

# GROSSE POINTE CIVIC NEWS

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## AROUSED TAXPAYERS ACT

At a meeting that will likely have far-reaching effects held in the home of Frank E. Price on Vendome Road and attended by 26 taxpayers of the five Grosse Pointe Villages Monday night, Dec. 14, preliminary plans were made for a study of the financial problems confronting the officials and taxpayers of the entire area.

Those attending the meeting agreed that never before has the interest of the citizens of Grosse Pointe been so generally aroused in the cost of their governments. When business was good and values were constantly mounting, little attention was paid by the average citizen to governmental costs but following the recent financial disturbance there has come a realization of the seriousness of the situation.

Mr. Price, acting as chairman, called the meeting to order, stating the purpose to be a neighborly get-together for discussion of mutual problems dealing with taxation. Opinions varied as to the best method of procedure but all agreed that something could and should be done. The discussion culminated in the decision that it was a problem for an expert in municipal affairs.

Following the exchange of ideas of the taxpayers and suggestions offered by two experts on governmental affairs, a resolution was passed authorizing Mr. Price to appoint a committee of not more than six members whose duty it will be "to report at a later date information and suggestions working to the end of bettering conditions in the Grosse Pointe area from the standpoint of the individual taxpayer."

It is expected that the findings of the committee will be of tremendous interest to the taxpayers of Grosse Pointe. Their report will be published in a future issue of the CIVIC NEWS.

Of unusual interest to the assembled group was a report of a survey showing a comparison in the cost of schools with the cost of government.

The startling fact is brought out that government in the Grosse Pointe villages costs more than twice as much as education, although an average of 125 Michigan towns shows that 50 per cent of the taxes is required for education and 50 per cent for the rest of the operation of public service.

The cost of the school system in Grosse Pointe for the year is \$803,875. But the cost of government in the Grosse Pointe area is more than a million dollars in excess of this. Assuming that the cost of education is normal, which appeared to be the case, then the cost of government is two and one-half times normal. If the cost of education is high, as some critics of the Board of Education maintain, then it is all the more certain that the cost of government is higher than it should be, according to the ratio maintained throughout the state.

Pointing out that things are expensive or cheap only by comparison, the analyst showed that the cost of government of Highland Park, with a population of 52,959, was \$1,862,989 for the year; that of Royal Oak, with a population of 22,904, was \$577,152. This makes a per capita cost of government for Highland Park of \$35; for Royal Oak of \$25 and for Grosse Pointe \$90.

Grosse Pointe with its population of 21,428 and approximately 10 square miles of territory is very much the same size as Royal Oak with its 22,904 residents in 11 square miles. The cost of schools in Grosse Pointe is \$803,875 and that of Royal Oak, \$626,565. But the cost of government in Royal Oak is only \$577,152 as compared with Grosse Pointe's total cost of \$1,880,233.

A potential saving of \$300,000 to \$500,000 in the cost of government in the Grosse Pointe area is possible, according to one of the experts who addressed the group. This saving, however, would necessitate combining the five villages into one. Opinions varied as to the desirability of this procedure.

There are other ways of cutting down the costs, the expert maintained. "There is not a single community in the group," he said, "which cannot reduce expenses providing there is a will to do so and pressure is brought to bear. Officials will say it can't be done. I was a public official for 10 years and I would have said it, too."

A lowering of taxes is not always possible to obtain by a single gesture of cutting the budget for one year because of the cost of debt service, he cautioned, pointing to the example of the increase of \$1.71 in the school tax this year despite a budget \$70,735 lower than a year ago. "The increase," he said, "is really building a reserve in the school treasury that will permit them to operate without borrowing from the banks. This will put Grosse Pointe schools in an enviable position and should later result in a lowering of taxes.

"Government today must learn to get along on the money it collects and must not rely on future collections of taxes. The practice of borrowing on delinquent taxes has aggravated the financial situation. Taxes are no longer worth 100 cents on the dollar as was formerly supposed. It is impossible to tell how long the delinquencies will run. Buyers of delinquent tax properties are no longer interested in purchasing.

