



## Ticket fines plummet, threatening new court

Compassionate cops may be lenient during woeful economy.

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Clinton Township court officials say traffic ticket revenue is on the decline, and compassionate cops may be part of the reason.

Fines from the tickets are down by tens of thousands of dollars a month in recent months, according to judges and administrators in 41B District Court. The shortages range between \$35,000 and \$80,000 per month.

"That's way below our targeted projections," said Judge Linda Davis, the chief judge in the tri-community court system.

The fines are the primary source of revenue to pay off a \$13 million bond issue that was used to finance a new 47,000-square-foot court building, now under construction on Groesbeck Highway.

Members of a committee monitoring the construction project said they were alarmed to see the cash shortfall and have developed plans to address it.

One high-ranking police commander said Michigan's sour economy plays a role in the decline of tickets being handed out for traffic offenses on the township's roads.

The commander said some officers may be giving drivers, especially unemployed ones, more verbal warnings or writing up only one offense instead of several.

Police Chief Fred Posavetz said while that may be true, it's only a partial answer.

"There is a very real possibility that some of our officers are feeling sympathetic to people because of the economy," Posavetz said. "Most officers get into police work because they have a strong sense of community and want to help, and maybe we're being a little more empathetic."

But the chief said there may be other factors such as recent cutbacks in the department caused by the decline in state revenue sharing. That means more officers are focusing on serious crimes and

less time on speeding drivers, and spending more time on processing their reports and evidence because of manpower reductions.

"Also, it's not surprising in tough times to see people with no jobs turning to crime to meet their needs, so our felonies are up," Posavetz said.

There has been a downturn in drunken driving arrests, which generally bring in a good deal of money for the courts in fines, and civil infractions. A large portion of the fines go to the state, so if there's fewer tickets being written, there's less money for the local communities in terms of fines.

For example, the state of Michigan receives \$40 for every \$65 civil infraction, leaving only \$25 for the local court. But for speeding cases, where the fine is \$120, the state still receives its \$40, leaving the remainder for the court system.

Court Administrator Kim Silvestro said the court has enhanced collection efforts to bring in outstanding fines that haven't been paid by defendants. Since the effort was launched four months ago, it brought in \$543,000, Silvestro said.

The court also has saved money by not filling vacant positions, Davis added.

The 41B District handles cases for Clinton Township, Mount Clemens and Harrison Township. If cash shortfalls continue, the money likely will have to come out of the general funds of those communities, officials said.