

Satisfied

Support millage renewal

By now, just about everyone with an interest in the Farmington Public Schools should be satisfied. That school millage request that voters will decide on Tuesday, Feb. 2, is a straightforward renewal, not an increase.

After listening to school officials and other experts on school financing, we're satisfied. We're endorsing the proposal that will renew 12.0834 mills worth \$31.1 million to operate the public schools in this community.

Voters in the Farmington District should say yes to the millage renewal on Feb. 2.

This is a renewal, not an increase, and renewals usually pass easily. There was some confusion about this one, however, because the mill total represents three separate blocks that have expired, or will expire.

Instead of holding three separate elections, Farmington school officials decided to renew the entire package at once — in the Feb. 2 special election.

Concern was expressed that a combined renewal would be immune to future Headlee Amendment rollbacks this year and in the future.

The 1978 Headlee Amendment, named after Farmington Hills resident and unsuccessful gubernatorial candidate Richard Headlee, is de-

signed to limit tax growth to the rate of inflation.

Among other things, the Headlee Amendment requires local units of government to roll back the tax rate (not millage) when the tax base rises faster than inflation, unless voters authorize an increase.

After speaking with several people — including Bruce Barrett, the district's assistant superintendent for finance — we're satisfied that the 12.0834 mills already reflect Headlee Amendment rollbacks. That total was rolled back from about 14 mills.

Headlee, who is something of a conservative guru, has been critical of past Farmington school millage requests. However, he indicated recently that he'll support the Feb. 2 renewal.

Patrick Anderson, an economist for Headlee's Alexander Hamilton Life insurance company, is also supporting it.

Even Richard DeVries, a thorn in the side of some Farmington school officials over the years, seems to have moderated his opposition. However, we were disappointed Tuesday to note that he wasn't at the millage information meeting to argue his views with the board. He dropped off some written questions and then left the meeting.

Anyway, let's get this millage renewed and move on to other matters.

Don't strip higher education

Public higher education in the United States has been more successful than K-12.

As new Oakland University President Sandra Packard told a group of Oakland County leaders last week, "It has a hole that K-12 doesn't have."

In fact, students from all over the world aspire to attend America's institutions of higher learning of which Michigan's rank among the best.

But if we're not careful here, in the state of Michigan, that halo will topple. Slowly, surely, like a hypodermic syringe withdrawing blood from an arm, the state is sucking funding from its public universities and community colleges.

Here in our own region, Oakland University and Schoolcraft and Oakland community colleges are feeling the pinch as they compete for state funds along with 14 four-year schools and the rest of the state's community colleges.

In just five years, the state has gone from providing 60.5 percent of OU's budget, to 54 percent. In 1970, the state paid 47 percent of Schoolcraft's budget; two years ago it was 28 percent. As for OCC, the state paid 39.5 percent in 1970; last year it was 24 percent.

Both community colleges are also supported by a property tax millage, which Schoolcraft raised from .5 to 2.27 mills in 1986 and which has always been 1 mill for OCC. Fueling the millages has been residential, business and industrial growth.

While Schoolcraft has managed to hold the line on tuition by raising its tax rate, both OU and OCC have steadily increased student fees.

Many residents of affluent Oakland County can afford to pay the added amount. But many others can't. And what is happening is that the very schools which should be the most open to the most people are becoming less accessible.

Yes, more students are on federal financial aid or on scholarships than ever before. But those on financial aid must begin paying their loans back the minute they graduate, and that can be difficult in this depressed job market.

In addition, college staff positions are being eliminated, and expansion of programs and development of new ones are curtailed.

It is ironic that as we look for solutions to the funding and content of K-12 education, we are placing our success — higher education — at risk.

In no way can we afford to do that. OU President Packard sees the role of the college and university as graduating students to have "not just a job but a way to approach the world."

If we further shut off the students from the middle and lower income groups — by making them go into debt through excessive dependence on student loans, or simply by pricing them out of the higher education market — we are doomed to widen the current educational and financial disparities that are tearing our society apart.

Smart move



HASTY BOST/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fiscal crunch: Going to college, such as the Orchard Ridge campus of Oakland Community College, is an important step for young men and women intent on a good future. That future, however, is threatened by state cuts in funding to higher education. For an editorial on the subject, see the lower left side of this page.