"That delinquencies are still on the increase is shown by the fact that in Grosse Pointe Farms one per cent of 1928 taxes still remain unpaid, two per cent remain unpaid of 1929 taxes

(Concluded on Page 2, Col. 2)

## Grosse Pointe Civic News

Grosse Pointe, Mich.

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### TO CLARIFY

A statement sent out recently with the Township tax bills was not entirely clear to many. Even one of our local newspapers misinterpreted the facts in printing a report of it. No doubt, the officials concerned will be glad to have any mistaken impression corrected.

Casual reading of the statement would lead one to believe that because of a rise in the school tax, the Township tax is relatively small and the schools are the cause of high taxes in the Grosse Pointe area. Of course, the officials did not purposely intend to mislead the public. For they realize, as many of the taxpayers are beginning to realize, that while the schools have a budget of \$803,000, the local governments have a total budget of \$1,880,000.

Local taxpayers who have paid taxes in Detroit are impressed with the comparatively high winter tax and low summer tax in Grosse Pointe, a situation explained by the fact that the Detroit school tax is included in the city or local government tax bill while the Grosse Pointe school tax accompanies the state and county tax.

A fair comparison of local tax rates to Detroit's, then, would be had by deducting Grosse Pointe's school and township tax from the winter tax bill and adding it to the summer or village tax.

(Continued from Page 1, Col. 8)

and seven per cent of 1930 taxes are delinquent. And the Farms' record is one of the best in Michigan. In Grosse Pointe Village two per cent of 1928 taxes remain unpaid, four per cent of 1929 and 14 per cent of 1930. The 14 per cent amounted to \$64,000, an amount uncollected but probably spent. In Grosse Pointe Park 1.6 per cent of 1928 taxes are still delinquent, six per cent of 1929 taxes and 14 per cent, amounting to \$74,000 of 1930 taxes."

It is time to take an inventory of governmental service in the Grosse Pointe area, according to this expert who for some time has been familiar with the financial conditions both in this section of the state as well as others. "I believe that if a tabulation of the cost of police, fire protection and other public service were made and compared with the cost elsewhere it would be a revelation to the taxpayers in Grosse Pointe," he said.

Another expert who spoke in favor of consolidation of the five villages declared that administrative costs would be reduced approximately one-third. Even if each separate community became a city, it would result in a considerable saving, he pointed out, as the township government, described as an unnecessary overlay, would be abolished. Later, the separate cities could unite one with another, if it seemed advisable.

That the high cost of government in Grosse Pointe villages is due, at least in part, to the demands of the people for service rather than the extravagance of present office holders was admitted by several of the speakers who declared they thought Grosse Pointe officials sincere in thinking the cost of government to be as low as possible. However, one speaker referred to the expert who while a public official thought expenses could not be reduced but when he became a financial consultant knew they could be cut.

An official in one of the villages censured the citizens who show interest in their government only when they receive tax bills. No proposition put up to the voters has ever been turned down in his village, he stated. Interest of the taxpayers throughout the year as important projects arise is needed, he maintained. "Officials," he said, "are willing and eager to have

the help and advice of the citizenry in operating their governments. Many officials would like to make cuts in their budgets but fail to do so for fear of disfavor with those affected. If the people demanded the reductions, the officials would be glad to comply."

Belief that the people are alive today more than ever before to the necessity of cutting expenses of government, was expressed by one speaker who said: "When things were going along nicely, little attention was paid to our tax bills or our governmental work.

"But values are different today. In our business we have had to stop, take inventory and sometimes make drastic changes to effect economies. I don't see why we can't do in our communities what we have done in our business for the benefit of all the taxpayers.

