

State of Cities

Home rule message is clear

BY JONI HUBRED
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A muted but clear undercurrent flowed through the festive atmosphere of Thursday morning's 2000 State of the Cities breakfast at Farmington Hills Manor.

Farmington and Farmington Hills officials painted a bright but challenging future. And where state lawmakers are concerned, they're mad as hell, and



Speaking: Superintendent Bob Maxfield stressed cooperation between the cities, schools and state.

they're not going to take it any more.

Mayors Nancy Bates and Bill Hartsock and Farmington School Board Chair Priscilla Brouillette all expressed high praise for the level of cooperation they share.

Their hired administrators, however, expressed frustration with the layer of government that stayed for only a portion of the meeting.

State Rep. Andrew Raczowski left before the bulk of complaints surfaced about what local officials have characterized as attacks on "home rule."

While his name wasn't specifically mentioned, Raczowski has publicly criticized city officials for misrepresenting his stand on legislation that would override the cities' authority.

The biggest challenge in Farmington, said City Manager Frank Lauhoff, has been dealing with state laws that affect local revenues. A recently completed

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study of state revenue sharing indicated Farmington will receive only a 1.5 percent increase in state funding in each of the next five years.

Those dollars account for a quarter of the city's budget. Lauhoff urged listeners to imagine trying to balance their family budget with an annual salary of less than 2 percent.

"We can't change that today," he said, "but we have to be careful about laws changing in the future."

Hills City Manager Steve Brock's comments about the attack on local control drew a big round of applause.

"Thomas Jefferson said the government that governs best governs least," Brock said. "And, I would add, closest to the people."

Brouillette said school officials were troubled by a proposed Constitutional amendment that would allow state funding to be spent on vouchers for private schools. Board members have passed a resolution expressing their opposition.

"It will weaken our schools, divide our community... and weaken public education," she stated.

Superintendent Bob Maxfield considered the breakfast event an opportunity to stress the critical importance of cooperation among the entities.

Farmington schools has established three education basics, he said — student success in the core areas of reading, writing, math and technology; student success in eight areas contained in the district's profile for lifelong learning; and a strong commitment to both excellence and equity, promoting and encouraging student achievements while meeting the challenge of students with special needs.

Maxfield related the story of a youngster who had answered two of three questions his teacher posed. Stuck on the third, he appeared to be feeling the pressure. A student sitting next to

him, apparently a fan of the television game show "Who Wants to be a Millionaire," said, "Couldn't he phone a friend?"

"We have lots of opportunities to 'phone a friend,'" Maxfield said. "The reason that works as well as it does is we have lots of friends out there."

Among the previous year's accomplishments that involved people from both cities were the construction of a playscape in Farmington and plans for the new 47th District Court building on the Farmington Hills municipal campus at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake Road.

Brock and Lauhoff also urged everyone's participation in the 2000 census, critical to population-driven state and federal funding in both communities.

"I can't stress enough how important it is that we get an accurate count, and if we can't get an accurate count, at least a high one," Brock joked.

Farmington/Farmington Hills residents can look for the following in the near future:

- Continued renovation/remodeling projects that will affect almost every Farmington Schools building, examples of which may be seen during an open house at Dunkel Middle School and the new television facility at North Farmington High on April 19.

- Boulevard improvements on Orchard Lake from 10 Mile to I-696;

- A dedicated right turn lane at Orchard Lake and 12 Mile Roads;

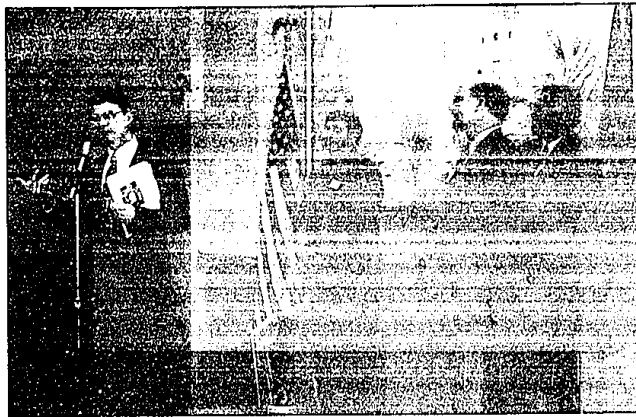
- Launching of the Farmington Hills city website;

