

Auburn Hills Business Leaders Ponder Question of Pontiac School Tax

by Irena Granaas

What city and chamber officials regard as an unjust tax bill was the subject of discussion at a recent public meeting at Auburn Hills City Hall.

Individuals from about 30 companies, representing a diverse sector of residents and businesses, attended the meeting May 20.

The meeting was called to review the coming tax bill to be mailed in early June to all taxpayers, business and residential, in the Pontiac School District.

Basically, the bill calls for a liability payment incurred by the school district, which comprises eight communities. The problem pops up when the tax payment is based on property values, and the northern half of Auburn Hills is actually more valuable than all of Pontiac – meaning more than half of the liability threatens to affect businesses and residents of Auburn Hills.

Because \$4 million of the \$8 million liability is set to be charged to those in Auburn Hills, the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce and city of Auburn Hills officials are fighting the decision.

The meeting gave officials a chance to lay out various ways affected residents and businesses can get involved in efforts to fight the bill.

The purpose of the meeting was twofold:

- To inform those attending of various options available to the city to prevent its citizens and business owners from being held responsible for the city's portion of the Pontiac School Board's unpaid \$7.9 million health care bill to the Michigan Education Special Services Association (MESSA), the agency which provides health care to the Pontiac School District's employees, and
- To find out what level of support businesses may be willing to

offer to enable the city to pursue some of these options.

Todd Lancaster, chairman of the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce, zeroed in on the main topic, after first noting that Rep. Tim Greimel, D-Auburn Hills, and Sen. Jim Marleau, a Republican representing Northern Oakland County, both of whom have been working diligently on the issue, were unable to attend as planned.

Lancaster briefly filled in the background of events.

"Essentially, why we're here is the Pontiac School Board has a liability of health insurance premiums to MESSA, which is the organization that handles the health insurance for the Pontiac School Board.

"They essentially for 2011 never made a payment to MESSA for the health insurance premiums for the teachers in the teachers' union . . . Roughly \$8 million is the amount owed."

Lancaster explained that MESSA went to court and sued the Pontiac School Board for the liability and won a judgment against the Pontiac schools for \$8 million.

"What the Pontiac School system essentially elected to do at that point is to pass that liability on to the taxpayers," he said. "This liability, which would normally be representative of Pontiac, also has an effect on all the surrounding townships and cities, such as the city of Auburn Hills, Sylvan Lake, the city of Bloomfield, West Bloomfield Hills . . .

"That liability is directly from the mismanagement of the Pontiac School system, and ultimately we look at it from a business standpoint as taxation without representation," said Lancaster, adding there may be culpability on the part of the school board and MESSA, since MESSA never canceled the policy despite lack of payment, while the Pontiac

School Board never adjusted its budget to pay for it.

Lancaster noted that, as the city of Auburn Hills competes for new business and development, it wants to be able to offer a steady tax base and certainty moving forward.

"This affects the entire community and, as a result of that, we believe that the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce is the perfect organization to stand up and say, 'This is a very difficult situation, it's a difficult problem, we have a lot of different parties that are interested.' And for that reason, we felt it was necessary to have a meeting of the minds to make sure that we help educate, help communicate and ultimately develop a strategy to deal with all of these issues."

City Manager Pete Auger an-

swered the question that was probably on the minds of many at the meeting – why isn't the city taking the lead on this issue?

"The reason is, we can't," he said. "According to the law, we are not the injured party in this situation."

Auger added that it doesn't mean the city isn't going to do everything it can to tackle the issue.

"We are very fiscally sound, we're very fiscally conservative, and this makes companies such as yourselves more comfortable with that stability moving forward, so we think we do have skin in this game," he said.

