



# Minnesota Journal

## Inside This Issue

A publication of the Citizens League

Farewell to welfare. — Page 2.

Property tax tables. — Pages 6 and 7.

'Grumpy old taxpayers.' — Page 8.

Volume 13, Number 10  
October 22, 1996

## Property taxes up \$148 on average-value metro homes

by Dana Schroeder and Lynn Reed

Average homeowners in most Twin Cities communities found higher property taxes when they opened their 1996 tax statements last spring. Property taxes rose in 1996 by an average of \$148, or 7.5 percent, on average-value homes in the 105 largest communities in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The growth in average taxes (to \$2,119) outstripped the 6.3 percent growth in average value (to \$117,093).

These are among the findings of the 30th annual homestead property-tax survey of Minnesota communities over 2,500 population, conducted jointly for the fourth year by the Minnesota Taxpayers Association and the Citizens

League. (Some parts of the analysis were done differently from past years. See box on page 5.) Other major findings:

- In the 129 nonmetropolitan communities, average homestead taxes grew more slowly than value and by less than in the metro-area communities. Taxes increased by \$61, or 6.9 percent, to \$942. The average-value homestead in the non-metro communities was \$68,452, 7.2 percent higher than last year.

- New Prague is the top-ranked metro community and Staples the top-ranked nonmetro community in a comparison of taxes on a simi-

larly valued home. This year the comparison is on a home assessed for tax purposes at \$105,000 in the metro communities and at \$65,000 in the nonmetro communities.

- Responsibility for high taxes in top-ranked communities is shared among taxing jurisdictions, with counties and schools playing a stronger role in top-ranked metro communities and cities and counties playing a stronger role in top-ranked communities outside the metro area.

**\$105,000 metro homes**  
New Prague, in school district 721, takes the honors this year for

the highest metro-area tax bill—\$2,280—on a home assessed for tax purposes at \$105,000. The \$105,000 home approximates the median-value homestead in the metro communities. Homeowners whose tax statement lists an estimated market value of \$105,000 should find their 1996 taxes similar to those listed here for their community.

However, depending on assessment practices, the actual selling price for such a house could differ from community to community—ranging from \$107,034 in Washington County's May Township to \$135,484 in Jordan.

Continued on page 3

## Charter schools stimulate achievement, system reform

by Joe Nathan

Minnesota parents, educators and policymakers want to see results, not just rhetoric about improving education. The charter school movement around the country is producing encouraging results—helping youngsters and producing broader improvements in public education. We in Minnesota can learn from success, not only here, but in states that have stronger, more effective charter laws. Strengthening Minnesota's charter law would produce more positive results.

Around the nation charter schools are moving ahead, despite vigorous opposition from major education groups. Their impact is dramatic:

- They are increasing student achievement and attendance, especially among young people from low-income and otherwise troubled families.
- They are stimulating broader system improvements.

### Achievement gains

Charter advocates don't deny that there are many troubled families and challenging youngsters. But as excellent public school teachers point out, problems *outside* schools, which deserve attention, should not be used as an excuse for little progress *inside* schools. In many communities, charter schools are making a big difference with youngsters, including those from low-income and non-English

speaking families. A few examples:

- Vaughn Next Century (Charter) School, which enrolls more than 1,100 inner-city, predominantly Hispanic youngsters in Los Angeles, has produced major achievement gains and dramatically increased parent involvement.
- The Sacramento, California, school board recently renewed Bowling Green Elementary's char-

Continued on page 4

# Farewell to welfare: Track impact, foster innovation

With the end of "welfare as we know it," the nation is rethinking how to meet the needs of low-income people and reordering the responsibilities of federal, state and local governments. As we embark as a nation on the "post-entitlement" era, it might be useful—though perhaps a little discouraging—to hark back to a 1984 Citizens League report, *A Farewell to Welfare*.

In the report the League concluded that:

- Minnesota lacked a consistent and comprehensive income policy for the poor.
- Too frequently means-tested programs did not provide recipients with a path to self-sufficiency.
- The income-assistance system was unfair, because it failed to target the most assistance to those who were neediest. (A disproportionate share of federal income transfers, for example, continues to benefit middle- and upper middle-income people.)

The League urged Minnesota policymakers to pay as much attention and give as much assistance to children as to the elderly and to see to it that those responsible for children actually fulfill their responsibilities. Finally, the League observed that myths about poor people, and negative value judgments about them, confound attempts to develop consistent and rational income assistance policy.

The League recommended that Minnesota establish a guaranteed annual income program, with all income support paid in cash and

## Viewpoint

by Lyle Wray

all payments taxable. Effective employment and social programs would supplement this effort.

A dozen years later, there is regrettably little reason to modify these conclusions substantially.

**The new framework.** Fast forward to 1996. Hundreds of pages of analysis have already issued forth from every corner on the federal welfare changes and their likely effects. The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits and others have been busy briefing the community. We can expect to hear much more as the most dramatic changes, such as limits on eligibility and targets for employment, kick in.

**Impact.** The Washington, D.C.-based Urban Institute has received about \$19 million to monitor changes in state and local laws and the effects of "devolution." Hennepin County has drawn a fairly grim picture of the effects anticipated among its residents. Philadelphia has estimated that 63,000 families will be cut off Medicaid in the next few years and local governments have acted to limit the use of emergency shelter to families with children.

Measuring such impacts systematically should not solely be the job of a nonprofit think-tank, nor the federal government. While there might be 149 lobbyists for each member of Congress, few of those lobbyists are

working on behalf of low-income individuals. Minnesota's Legislature and executive branch both must assess the effects and be prepared to respond to them as they occur. The Commissioner of Human Services, counties and affected nonprofits should be setting up and coordinating the monitoring of such indicators as foodshelf use, demand for emergency housing and entrance into paid employment.

**Innovation.** A number of public and private initiatives to help families on welfare become more self-sufficient have been taking shape in Minnesota over the past decade. Many have been funded by the McKnight Foundation and other foundation and corporate contributors. The Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP), for instance, removes much of the disincentive for work and provides support for families on the path to self-sufficiency. While promising, MFIP is unlikely to be enough to move thousands of recipients into employment quickly. An article in the October 6 issue of the *Washington Post* listed a number of innovations to assist low-income people to find jobs and to promote self-sufficiency. Minnesota and the rest of the nation need a clearinghouse and pipeline for disseminating innovations. Merely jiggering eligibility rules to prevent attracting "welfare migrants" in response to these developments—as some states appear to be doing—will not cut it.