- Reconstruction of Farmington Road in 2001, widening it from four lanes to five;

- An increase in Detroit water rates, which will be offset in Farmington by a drop in sewer rates;

- Revamping of the city of Farmington's 50-year-old zoning (land use) ordinances;

- Expansion of the San Marino golf course in Farmington



STAFF PHOTOS BY DEB EGGERS

Q&A: Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff fields an audience question during the question and answer portion of the 2000 State of the Cities program. Duane Reynolds, chamber of commerce chairman, Steve Brock, Farmington Hills city manager, and Bob Maxfield, school superintendent, wait their turn for questions.

Hills. What will also continue, officials said, is the spirit of cooperation they celebrated. Eleventh

District Congressman Joseph Knollenberg said that's why he located his offices in the Farmington area.

"I think there's a camaraderie," he said. "There's a common goal both cities share."



Audience: A record crowd turned out for the 2000 State of the Cities breakfast Thursday at Farmington Hills Manor.

Third judge for Farmington proposed in Senate legislation

BY MIKE MALOTT
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Oakland County may be in for some new judgeships, if state lawmakers have their way. Two additional judges on the circuit court bench are possible. Another judge at the 52-1 District Court in Novi is also under consideration.

Less likely, an additional judge in 47th District Court in Farmington has also been proposed.

If approved, these new judicial posts would be the first approved anywhere in the state in more than seven years. And the open seats would have to go on the ballot for the election this fall to be filled next January.

State Sen. Bill Bullard (R-Highland) has introduced Senate Bills 257, 258 and 649 to make the additions. Rep. Marc Shulman (R-West Bloomfield) has introduced House Bill 4775, a companion bill to add the two judgeships to the Oakland County Circuit Court.

Getting approval won't be easy. Gov. John Engler has been reluctant to add judgeships in recent years, saying he wanted the state court system made more efficient. And lawmakers elsewhere in the state have a backlog of requests for new judges.

But Bullard does have the support of the State Court Administrators office, which has recommended the additional judges for the circuit and 52-1 district courts. It has not recommended adding a judge to the district court in Farmington.

"The administrator's office issues these recommendations based — not on politics or who asks for them first or anything like that — but strictly on case load," Bullard explained.

Caseload figures show Oakland County judges, both at the circuit level and the district level, have

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the largest numbers of suits to be decided in the state. Oakland circuit court saw 34,928 new cases in 1998, the latest year available, compared to a statewide average for county courts of 4,587.

Divided up among Oakland's 17 judges, the number would come to 3,819 per judge.

"Oakland County has 17 circuit judges. Wayne County has 63. That's what we get for 30 years of Democratic control in the legislature," Bullard said. "Oakland's population is 1.2 million. Wayne's is about 2.5 million. On that basis, Wayne should have about 34 judges."

Shulman said he believes consideration of the added judgeship will have to wait until budget hearings begin this spring, but Bullard said he is asking senate leadership to move forward with his requests in the next few weeks.

Statistics show a similarly heavy load for the district court judges. Cases countywide in Oakland in 1998 came to 43,546, compared to a statewide average of 40,040.

Bullard said he anticipates adding one judge to 52-1 district court in Novi, and altering that court's jurisdiction, moving several of its northernmost communities to the jurisdiction of 52-2 District Court in Clarkston, which has a single judge.

A compromise may be suggested by the governor. Bullard speculated, to pare the district court bench in Pontiac, which currently has four district court judges. Cases there have dropped off in recent years.



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Farmington schools named winner in PR competition

Farmington Public Schools has been named a winner in the annual Michigan School Public Relations Association Communications Contest. The following awards were received:

- Commendable Award — Individual PA 25 Annual Report Category for the entry, "Farmington Public Schools Annual Report 1997-98." Presented to Diane Bauman, supervisor of school/community relations.

- Commendable Award — Publication Category for the entry, "Update and Just for Parents." Presented to Lisa Bur, communications specialist and Diane Bauman, supervisor of school/community relations.