"There never has been a time as opportune as now for accomplishing this purpose. We must look at the problem in a strictly business way. The people are up in arms and willing to do their bit now as never before. Just how the problem is to be solved, it is hard to say. It will not be an easy thing to accomplish. Opposition there is bound to be. But if we do not do something, what heritage will we pass on to our children, a government swamped with debt, the taxpayers so overburdened that delinquent taxes ever become greater?"

Focusing of public attention on the schools seven years ago when conditions became acute resulted in a bettering of the educational system, another taxpayer pointed out. "At that time," he said, "splendid results were accomplished. Success was due to the acute condition which aroused the people. I believe the present acute condition can be used to effect taxation. Before taking any action, however, I believe that a thorough study should be made with the help of expert consultants on municipal affairs."

An encouraging thing about the meeting was the frankness of the discussion and the fairness of the speakers to shoulder much of the blame as citizens who "did not take an interest" in their government. Apparently none present had political ambitions, but all wanted to see a fair deal for both office holders and the taxpayers throughout the community.

## FARMS' WATER GOOD

A report of the year's operation of Grosse Pointe Farms' new water filtration plant at Grosse Pointe Boulevard and Moross Road is being prepared by Norman Smith, Superintendent of the Department of Water Supply, who hopes to have it ready by March 1, 1932.

This will be a month ahead of the end of the year, but operating costs for the month of March will be estimated. It is expected that the Council will print the report for public distribution.

The people of the Farms voted for the proposal to erect the pumping station and filtration plant at a regular election after using water furnished by Highland Park and Detroit for some years.

Following approval by the people at a regular election, \$314,000 in bonds were issued April 15, 1930, to provide money for the undertaking. This amount provided funds for the pumping station itself as well as other related work.

No community in Michigan has a more modern plant. Constant supervision and regular tests insure an adequate supply of water free of harmful bacteria.

The water is cleared by what is known as the rapid sand filtration method. When the water comes in from the intake, which is about 1,800 feet beyond the "Farms" dock, it is first treated with aluminum sulphate in the "coagulation basin," to clarify it. Ammonia sulphate, one of the two chemicals used in the sterilization process, is also introduced at this time. The first dosage of chlorine is then added.

The aluminum sulphate, better known as alum, takes all suspended matter to the bottom of the tank. The clear water is then pumped to the filters where it passes through Ottawa silica sand, a special, uniform, high-quality sand used for this purpose. From the filters the water passes to the water reservoirs, where it receives its final dosage of chlorine. It is then ready for the high service pumps which force the water through the mains.

Although the chlorine plays a very important part in the treatment of the water only a very small percentage of it is used. The average content is one-tenth part of chlorine per million parts of water.

Step by step throughout the process of filtering and sterilizing the water, samples are taken and tests carried out by the chemist in charge. For bacterial analysis 35 samples are used every day. Besides, samples are taken every three hours day and night for routine general testing.

In more than six months the plant has been in operation no evidence has been found of any harmful bacteria passing through the high service pumps. The plant is governed by both State Board of Health and United States government regulations.

The disease most commonly spread through impure water is typhoid fever, according to Mr. Smith. Therefore, constant watch is maintained for presence of the bacillus typhosis. As this germ is hard to detect of itself, the chemist or bacteriologist looks for bacillus coli for they are almost always found together and the latter germ is much easier to detect.

Three things determine the quality of water from the standpoint of the consumer besides its freedom from harmful germs.

They are the degree of hardness of the water, its temperature and odor. It is the odor of the water, according to Superintendent Smith, that is responsible for a pleasant or unpleasant "taste." In all of these characteristics Grosse Pointe Farms, water is desirable.

The filtration plant has a capacity of six million gallons per day with a high service pumping capacity of sixteen and one-half million gallons per day. This, according to Superintendent Smith, is ample to take care of any demand that is likely to be put upon it.

Grosse Pointe for its population probably has a greater demand for water thrown on it during the summer months than any other community in Michigan because of the great number of lawn sprinkler systems used in the

area. On one day alone last summer five and a third million gallons of water were pumped through the system. However, the average consumption for the year is expected to be two million gallons per day.

