of new operating millage for the district in the near future.

• The board's role was discussed. DeVries called it one of representing the public and goal setting. Svoke said goal-setting, developing the community's trust and leadership are important. And Pralow called it a policy-making body.

• All three touted the importance of extracurricular activities and classes like art, music and physical education. They also feel fully life classes which teach about sex education, AIDS and other issues are important but that parents need to monitor such programs.

• In the area of cost reduction, Svoke called for using more technology, like the "Teacher on TV" program to enhance learning and keep costs down. DeVries said setting "specific and measurable goals" and evaluating such programs would help. Pralow said keeping teachers trained and up-to-date is an important way to make the best of education dollars.

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