**The road ahead.** Congress and the President enacted welfare reform as the nation appears to be reaching the end of one of the longest economic expansions in postwar history. What will happen when the inevitable business cycle downturn arrives?

The Twin Cities region already faces significant problems, with a very high disparity of incomes between urban and suburban areas. Core city poverty has been growing at a fast rate, even in these generally strong economic times. The realities reflected in recent news photographs of shotguns in broad daylight on city streets a mile from the city hall of our state's largest city will not help reinfuse economic life into parts of our core cities. And a human resources professional reports that 75 percent of those tested failed a drug test for reverse-commute, suburban jobs paying much more than minimum wage. Clearly, we have a lot of work to do, in addition to responding to federal and state law changes.

In his recent book, *Reflections of a Radical Moderate*, long-time public servant Elliott Richardson states that "rather than face up to really hard problems like the self-perpetuating cycle of inner-city poverty, despair, joblessness and violence—we allow ourselves to be diverted by...secondary issues." The Citizens League could add to the discussion with an update to the 1984 report, looking at ways to foster innovation and to carefully track impacts of these changes.

Lyle Wray is executive director of the Citizens League.

# Editors differ on how to end University's tenure 'crisis'

## On Balance

*"Diversity of opinion within the framework of loyalty to our free society is not only basic to a university but to the entire nation."*—J.B. Conant

"substantial portion" of the cost for a new stadium. It said some public funding is justified because of the cultural, social and economic benefits of professional sports. **Star Tribune** urged (Sept. 13) candidates to keep an open mind on the stadium issue until a detailed proposal has been put on the table. **Princeton Union-Eagle** said (Oct. 3) state legislatures are justified in investing in professional sports to help build the "spirit of the community and its overall productivity and success." It said legislatures should use venture capital and real estate developer consultants to negotiate a good deal and assure continuity of the franchise.

**Star Tribune** said (Sept. 18) Minneapolis voters should approve a new six-year, \$33-million per year school referendum. It said a successful referendum's biggest benefit will be stability. It said (Sept. 20) the St. Paul school district's lawsuit against the state, coming a year after a similar suit by the Minneapolis NAACP on behalf of Minneapolis students, will perhaps "jar lawmakers into addressing the unfairness of relying on property taxes for education. If educators take action, the courts won't have to." **Pioneer Press** said (Sept. 19) educational fiscal matters must be

resolved in the legislative chambers, not the courts. "Decisions on the appropriation of state money and the future direction of metro public schools should not be coming from courtrooms."

**St. Cloud Times** said (Sept. 22) Minnesota should reconstruct education spending priorities so that learning readiness programs are fully funded. **Star Tribune** said (Sept. 26) school officials must learn from the results of the sample state writing test that shows that 28 percent of 10th graders can't write at a minimally necessary level. It called on schools to refocus curricula on writing skills. **Duluth News-Tribune** said (Sept. 9) longer school hours for kids whose parents are working would be desirable, but expensive. "(I)t is not reasonable to ask taxpayers to help pick up the tab for after-school child care." It also said (Sept. 9) that parents have a right to know the test results for individual public school buildings. It endorsed (Sept. 12) plans by the state board of education to develop a report card assessing the performance of every public school in the state.

**Duluth News-Tribune** said (Sept. 13) federal mediation efforts attempting to resolve issues in the

BWCA should be given a chance. **Star Tribune** said (Sept. 21) two participants in the mediation process—Todd Indehar and Bruce Kerfoot—seem to want to win the argument before it starts. It said they should take part in the mediation on the same terms as everyone else.

**Rochester Post-Bulletin** said (Sept. 14) a 15 percent state-ordered increase in valuation of commercial/industrial property in Rochester illustrates the need for legislation to require more equitable treatment of different classes of property.

**St. Cloud Times** said (Sept. 6) the dilemma of Oak Hill Community School in St. Cloud—only six years old and already beyond capacity—points to the need for areawide comprehensive planning. The school serves a rapidly developing area extending into four townships beyond St. Cloud and ended up with 60 students more than anticipated for the opening of the school year. **Star Tribune** said (Oct. 9) questions over the size of the Metropolitan Council's proposed new "urban reserve" and the choice of a growth-options strategy seem "almost beside the point." "The real issue is whether the will and authority can be mustered—not only at the metro level but also at the local and state levels—to carry out the new strategy, and to exercise effective restraint on the spread of urban-density development."

# Metro area one of most highly segregated in country

From Examining the Relationship Between Housing, Education, and Persistent Segregation: A Preliminary Report, *The Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota, Summer, 1996.*

The Twin Cities area is among the most highly segregated metropolitan areas in the United States, with giant gaps between the worlds of whites and minority groups. This gap is exemplified by the well documented racial discrimination that minorities experience in applying

for mortgages. However, home ownership programs for low to moderate income buyers have been created, both privately and with local government sponsorship. Meanwhile, the Twin Cities' various municipalities continue to include elements of exclusionary zoning in their regulations and administrative procedures...

Segregation in housing and education in the Twin Cities seems to match current trends on the national scene. Innovative programs to

address problems both in education and housing are underway, but barriers to true integration, and a city where living and going to school is a positive experience for all of a metropolitan area's residents, are high and growing. If it looks like a precarious balancing act is being managed both by educational and housing policy makers, it is. Looking at both issues together may show a way to make growing up as a poor person of color an incidental factor to that person's choice of residence and

educational opportunities.

Overall, the conclusion of this preliminary report is that despite the implementation of several education and residential desegregation efforts, the Twin Cities metropolitan region remains highly segregated. Future research in phase two of this study will document this segregation in more detail, offer a more in-depth policy study of programs to address this problem, and offer recommendations for future policy development.

## The Minnesota Journal

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The Minnesota Journal (ISSN 0741-9449) is a publication of the Citizens League, a nonprofit nonpartisan Twin Cities public affairs organization, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415, Mike Christenson, president. Articles and commentary are drawn from a broad range of perspectives and do not necessarily reflect League positions on policy questions. The Journal is published once a month. Second class postage paid at Minneapolis, MN.

