

Fraser again shuns city life - Ann Arbor leader buys house in nearby township once more

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News Staff Reporter

When he took the job as Ann Arbor 's city administrator four years ago, Roger Fraser bought a house in Scio Township, saying homes were "pricey ... too small, too expensive" in the city .

And when it recently came time for him to move again, Fraser bought a home in Webster Township - again eschewing the city limits.

The administrator's choice of residency outside the city limits has drawn a mixed reaction from political figures and residents.

Fraser earns \$145,354 as the top paid city employee. Webster Township tax records show the sale price of the home was \$417,150 on June 29. If the house is assessed at the sale price, Fraser 's property taxes in Webster Township would be about \$7,000, compared to about \$9,800 for a home with the same price in AnnArbor .

"The issue for us was to find space enough to accommodate 10 grandchildren," Fraser said. "We searched for two years, including the city of Ann Arbor . We found what we needed with a price we could manage" in Webster Township.

No laws or requirements mandate that Fraser live in the city . And he said he felt no obligation to buy in Ann Arbor .

"Otherwise, I would," Fraser said. "My responsibility is to serve the city . I also have a responsibility to my family and to meet my family's needs. I give the city the biggest share of my awake hours every day."

City Council Member Wendy Woods said she didn't think Fraser 's choice of a home in Webster Township was newsworthy.

"The bottom line is people have to do what is best for their family," Woods said. "We do have a lot of really great employees that don't live in the city . People have to do what is best for their families."

Council Member Marcia Higgins said Fraser 's choice is "disappointing." She said a perception exists that if you live in the city , you are more in tune with the issues.

"You can be here a lot of your waking hours, but it is a job," Higgins said. "The recommendations we give him increase people's taxes. But they don't apply to him."

Tim Colenback, vice chairman of organization for the Ann Arbor Democratic Party, said he is skeptical that Fraser couldn't find a house in the city .

"It seems ridiculous to me he couldn't find a house within the city limits that couldn't accommodate occasional visitors," Colenback said. "A lot of people who live inAnn Arbor have grandchildren of that number and find a way to cope. I think it is very unfortunate and sends a bad message to people looking to relocate to AnnArbor who have similar needs."

Ron Suarez, who won the primary election in the 1st Ward for the City Council and is running unopposed in the general election, said Fraser should be allowed to make personal choices.

"I have a problem where the city has gotten to the state where people will often make these choices because of how high our real estate taxes are," he said.

Ann Arbor resident Ellen Sabor said she remembers a small community outcry the first time Fraser decided to live outside the city limits.

"It must not matter to him," she said.

Sabor said it bothers her slightly, especially since he's now done it twice.

"I would expect the city administrator who draws a city paycheck to live in the city ," Sabor said. "If he chose not to because the taxes are too high, what is he doing on the job?"