LETTERS

Concept is 'inane'

I object to the so-called clock tower project on the Masonic Temple property in Farmington, discussed in your Jan. 14 article.

Apparently, we're looking at a proposed modernistic structure and related geometric terracing that seem at odds with the historic feel of the temple building.

To fall back on the extreme triteness of a clock tower, or the like, with or without dazzling electronic signage, and to hear of creating a "focal point" thereby borders on the completely inane.

It is a tiny piece of property which already possesses the Farmington focal point: The Masonic Lodge building itself.

It has been the "logo" of Farmington for decades. To interrupt this view by installing such a structure is tantamount to saying we want to shift the attention from the history and beauty of the old structure to this totally commonplace, monolithic, purposeless device.

I think we can hardly compare this with the magnificent structures found in great European cities, as implied in the article.

As I understand it, the actual cost will be far beyond the amount indicated, for landscaping, terraces, concrete work, etc.

Whether the funding comes from earmarked funds, or wherever (reminding ourselves the source is always taxation), the expense is unconscionable.

In 1974, the present Masonic corner garden was done by volunteer effort, CETA grant money, donations, and very little money from city hall.

To put it bluntly, it was a shoestring project. I feel today, however, while we're in the midst of the worst recession in memory, it is totally out of touch for a city government to create any frivolous project that costs money.

If there are surplus funds lying around, at least find an intelligent place to put them, in synch with the times, which today are hard times.

Fred Welsh, Farmington

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Parents want better schools

This year's MEAP test scores were released last week at school districts throughout Michigan.

As I've said before, the Michigan Education Assessment Program test is a time bomb ticking in every high school in the state that will explode in May 1994. Here's why:

By action of the Legislature and beginning with the graduating class of '94, Michigan children who do not get passing scores in MEAP tests of reading, math and science will not obtain a state endorsement on their diploma. And you can bet employers and college admissions officers will be looking for those endorsements before making any hiring or entry decisions.

MEAP is the first time the actual academic achievement of Michigan school children has been directly and regularly measured.

While many can quarrel with the specifics of this MEAP test or whether any one test should mean so much to a kid's future, it's clear that some assessment of learning performance is preferable to none.

The MEAP test is an important part of the school reform scenario. Publishing the MEAP results will make parents aware of just how their district's kids performed when measured against others. And this, in turn, will get parents in deficient districts to start putting on the pressure for improvement.

If parents in the usually sedate South Redford School District are any indication, this scenario is working.

Disturbed by the poor performance of South Redford's Thurston High School 10th graders on last year's MEAP math test, a parents' group has taken the unusual step of petitioning to beef up the school's curriculum.

Led by Roger Parlett, who has children in ninth and 12th grades, the group pointed out that Thurston's math and reading scores for 10th graders wound up in the lower quartile when compared with 73 schools in the Detroit tri-county area. "This performance of our schools is clearly unacceptable," Parlett told Thurston principal Stewart Schauder.



PHILIP POWER

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In a letter accompanying the petition, Parlett said kids with poor math skills leave school with a competitive disadvantage in a world where good skills are required for good jobs.

The kind of parental action now being taken in South Redford is exactly what school reformers are hoping for. It's good evidence that the strategy for school improvement is gradually working.

And it's coming from concentrating on the actual outcomes of schooling, measured by an objective test, rather than bashing teachers or principals.

"As parents, we are ready to work with our school to assure that these objectives are met," said Parlett's letter. "We do appreciate the hard work that has gone into our school by many excellent teachers, but we feel that what is needed is a commitment from everybody using goal orientation as a yardstick."

Congratulations to Roger Parlett and the South Redford parents who care enough for their kids, their schools and their community to get involved.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His voice mail number for touch-tone phones is 953-2047 Ext. 1880.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Who will win the Super Bowl?

We asked this question at the Crossroads A&W restaurant in Farmington.



'The (Buffalo) Bills'll take it this time. The percentages are with 'em.
Robert Kwasy
Plymouth



'Dallas is going to win. My inside guy says so.'
Don Gould
Livonia



'Dallas. They haven't won it in how many years.'
Joe Parackla
Livonia



'I don't watch football. Who's playing?'
Eric Jacobson
New Hudson

The Farmington Observer

TOM EAER, EDITOR, 477-6420

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