Annual subscription rate for nonmembers is \$40. Issues. Orders may be placed at 612/338-1414 or by mail at the above address.

Postmaster: Send address changes to The Minnesota Journal, 708 S. Third St., Suite 500, Minneapolis, MN 55415

# Property tax

Continued from page 1

The other four *highest* metro communities in the \$105,000 home comparison are (school district numbers are in parentheses):

**Waconia** (110), \$2,183; **Osseo** (279), \$2,127; **Brooklyn Park** (279), \$2,113; and **St. Paul** (625), \$2,113.

**Minneapolis** (1), at \$2,039, ranked 12th.

The average home values (for tax purposes) of four of these five highest-tax communities ranked in approximately the bottom fifth

among the metro cities, ranging from St. Paul, at \$76,719, to Brooklyn Park, at \$87,782. Minneapolis, at \$82,686, also fell in the bottom fifth. Waconia, at \$104,609, ranked in about the middle. Taxes on the average-value homestead (\$81,900) in top-ranked New Prague increased by 17.4 percent in 1996, well above the metrowide 7.5 percent average increase for average-value homesteads.

Relatively high county and school taxes—and, to a lesser degree, city taxes—played a strong role in pushing these cities to their top-10 ranking. Eight of the 10 top-ranked metro communities have county taxes ranking in the top 10; five have school taxes in the top 10 and six have city taxes in the top fourth

(three in the top 10).

New Prague had the highest city tax on the \$105,000 home, \$607, of any of the 105 metro communities; the 11th highest school tax, \$1,028 (out of 50); the sixth highest county tax, \$625 (out of 18); and one of the lowest special district taxes, \$19.

Like New Prague, the other four communities in the top five all rank toward the top in city, county or school district taxes:

- All four are among the top 16 in city taxes, with St. Paul ranking seventh;

- All four are among the top 10 in county taxes, with Waconia (Carver-

Continued on page 5

# Charters

Continued from page 1

ter, based on significant increases in student achievement and attendance. Before becoming a charter, Bowling Green was one of the district's lowest performing schools.

- Academy Charter School in Castle Rock, Colorado, had its contract extended after demonstrating clear academic gains.

- City Academy in St. Paul became the first charter school in the country to have its contract renewed, based on improvements in attendance, achievement and attitude for its students, all of whom were out of school prior to enrolling at City Academy. The National Education Association (NEA) has asked City Academy's lead teacher, Milo Cutter, an NEA member, to help other teachers start charter schools.

- Other Minnesota charter schools have come up for review and had their contracts renewed. These include the Cedar-Riverside and New Visions charter schools in Minneapolis, the Bluffview Montessori Charter in Winona and the Toivola-Meadowlands Charter in northeastern Minnesota.

Many other public charter schools around the country have had encouraging gains in academic results. Moreover, several studies, including one done last year by the Education Commission of the States, show that charter schools serve a higher percentage of minority students than other public schools in most of the states where they operate. A review of Minnesota charter schools by the University of Minnesota's Center for School Change found that during the 1995-96 school year more than 40 percent of charter school students were students of color, compared to about 13 percent of the state's K-12 population.

## System reform

Strong charter laws also introduce thoughtful competition, helping to stimulate broader improvement:

- The Massachusetts charter law allows charter applicants to get sponsorship from the state. After 18 of the first 64 applicants came

from Boston, the local school board and teachers' union agreed to create a new "pilot school" program, permitting educators to create new, innovative schools within the district.

- The Colorado charter law, which permits applicants to appeal to the state board if a local board turns down the charter proposal, helped stimulate improvements in several districts. One district, which for four years had tolerated a waiting list of 1,000 students for two innovative schools, replicated those schools soon after the charter law was adopted. Two charters also opened in the district.

- A Minnesota school board, which for a decade resisted parent requests for a Montessori public school, finally created one after a private, nonsectarian Montessori school requested a charter.

- After noting that a local university was considering sponsoring a charter school (and after turning down several charter proposals), the Duluth School Board is now advertising nationally for proposals to create a charter in an unused district building.

Unfortunately, more than half of Minnesota's charter school proposals have been turned down by local school boards. In one notorious case, a Minnesota school board voted four-to-three to reject the charter request from a district alternative school. The board then voted seven-to-nothing to commend the school's faculty for their commitment to youngsters. As one bitter teacher commented at the board meeting, "Neither vote impresses me."

While not every charter proposal should be approved, other states

have found they will have more strong proposals, and more system response, if applicants are allowed to go directly to the state for a charter. Minnesota permits an appeal to the state board only after a local school board turns down a charter proposal and only if at least two school board members vote for the unsuccessful proposal. Minnesota should follow the lead of Arizona, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Jersey, North Carolina and Texas and allow direct application for a charter from the state.

Allowing applicants to go directly to the state won't just produce more schools. It will encourage school districts to focus more on students' needs—just as Minnesota's Post-Secondary Options program has. More than half of the 400 high school administrators surveyed earlier this year by the Legislative Auditor reported that the program produced greater cooperation between high schools and colleges. It is helping students who stay in high schools, as well as those who take courses elsewhere.

## Education group opposition

Twenty-five states have passed some kind of charter legislation, with support from liberals and conservatives. But major education groups often oppose the strong charter legislation that allows more than one group to sponsor public schools and gives charter schools a waiver from many rules and regulations, in exchange for greater accountability of results.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), for example, points to the Rhode Island law as a model bill. But in more than a year since its adoption, the law hasn't produced a single charter. That's in great part because both the local school board and teacher union

must agree on any waivers from their labor/management agreement.

But people and organizations change. The Minnesota Education Association (MEA) vigorously resisted Governor Rudy Perpich's 1985 cross-district public school choice plan (open enrollment). Three years later an MEA survey found that 61 percent of its members supported the program. The MEA stopped fighting it. The MEA called charters "a hoax" in 1991; two years later the organization featured Milo Cutter, cofounder of the City Academy charter school on the cover of its statewide newspaper.

The National Education Association (NEA) "unalterably opposed" federal support for charter schools in 1991. Now the NEA has allocated \$1.5 million to help members start charter schools. AFT President Al Shanker insisted in 1993 that charter schools "won't fix anything," but a 1996 AFT report calls charter schools "a useful vehicle for school reform." Sacramento's teacher union opposed Bowling Green's original charter application, but supported its successful renewal application.