"In talking with somebody who is no longer with the school district in Pontiac, they explained to me that they put a bare bones budget out there in order to get back into the good graces with the budget

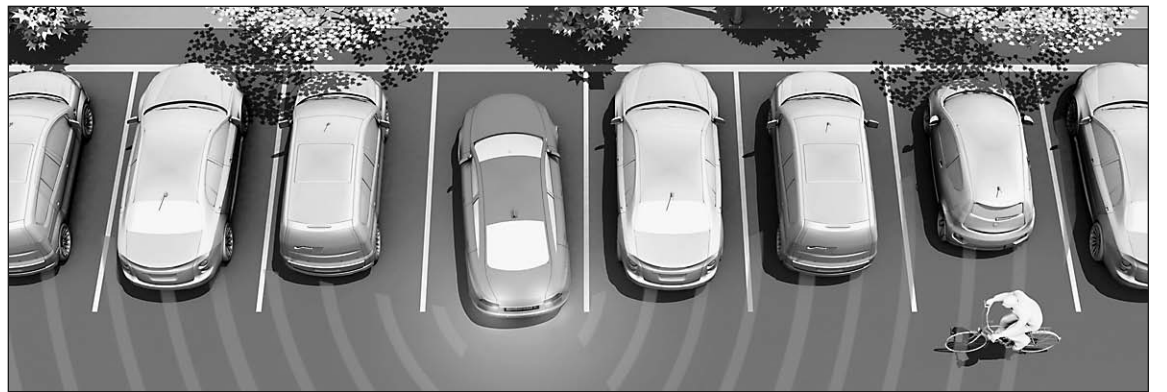
guys . . . They didn't stick to the plan . . . This is kicking the can down the road and, in five years, we'll be in the same position."

Attorney Stewart Mandell offered options the city may look at to avert the tax levy.

"Different avenues are being pursued," he said.

Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce President Denise Asker, who attended the meeting, said the chamber has been talking about this issue since early March.

"We were told with great certainty it was going to be a non-issue by Lansing, and when that turned out not to be the case, we reacted within days to put this meeting together, so that stakeholders had a chance to get involved in the process and ask questions," Asker said in an exclusive interview.



Mandatory tire pressure monitoring systems would save billions.

Continental Honored for Safety Solutions

Automotive supplier Continental is getting recognition these days for two of its technologies that make driving safer.

Continental has received the 2013 *Automotive News* PACE Award for its LocSync Tire Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS).

The award-winning system from Continental provides the driver with precise information about inflation pressure for the individual tires.

If the pressure in a tire is too low, the instrument cluster alerts the driver – via in-dash display – of the precise location and specific details of a low-pressure tire.

The technology combines Continental's tire pressure monitoring expertise with wheel-speed sensor information from existing stability control systems or anti-lock braking systems in vehicles.

It also provides environmental benefits and increases driver safety. Individual pressure displays help reduce fuel consump-

tion and carbon footprint, as well as longer tire life and better vehicle handling for the driver.

According to Continental, the system boosts occupant safety as well. The NHTSA reported that if tires are under-inflated by 25 percent or more, they are three times more likely to be cited as critical to events leading to a crash.

"Winning the 2013 Automotive News PACE Award for LocSync is an honor and testament to the hard work of the Continental team and worldwide acceptance of this unique solution by our customers," said Michael Crane, head of Continental's North American Body & Security business unit.

"LocSync is the next step in tire pressure monitoring systems – an intelligent, low-cost, best-in-class product that works with existing technology to offer enhanced functionality."

The LocSync Tire Pressure Monitoring System was not the only

Continental technology innovation to receive PACE recognition. Continental also received a 2013 PACE award for its Short Range Radar solution.

The SRR package features two smart sensors with integrated Electronic Control Unit (ECU) mounted to the vehicle's rear-quarter/corner panel (on both sides), which can distinguish between traffic and infrastructure and alert drivers to the presence of objects within the detection zone and help to avoid them.

In production with several automakers, the radar features:

- Blind Spot Detection to warn about vehicles in the driver's blind spot of the side-view mirror;
- Lane Change Assist, which gives warning when attempting unsafe lane changes;
- Rear Cross Traffic Alert, which could help avoid accidents when backing out of a parking space.

Women's Golf Clinic Provides Chance To Improve Game While Networking

The Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce issued an invitation for professional women to join the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce Golf Clinic June 20 at the Indianwood Golf & Country Club in Orion Township.

In addition to having opportunities to network in an informal setting, participating women will get tips from the pros.