A population of approximately 9,000 persons is now served by the plant. This includes the "Farms," Grosse Pointe Village and about one-half of Grosse Pointe Shores. The Shores is under a contract for one year and the Village for ten years.

The water rate on a quarterly basis in the Farms is \$1.50 per 1,000 cubic feet for the first 9,000 cubic feet and \$1.00 per 1,000 cubic feet thereafter.

At the last meeting of the Grosse Pointe Farms' council held Monday night, December 7, authorization was given for the employment of accountants to change the bookkeeping system to the standard form of accounting prescribed by the Michigan Public Utilities Commission.

A proposal that Grosse Pointe Shores contract with the Farms for its entire water supply failed to pass at the last meeting of the council the evening of Dec. 7. At the present time half of its supply is furnished by the Farms and half by the Detroit Department of Water Supply.

In addition to Mr. Smith, who also functions as village engineer, the plant personnel consists of a chemist, Sidney De Boer, a chief operator, Herman Dondero, and three operators, John Aukland, Ignatius Backman and Fred Dansbury.

### PARK NAME SUGGESTED

A petition bearing more than 250 names of citizens was presented to the council of Grosse Pointe Park last July, asking that the public park at the foot of Alter Road be named Lincoln Park.

No action had been taken on the petition up to December 26.

### NOT LIABLE

The Grosse Pointe Board of Education is not liable for payment of School District bond coupons dated May 15, 1931, for which the district deposited money with the Fidelity Trust Company as agreed in the bond where bondholders did not present the coupons for payment before the collapse of the trust company, according to a ruling by William S. Fitzpatrick, School Board Attorney. Claims for payment of the coupons had been presented to the Board but, according to the attorney, there is no money available under the law to pay for the coupons out of school funds. The holders must look to the bank for payment the same as any depositor.

Because the law definitely states that the bond of the School District Treasurer must be equal to the greatest amount of money he may have in his possession at any one time, arrangements are being made to increase the bond of Treasurer Charles A. Poupard to \$250,000. Mr. Fitzpatrick pointed out that it was mandatory on the School Board to provide the protection for the Treasurer. In addition a depository bond is required of each bank where

the School District money is deposited.

It has been the custom in the past, according to Mr. Fitzpatrick, to set a nominal bond and then raise it as occasion demanded. But this procedure, he contends, is not in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The Board of Education does not need to take out public liability insurance, Mr. Fitzpatrick ruled, except in the case of property owned by the School District and rented to others. It would be advisable, he declared, to have liability insurance on the old school on Mack Avenue, used for a church, as well as on several houses on Notre Dame Avenue. The attorney's recommendation was referred to J. R. Sutton, insurance counsel.

"Does an accident policy cover a broken tooth?" John R. Watkins, School Board member suddenly demanded at the Board meeting, Monday night, during a discussion of insurance problems by agents of rival companies and the Board's insurance adviser.

A store tooth in his mouth had become dislodged from its moorings. As the original accident had hap-

pened 11 years ago and the substitute had done duty all this time, it was thought that it would be impossible to collect at this time.

A revenue of \$2,929 has been derived up to Dec. 1 from tuition fees charged 46 students in Grosse Pointe schools who live out of the district, according to Dr. S. M. Brownell, Superintendent. The individual fee in the senior high school is \$200 per year; in the junior high, it is \$180 per year and in the elementary grades it is \$150.

Most of the students are those who lived in the district and wish to finish their schooling in the same place or those whose parents are planning on building in the near future and want their children to begin in the school as soon as possible to avoid changing later.

The financial report of Superintendent Brownell shows an expenditure of \$59,800.10 less than a year ago. This difference is partly accounted for by the fact that during 1930 a \$25,000 bond issue was paid off. But the report shows a saving of \$23,000 in operating expense over the previous year.

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The great principles of right and wrong are legible to every reader; to pursue them requires not the aid of many counselors.

—Thomas Jefferson.

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