Citizen League members, who helped convince the Legislature to create the nation's first charter school law, should be proud of their role in this national movement. It's time to change Minnesota's law to better encourage what the Citizens League originally proposed: a program that will increase achievement and stimulate much broader system improvement.

No single change will solve all of education's problems. But the charter idea is no longer a theory. Evidence is accumulating that charter schools and strong charter laws help students.

*Joe Nathan directs the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute. He is a former public school teacher and administrator and is author of a new book, Charter Schools: Creating Hope and Opportunity in American Education, from which this article is adapted.*



On the move ...

# Property tax

Continued from page 3

er County) ranking second;

All four rank in the top fifth for school taxes: Osseo and Brooklyn Park, both in district 279, rank third, Waconia seventh and St. Paul 21st.

Minneapolis ranks ninth in city taxes, 11th in county taxes, 13th in school taxes and 23rd in special district taxes.

The five *lowest* tax metro communities in the \$105,000 home comparison are all townships:

**Forest Lake Township** (831), \$1,390; **Linwood Township** (831), \$1,467; **Columbus Township** (831), \$1,468; **West Lakeland Township** (834), \$1,484; and **Burns Township** (11), \$1,551.

Forest Lake and West Lakeland Townships are in Washington County; Linwood, Columbus and

Burns Townships are in Anoka County.

All of the bottom five communities rank among the lowest in municipal, county and school taxes:

- All are in the bottom fourth in city taxes, with West Lakeland Township ranking at the very bottom.

- All are in the bottom third in county taxes, ranking 12th or 13th out of 18 different county tax amounts.

- All are in the bottom half in school taxes, with Columbus, Linwood and Forest Lake Townships, all in district 831, ranking at the very bottom.

## \$65,000 nonmetro homes

Staples is the top-ranked nonmetro community in taxes on a hypothetical home valued for tax purposes at \$65,000—again, the approximate median for nonmetro average-value homesteads. The analysis shows that the actual selling price for such a home would actually range from

## What's different this year?

an estimated market value of \$85,000.

In a sense, then, communities with more accurate assessment were penalized by our rankings. If they assessed close to 100 percent, their chances of landing near the top of our rankings were enhanced. If not, it's likely their rankings would be lower and they would avoid the negative stigma of high rankings.

In an attempt to fix that perceived problem, this year's survey computes taxes on a set estimated market value, rather than a sales price. For metro communities that value is \$105,000; for nonmetro communities, \$65,000. This is the value that would appear on a homeowner's tax statement and takes no account of differences in assessment practices among communities. Also, this year, unlike in the past, the analysis does not account for the special targeted property-tax refund intended to help offset large increases in taxes, since homeowners must specially apply for that refund.

A high ranking in this comparison shows that a community has relatively high taxes per dollar of

\$65,723 in Olivia to \$88,315 in Ely.

The five *highest* tax nonmetro communities in the \$65,000 home comparison are:

**Staples** (2170), \$1,297; **Glenwood** (2149), \$1,214; **Long Prairie** (2753), \$1,131; **Princeton** (477), \$1,129; and **Wadena** (2155), \$1,088.

The average tax on a \$65,000 homestead in the 129 nonmetro communities in the survey is \$845.

All five top-ranking communities are in the bottom fifth in average-value homesteads—Staples (at \$29,604) is lowest of the 129 nonmetro communities, Wadena is sixth lowest and Glenwood is 13th from the bottom. In fact, Staples is the only one of the 129 communities in the survey where the average home value declined over the past year, dropping by 8.7 percent. The average homeowner in Staples, then, is paying lower taxes than on the \$65,000 home in the comparative example. Taxes on the aver-

age-value home in Staples are \$591, which ranks 111th among the 129 communities.

In contrast to the metro communities, relatively high city taxes and, to a lesser degree, county taxes played a strong role in pushing the nonmetro communities to the top of the rankings. Eight of the 10 top-ranked nonmetro communities have city taxes ranking in the top fifth (four in the top 10); five had county rankings in the top fifth (four in the top 10); and only three had school rankings in the top fifth (only one in the top 10).

Each of the five top-ranked nonmetro communities has at least one component of its taxes—city, school district, county or special districts—ranking in the top five:

- City taxes rank second in Glenwood and third in Staples;

- County taxes rank first in Wadena (Wadena County), third in

Continued on page 6

hypothetical \$65,000 home would be \$72,383. Taxes on that home, if it were assessed at full value, would rank third, rather than first. Ely, which has the lowest nonmetro sales ratio, 73.6 percent, would have a likely selling price of \$88,315; its tax ranking would jump from ninth in the rankings to first.

In the top-ranked metro community, New Prague, which has a sales ratio of 87.9 percent, the likely selling price of the \$105,000 home would be \$119,454. Taxes on that home, if it were assessed at full value, would rank second, rather than first. Jordan, which has the lowest metro sales ratio, at 77.5 percent, would have a likely selling price of \$135,484 and its tax ranking would jump from 15th to first.

It's important to note that, as in past years, the survey includes only owner-occupied homes, not rental properties, businesses or other types of property. Since taxes on these types of properties will differ from taxes on homes, the results of the survey should not be used to gauge taxes on other types of property.

Property tax

Continued from page 5

TABLE 1: TAX ON HOME ASSESSED AT \$105,000 IN 105\* METROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES, 1996

