

Residents argue against increases

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

If the Farmington Hills City Hall parking lot is full, the boards of review must be in session. That's how it's been for a week and how it's likely to be until March 23, when the two boards finish their work.

Property owners like Tom Schneider have been coming in to appeal their assessments in a year unlike any Hills assessor Dean Babb has seen. Schneider appealed the city's determination of the amount of square footage he owns, and review board member Dorothy Jeffries agreed with him.

"I looked at houses that were similar in structure and their percent of (assessment) increase," Schneider said. "Ten out of 13 decreased, two increased 2 percent and mine increased 8 percent."

Jeffries, a licensed Realtor, said the city will remeasure the property before having Schneider come back.

Another woman, who is retired and lives alone, said her assessment has made it hard for her to pay her bills. George Doorn, a professional arbitrator, gave the woman forms to fill out on her

finances so that she can appeal her assessment based upon economic hardship.

"We're not going to allow somebody to be put out of their home because of this," he told the woman. "This is not a handout. It's legitimate."

Those were typical of the appeals board members are hearing this year. And historically, property owners have at least a 40 percent chance at having a reduction in their taxes.

The key? Those who document why their assessments were off have a better chance, especially if they can show that the assessment doesn't affect true market value.

"A quality appeal to the board of review has a good chance," said Dean Babb, Farmington Hills assessor. "But we have some old faithfuls that we see every year."

Babb said there are more no-shows toward the end of the scheduled appeals.

"If they weren't standing outside the door Monday morning (March 1), then it probably isn't as important to them as those who came in right away because they thought their assessment was too high."



SHARON LAMMEZ/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Making his pitch: Farmington Hills resident Tom Schneider (wearing coat and tie) appeals his assessment to the Board of Review, including Gordon Meyers (left), Dorothy Jeffries and Barbara Megerian.

Appeals from page 1A

In 1991, some 1,485 property owners appealed, of which 1,008 were residential owners. Of total appeals, 632 assessments, or 43 percent, were lowered. In the cases involving residential property, 483 assessments, or 48 percent, were lowered, Babb said.

But Babb said many people he's seen come before the boards were affected by the new changes in the state's formula for assessing and probably won't have their assessments lowered.

"My guess is that a lot of peo-

ple coming in just based their appeal on the percent of increase compared to their neighbor's," Babb said. "We've tried to explain that."

The trouble for many residents involves the differences in the way the state is assessing different types of structures. A colonial, tri-level and ranch could have the same square footage but be assessed differently because of their construction, Babb said.

Marilyn Cohen, a Farmington Hills resident, said she was

surprised that the city assessed her concrete-lined swimming pool as if it were vinyl.

"They're basing all pools as if they were vinyl," she said.

Babb said that was one break the city could give taxpayers un-

der the new state rules. But for the most part, the city has little latitude.

"We're not the only community experiencing this," he said. "West Bloomfield has a third board of review."

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