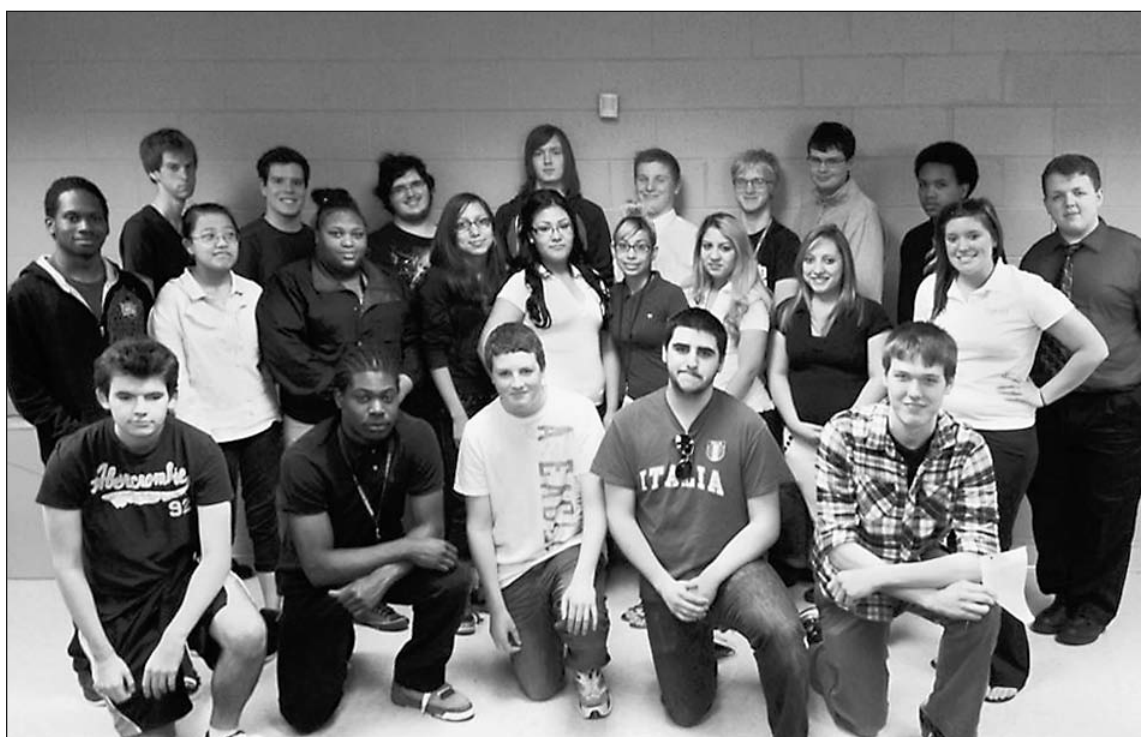
Those interested are welcome to bring colleagues and friends,

as well.

Guests will receive:

- 90 minutes of instruction from two PGA professionals
- 30 minutes of full swing
- 30 minutes of short game
- 30 minutes putting
- A wine and cheese reception at the St. Andrews Room.

Tickets are discounted for all who register by June 2. To register or for more information, go to info@auburnhillschamber.com.



Oakland Technical students get financial insight from Genisys.

Genisys Credit Union Helps Sharpen Oakland Tech Kids' Financial Literacy

While mastery of the traditional "Three Rs" is key to a student's success in school, applying that knowledge to real-life skills is important for a more successful, secure lifestyle.

Students at Oakland Technical School in Auburn Hills had a chance to do that recently, thanks to Auburn Hills-based Genisys Credit Union.

Genisys representatives gave the students helpful financial insight as part of the Michigan Credit Union League & Affiliates 10th Annual Financial Literacy Legislative Challenge, held in conjunction with Financial Literacy Month and Money Smart Week (April 20-27).

April's Financial Literacy Month included a variety of local workshops and programs that exposed students to investing and saving concepts, budgeting,

credit and debit cards, purchasing a car and funding for college. Youth programs like this one are open to any resident of Michigan's Lower Peninsula who opens a Genisys Credit Union account.

"This is a wonderful experience for our local youth to learn the importance of financial literacy," said Jackie Buchanan, Genisys president/CEO. "Hopefully, our younger members will see the value and start adopting these helpful money management skills."

Buchanan said Michigan's credit unions have served as national leaders in youth financial education, reaching nearly 47,000 students during the 2011-12 school year alone. They have also helped organize more than 375 student-run credit unions across the state.