Community (School District)	Total Tax	Total Tax Rank	Likely Selling Price (SP)**	Rank on SP Tax	Community (School District)	Total Tax	Total Tax Rank	Likely Selling Price (SP)**	Rank on SP Tax
Afton(834)	\$1,559	99	\$119,318	90	Maplewood(622)	\$1,933	30	\$117,845	21
Andover(11)	1,653	86	113,759	92	May Twp.(834)	1,600	94	107,034	105
Anoka(11 )	1,756	67	116,150	68	Medina(278)	1,649	89	113,883	91
Apple Valley(196)	1,780	62	115,639	66	Mendota Heights(197)	1,578	98	114,629	99
Arden Hills(621)	1,784	60	117,713	55	Minneapolis(1)	2,039	12	116,667	14
Bayport( 834)	1,923	32	119,318	18	Minnetonka(276)	1,941	25	117,057	25
Belle Plaine(716)	1,973	19	124,113	9	Minnetrista(277)	1,844	48	119,183	39
Blaine(16)	1,699	79	113,883	85	Mound(277)	1,889	40	117,581	35
Bloomington(271)	1,719	73	114,379	81	Mounds View(621)	1,890	39	117,057	37
Brooklyn Center(286)	1,964	20	114,629	32	New Brighton(621)	1,785	59	117,978	50
Brooklyn Park(279)	2,113	4	113,883	15	New Hope(281)	1,832	50	114,880	58
Burns Twp.(11)	1,551	101	116,537	98	New Market Twp.(194)	1,819	54	111,465	76
Burnsville(191)	1,777	63	115,512	65	New Prague(721)	2,280	1	119,454	2
Champlin(11)	1,799	57	111,465	78	New Scandia Twp.(831)	1,581	97	124,703	70
Chanhassen(112)	2,064	10	116,408	12	Newport(833)	1,886	41	116,796	40
Chaska(112)	1,914	36	115,512	41	North Oaks(621)	1,648	90	110,526	100
Circle Pines(12)	1,773	64	115,258	69	North St. Paul(622)	1,826	52	115,132	59
Columbia Heights(13)	1,670	82	115,005	87	Oak Grove(15)	1,916	34	115,894	38
Columbus Twp.(831)	1,468	103	118,644	101	Oak Park Heights(834)	1,713	76	114,880	79
Coon Rapids(11)	1,662	84	114,629	89	Oakdale(622)	1,789	58	117,581	54
Corcoran(877)	1,766	66	122,235	42	Orono(278)	1,702	78	116,927	75
Cottage Grove(833)	1,714	75	116,537	73	Osseo(279)	2,127	3	107,362	44
Credit River Twp.(719)	1,663	83	124,703	48	Plymouth(284)	1,836	49	116,022	52
Crystal(281)	1,875	43	115,639	46	Prior Lake(719)	2,092	7	121,810	4
Dayton (11)	1,904	38	111,465	60	Ramsey(11)	1,662	85	115,132	88
Deephaven(276)	1,853	44	114,754	53	Richfield(280)	1,955	23	115,005	30
Eagan(196)	1,718	74	115,512	77	Robbinsdale(281)	1,852	45	114,255	57
East Bethel(15)	1,728	72	114,130	80	Rosemount(196)	1,935	28	114,754	43
Eden Prairie(272)	1,936	26	116,667	28	Roseville(623)	1,955	22	116,667	23
Edina(273)	1,826	53	116,537	49	St. Anthony(282)	2,058	11	113,759	19
Excelsior(276)	2,005	16	126,965	3	St. Francis(15)	1,909	37	117,845	27
Falcon Heights(623)	1,935	27	115,766	31	St. Louis Park(283)	1,934	29	115,258	36
Farmington(192)	1,915	35	115,385	45	St. Paul Park(833)	1,602	93	115,005	96
Forest Lake Twp.(831)	1,390	105	119,318	104	St. Paul(625)	2,113	5	116,667	10
Forest Lake(831)	1,559	100	118,243	94	Savage(191)	2,111	6	120,690	5
Fridley(14)	1,828	51	112,540	71	Shakopee(720)	1,929	31	120,968	16
Golden Valley(270)	1,975	18	115,766	24	Shoreview(621)	1,808	56	117,713	47
Grant Twp.(832)	1,651	88	122,807	62	Shorewood(276)	1,918	33	116,150	34
Ham Lake(11)	1,591	96	116,150	95	South St. Paul(6)	1,621	92	117,581	86
Hastings(200)	1,728	71	115,894	72	Spring Lake Park(16)	1,784	61	113,269	74
Hopkins(270)	1,999	17	118,644	13	Spring Lake Twp.(719)	1,683	80	119,863	67
Hugo(624)	1,651	87	117,188	84	Stillwater(834)	1,848	47	121,387	22
Independence(278)	1,852	46	119,048	33	Vadnais Heights(624)	1,751	68	117,978	61
Inver Grove Heights(199)	1,709	77	115,258	82	Victoria(112)	2,076	9	120,137	7
Jordan(717)	2,019	15	135,484	1	Waconia(110)	2,183	2	116,796	6
Lake Elmo(834)	1,738	69	117,581	64	Watertown(111)	1,961	21	115,639	26
Lakeville(194)	1,593	95	115,385	97	Wayzata(284)	1,952	24	117,978	20
Lauderdale(623)	2,079	8	119,726	8	West Lakeland Twp.(834)	1,484	102	115,385	103
Lino Lakes(12)	1,810	55	116,150	56	West St. Paul(197)	1,633	91	114,629	93
Linwood Twp.(831)	1,467	104	116,537	102	White Bear Lake(624)	1,770	65	118,644	51
Little Canada(623)	2,032	13	119,454	11	White Bear Twp.(624)	1,729	70	118,510	63
Mahtomedi(832)	1,883	42	119,048	29	Woodbury(833)	1,673	81	116,279	83
Maple Grove(279)	2,027	14	115,512	17					

\*The 104 communities in the seven-county metropolitan area with populations of 2,500 or above, plus Excelsior, which has a population of 2,357.

\*\*\*Likely Selling Price" is the \$105,000 assessor's market value divided by the median sales ratio for each city, as a way of adjusting for differences in assessment practices.

SOURCES: Minnesota Taxpayers Association and Citizens League

Princeton (Mille Lacs County) and fourth in Long Prairie (Todd County);

● School district taxes rank first in g Prairie;

● Special district taxes rank first in Glenwood.

The five *lowest* tax nonmetro communities in the \$65,000 comparison are:

**Harris Township (318), \$429; Grand Rapids Township (318), \$463; Becker Township (726), \$476; Mountain Iron (712), \$570; Grand Rapids (318), \$578.**

Harris and Grand Rapids Townships and Grand Rapids are in Itasca County; Becker Township is in Sherburne County; and Mountain Iron is in St. Louis County.

All the communities in the bottom five, except Becker Township, qualify for the state-paid taconite home-  
stead credit. The credit reduces taxes by half or more in those four communities. Becker Township has the lowest tax rate (73.259 percent) of any of the 129 nonmetro communi-

ties. Its school district enjoys a why tax base that keeps the tax rate low, due to the location of a large power plant there.

