

THE OAKLAND PRESS

Residents foot bill for Phoenix Center

The city of Pontiac has invested \$22 million in constructing the so-called "state-of-the-art"

Phoenix Center Amphitheater and Plaza (No promoters show interest in Phoenix Center, Oct. 17).

It is a government project, like so many others, that private enterprise would never touch because it makes no financial sense. The proof is that when the city sent out a request for proposals to operate the center, not one potential operator submitted a proposal.

So what does this mean for the city of Pontiac, which is already suffering severe financial distress?

The answer is simple. The taxpayers get stuck with the bill for

building the Phoenix Center and, worse, get to annually pay the bill for maintaining or providing a subsidy for the facility, which is rarely used.

Growth Group Interim Director Sandy-Michael McDonald said he "was shocked" when the city got no bids to operate the facility. He added, "One thing I've learned from all this is that we are competitive."

So are we to conclude that no bids is the city's

definition of being competitive? In the face of the embarrassing fact that no private promoter is interested in the facility, we're informed that "3,000 new, perma-

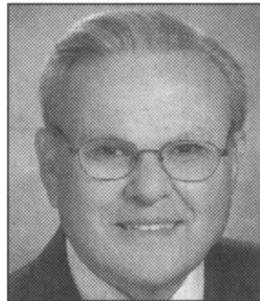
nent seats will be put in during the next few months to replace temporary seating." Apparently it's acceptable to increase investment in a losing proposition as long as taxpayers are footing the bill.

Finally, Mayor Clarence Phillips said, "That's a beautiful venue up there — maybe we can use other ways to take advantage of venue." You would think that by now, following the Strand Theatre and Phoenix Center disasters, Pontiac politicians would see the light and stay out of the entertainment business.

City officials have enough to do trying to provide basic city services such as police, firefighting and sanitation.

Waterford Township resident Louis Schimmel is director of municipal finance for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

GUEST OPINION



LOUIS SCHIMMEL