**Average-value homes**  
Taxes on average-value home-  
steads went up in all but 12 of the 105 metro communities in the sur-

vey. Increases ranged from \$1 in St. Paul Park to \$733 in Wayzata, while decreases ranged from \$1 in Maplewood to \$152 in Columbia Heights.

Taxes on average-value home-  
steads went up in 108 of the 129 nonmetro communities in the survey and down in 21. Increases ranged from \$1 in Plainview to \$227 in New London Township (Kandiyohi County), while decreases ranged from \$2 in Thomson Township (Carlton County) to \$111 in Rice Lake Township (St. Louis County).

Property tax bills for owners of average-value homes went up by 10 percent or more in 36 (or about one-third) of the metro communities in the metro area and in 23 (or 18 percent) of the nonmetro communities. The largest percentage increases were in St. Anthony (25.5 percent) in the metro area and in Becker Township in Sherburne County (32.0 percent) in the nonmetro communities.

*Dana Schroeder is editor of the Minnesota Journal and Lynn Reed is research director of the Minnesota Taxpayers Association (MTA). The MTA did the data preparation and analysis for the property tax survey. Copies of the complete tables reporting the analysis and of the methodology for the analysis are available from the Citizens League at 338-0791 or the MTA at 224-7477.*

TABLE 2: TAX ON HOME ASSESSED AT \$65,000 IN 25\* SELECTED NONMETROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES, 1996

Community (School District)	Total Tax	Total Rank	Likely Selling Price(SP)**	Rank on SP Tax
Austin(492)	\$824	69	\$74,371	58
Becker Twp.(726)	476	127	73,864	128
Cambridge(911)	1,038	10	73,948	8
Duluth(709)	939	26	73,363	30
Ely(696)	1,043	9	88,315	1
Faribault(656)	934	29	69,817	50
Glenwood(2149)	1,214	2	74,286	4
Grand Rapids Twp.(318)	463	128	71,116	129
Grand Rapids(318)	578	125	72,303	124
Harris Twp.(318)	429	129	75,758	127
Long Prairie(2753)	1,131	3	69,296	9
Mankato(77)	795	83	77,566	48
Montevideo(129)	1,071	7	71,903	10
Moorhead(152)	882	51	73,529	47
Mountain Iron(712)	570	126	71,823	125
Owatonna(761)	720	113	69,968	118
Plainview(810)	1,049	8	71,823	13
Princeton(477)	1,129	4	70,119	7
Rochester(535)	829	67	72,626	72
St. Cloud(742)	822	73	73,613	69
Staples(2170)	1,297	1	72,383	3
Thief River Falls(564)	1,078	6	81,454	2
Wadena(2155)	1,088	5	75,846	5
Willmar(347)	897	47	73,116	46
Winona(861)	798	80	78,031	41

\*The survey includes 129 nonmetro communities with populations of 2,500 or above and significant numbers of year-round homes. For space reasons only 25 communities are included in this table: the top 10 and bottom five nonmetro communities in the total tax ranking, plus the 10 largest nonmetro communities. The complete tables are available from the Citizens League or the Minnesota Taxpayers Association.

\*\*\*Likely Selling Price" is the \$65,000 assessor's market value divided by the median sales ratio for each city, as a way of adjusting for differences in assessment practices.

SOURCES: Minnesota Taxpayers Association and Citizens League

TABLE 3: TAXES IN SELECTED METRO AND NONMETRO CITIES, 1996

Metro Cities (\$105,000 home)												
Community (School District)	Total Tax Rank	City Tax	Rank	County Tax	Rank	School Tax	Rank	Special Dist. Tax	Rank	Average Estimated Market Value*	Tax on Average Value*	Rank*
Minneapolis(1)	12	\$490	9	\$461	11	\$1,002	13	\$86	23	\$82,686	\$1,380	79
Saint Paul(625)	5	517	7	552	9	961	21	82	29	76,719	1,247	89
New Prague(721)	1	607	1	625	6	1,028	11	19	64	81,900	1,524	69
Waconia(110)	2	460	12	653	2	1,043	7	28	60	104,609	2,171	35
Linwood Twp.(831)	104	263	74	428	12	746	50	30	59	77,624	893	104
Forest Lake Twp.(831)	105	193	97	411	13	746	50	40	55	118,611	1,661	61
Totals in categories**	105		105		18		50		65			105
Nonmetro Cities (\$65,000 home)												
Staples(2170)	1	\$477	3	\$431	5	\$388	44	\$ 1	68	\$29,604	\$591	111
Glenwood(2149)	2	496	2	286	49	402	35	29	1	42,449	793	83
Grand Rapids Twp.(318)	128	81	112	174	99	208	106	1	70	65,324	467	123
Harris Twp.(318)	129	58	122	169	100	201	107	1	70	80,200	692	95
Totals in categories**	129		129		104		109		71			129

\* While most of this table reports taxes on a hypothetical home assessed at \$105,000 for metro cities and \$65,000 for nonmetro cities, the last three columns report taxes on average-value homes, as assessed for tax purposes, in each community.

\*\*Counties often have more than one tax rate for library services or parks, because cities may provide these services themselves.

SOURCES: Minnesota Taxpayers Association and Citizens League

# 'Grumpy old taxpayers' may oppose school spending

*Business Week* (Sept. 16) recently reported on a new Massachusetts Institute of Technology study confirming that elderly folks are more likely to vote against increases in school spending. Economist James Poterba, the study's author, found that states with a larger share of their populations over age 65 spend substantially less per pupil, even after adjusting for regional differences. Poterba estimated that an increase in the elderly population from 11 percent to 13 percent would cause per-pupil spending to drop by almost five percent.

This "grumpy old taxpayer" syndrome adds up to big effects over the long run: The growth in the percentage of elderly to 18.7 percent of the U.S. population in 2030 will lead to a 10 percent decline in per-child spending from its 1990 level, Poterba calculated.

It's enough to chill the spines of people in Minneapolis and elsewhere who hope to persuade taxpayers without schoolkids to support excess levy referenda.

But consider this, too: Minnesota's school enrollment is projected to grow 22,000, to a peak of 848,000, between the 1995-96 and 1999-2000 school years. Burgeoning enrollments will put the pressure on to build new schools. Older schools built in the 1950s and 1960s need major refurbishing and upgrading to support computer and technology use and to become more accessible. In 1995 the Minnesota Department of Education estimated that total spending on school bond issues would be \$550 million per year through 2000.

Schools will have little choice but to convince those "grumpy old taxpayers" of the merit of their levy requests.—*Janet Dudrow.*

"That Was Then, This is Now," a document prepared recently by the University of Minnesota, reports progress on a number of measures over the past 10 years. Among the tidbits:

- Class hours taught by full professors: 1986—23 percent; 1995—40 percent;
- Average class size reduced 23 percent on Twin Cities campus, 11

percent systemwide;

- Freshmen living on campus: 1986—45 percent; 1995—70 percent;

- Four-year graduation rate (all campuses): 1986 entering class—9.9 percent; 1991 entering class—18.7 percent.

- Number of entering students satisfying the university's preparation requirements: 1985—17 percent; 1995—85 percent (College of Liberal Arts and Institute of Technology, 95 percent);

- Freshman applications: up 24 percent in past two years. Among new freshmen in fall 1995, 67 percent were in top quartile of their class.

The comment of Tom Swain, the University's acting vice president for institutional relations: "Change may not be rapid enough to suit some critics, but it is a damn sight faster than I think many sense is the case."—*Dana Schroeder.*

**Urban renewal**—like, for real? Historically, urban renewal programs have had an abysmal record. But one program in the Livable Communities Act has had a noticeable, if modest, impact on urban redevelopment in its first year.

The Tax Base Revitalization Program (TBRP) run by the Metropolitan Council has earned some quick and encouraging results by providing financing for contaminated site clean-up. In the first of two grant cycles, the program gave out \$3.8 million in grants to clean up 50 acres in 11 sites that were located predominately in the central cities and first-ring suburbs.

So far these TBRP grants have leveraged more than \$40 million in private investment, along with \$7.7 million in additional public money (for new infrastructure, etc.). In just one year, these sites have seen an increase in net tax capacity of \$1.7 million, according to figures provided by Hal Freshley, director of the program.

## Take Note

*Tidbits to interest even the grumpiest.*

At such a rate, he said, money invested in this program will pay itself back in two years. In all, this investment also is expected to produce more than 1,000 new jobs, averaging \$11.77 an hour, when construction projects are completed.—*Ron Wirtz.*

**Looks like it's** going to be hard to tell the difference between the School Boards Association and the MEA around the Capitol next session. It appears the major education groups have, in fact, agreed on a common agenda for the '97 session: Get the spending caps lifted, get an increase in the per-pupil amount on top of that and stop vouchers.

Nothing controversial. The superintendents' association, for example, won't be pushing (as it usually does) for changes in the bargaining law next year. Why antagonize the unions (the thinking went) in a year when we need their help to get the money?

So, it's up to the Governor and to legislators to insist that, in return for the money, the public get the changes that will make the K-12 system one that truly puts students' interests, rather than adults', first.—*Ted Kolderie.*

**At a recent Citizens League** study committee meeting, Jennifer Bloom, director of the Minnesota Center for Community Legal Education—an outfit that teaches kids and teachers about law and civics—observed an interesting connection

between schools and civics. "If we want to teach kids to be good citizens—if we want to espouse democracy—we'd better be sure that school itself provides a model of effective democracy," she said.

Bloom was quick to caution that effective democracy doesn't mean that teachers or students get to make all the decisions. But when the powers-that-be *do* delegate decisions, they had better abide by the decisions that are made.

Too often, she said, schools adopt participatory styles of management, but fail to decide in advance who will be permitted to make what decisions. It's a familiar and unfortunate scenario: Kids are asked to pick a school dance theme, but the principal vetoes their choice. Parents are invited to participate on a site-management team, but the district nixes their suggestions. Teachers are asked to propose new curricula and their advice is ignored.

The result, Bloom suggested, is that kids come to believe that participation is meaningless and futile. It's their first step toward becoming cynical, apathetic citizens.

Bloom's observation suggests some advice to school officials who are trying to develop a more collaborative approach to education: Be clear about which decisions you're keeping to yourself and which you'll let go. Then let go. And think of it as a civics lesson for the young'uns.—*J.D.*

*Contributors to "Take Note" this month include Minnesota Journal and Citizens League staff members.*

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# Citizens League Matters

October 22, 1996

News for Citizens League Members

## Welcome New Members

**Jim Koppel**  
**Beverly Kottas**  
**Gerard McCullough**  
**Jim Rickabaugh**  
**Eric Schubert**  
**Laura Sether**  
**Alison Thayer**

*Thank you to  
recruiters*

**Mary Anderson**  
**Shel Lang**  
**Connie Morrison**  
**Jim Newland**

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pol/citizen/](http://freenet.msp.mn.us/ip/pol/citizen/)

The Citizens League promotes the public interest in Minnesota by involving citizens in identifying and framing critical public policy choices, forging recommendations and advocating their adoption. Suggested dues for membership are \$50 for individuals and \$75 for a family membership. Other categories are also available. For more information on membership, please call 338-0791.

## Retreat reveals sobering reality for policy-makers

Six community and political leaders painted a decidedly grim picture on the region's current policy reality at a Citizens League Board of Directors retreat on October 2. The session, hosted by Board member Pam Neary at her Afton home, was the first of two retreats at which the Board will develop the League's annual work plan.

Speakers were Metro Council Chair **Curt Johnson**, *Pioneer Press* editorial writer **Steve Dornfeld**, Rep. **Dee Long** (DFL-Mpls.), **Jim Koppel**, Children's Defense Fund, Hennepin County Commissioner **Peter McLaughlin**, and **Pam Wheelock**, director of the St. Paul Department of Planning and Economic Development.

**Curt Johnson** said that our region's most complex and difficult problem is the absence of a coalescing crisis. Because the region has not had to deal with economic or social crisis, as some other areas have, we're superbly in the middle.

According to Johnson, the Twin Cities region has become quite skilled at tinkering with what works pretty well. "We're very good at admiring the problem," he said, "but we don't do well at cross-sectoral analysis of problems. We don't usually make a point of assembling disagreement. Our civics are too much like churches and our churches are too much like civics."

**Steve Dornfeld** expressed dismay at the lack of understanding of the Twin Cities as a metro region. During the process of interviewing legislative candidates, he discovered that not only couldn't they agree on the problems we face today—they didn't even agree on the problems we faced twenty years ago let alone solutions.

Rep. **Dee Long** (DFL-Mpls.) commented on the increasing partisanship in the Legislature. Much of the tension comes from the sense that either side could capture the majority, she said. Legislators are operating on a very short-term horizon and aren't looking past the next election, partly because the power structure will change dramatically after the next reapportionment. Long believes that ultimately the public has to be involved in something other than knee-jerk reactions.

**Jim Koppel** also commented on the sense of paralysis setting into the public policy arena. People feel disenfranchised and they have checked out, he said. He thinks the power for solutions has to come from the community—getting people involved in a bottom up way. According to Koppel, "it's messy, it takes longer, but it's what gets things done."

**Peter McLaughlin** said community institutions are the key to remedying many of today's problems as well as handling additional responsibilities

recently spun off from the federal government.

**McLaughlin** said government must identify and fix inefficient programs and spending, and be held accountable for the services that it is supposed to provide. But neighborhoods and citizens must be involved in the process. He said government must engage the citizenry in a different way.

**Pam Wheelock** said that our society has lost the ability to solve problems in a collaborative manner. This includes government, as many public agencies are forced to chase the next pot of money to fund next year's programs. She said government loses sight of the big picture, and forces programs into "boxes" in order to receive funding. As a result, there is no comprehensive problem-solving strategy that ties related programs together.

Taken collectively, the remarks were a very sobering and disturbing picture of our current political and policy reality. Their pessimism offers both a challenge and an opportunity for the League. The opportunity is that there is much policy work to be done. The challenge is that in such a gloomy climate good ideas might not thrive or generate financial support. At its next meeting, the Board will begin structuring a response to the civic decay articulated at the first retreat. Clearly solutions to these problems will come harder than the diagnosis.

# Building community, part one: dollars, sense and vision

## National experts discuss impact fees, cost of development and community design vision

The next Mind-Opener policy series, "Building Community," will feature nationally-renowned speakers with unique insights into issues of regional growth and development.

Part One of the two-part, six-session series will look at issues surrounding the cost of development, and take a close look at the pros and cons of impact fees. It also features a unique community visioning process that can help governments, developers and homebuyers determine the shape of growth and development.

The series will begin on Monday November 4 at 11:30 a.m. with

**Robert Freilich.** Mr. Freilich is a nationally-recognized expert on zoning, regulatory takings and impact fees. He will provide an overview of impact fees and their application in Minnesota.

**Tony Nelessen,** Associate Professor at Rutgers University's Graduate School of Urban Planning and Policy Development, will speak at 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 7. Mr. Nelessen has over 25 years of professional experience in the fields of architecture, planning and urban design. He will discuss neo-traditional development, community planning and the applica-

tion of his Visual Preference Survey (TM).

The series will conclude with a 11:30 luncheon on Friday, November 15 featuring **Gene Bunnell**, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Professor Bunnell will discuss the cost of development, and critique the common usage of fiscal impact analysis by municipalities.

In December, Part Two of "Building Community" will provide insight on specific programs and developments which are literally creating liv-

able communities. Invited speakers include **Bob Lanier**, Mayor of Houston, **Paul Brunsell**, the Project Director for Middleton Hills, a New Urbanist development in a suburb outside of Madison, Wis. and **Curt Johnson** of the Metropolitan Council.

The series will be held at the Thunderbird Hotel, 2201 E. 78th St., Bloomington. Cost is \$20 for members and \$25 for non-members. Thanks to Glenn Dorfman and the MN Association of Realtors, AIA-Minneapolis and the Metropolitan Council for their financial assistance.

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## Markets do the funniest things: Mind-Openers look at innovative public services in Oregon and Indianapolis

Most observers agree that welfare reform and other proposed devolution efforts by the federal government will require state, county and local governments to assume more services and responsibilities—sometimes with little or no additional funding. Voter backlash against higher taxes has warned government officials at all levels that they have to do a better job of controlling spending, while continuing to provide good service.

Many cities and states are finding innovative approaches to providing quality public services. Foremost among them are the City of Indianapolis and the State of Oregon. This Citizens League Mind-Opener series will explore how Indianapolis and Oregon approached this problem.

**Babak Armajani** opened the series on Tuesday, October 15

with an overview of the trends and innovative approaches to achieving high performance in public services.

**Michael Williams**, Chief Financial Officer for the Indianapolis Department of Capital Asset Management, will speak at 11:45 on Tuesday, October 22. Indianapolis is considered one of the forerunners in competitive contracting and other innovative government approaches to performance. Mr. Williams will discuss this program and other innovations taking place there.

This series will conclude on Monday, October 28 with a 6:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m. meeting featuring former Oregon governor, **Barbara Roberts**.

**Barbara Roberts** is currently director of the Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government at Harvard

University's Kennedy School of Government. She was governor of Oregon from 1991 to 1995. During this time she developed more than 20 initiatives to make government more efficient. She will discuss those efforts undertaken during her tenure to improve public performance in Oregon.

The meetings are at the St. Anthony Main Event Centre, 219 SE Main Street, Minneapolis. The cost is \$15 for Citizens League members and \$20 for non-members. For more information please call 338-0791.

Special thanks to the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Glenn Dorfman and the MN Association of Realtors and the W.E. Lahr Co., on behalf of Bumper to Bumper Auto Parts and Diesel Service Co., for their financial support of this special series.

## League financial audit completed

The Citizens League completed the fiscal year that ended August 31, 1996 with revenue of \$506,845 and expenses of \$508,473 for a shortfall of \$1,628. Revenue was slightly ahead of budget for this year and \$30,000 ahead of last year. Expenses also exceeded budget - by about \$12,000 - and were \$30,000 more than last year.

The Citizens League also established an endowment fund at the St. Paul Foundation during FY96. At June 30, 1996, the fund balance was \$66,704.

Total League fund balances (not including the endowment fund) ended the year at \$43,315 compared to \$64,943 last year. The decline is due to the transfer of money contributed to the endowment fund before it was officially established.

For a copy of the audit please call the office at 338-0791.