

# the farmington enterprise & observer

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## Does Industry Love Farmington?

### Industrial Progress Reviewed

By DAN McCOSH

Factory smoke doesn't belch much from Farmington stacks, and the Rouge River is still mainly water at this end.

The briefcase is more common than the lunch pail in what most people would describe as a "bedroom community."

Still, about 3,700 people go to work every day in local industry, and the long-term future of Farmington's industrial areas is a major concern of those attempting to plan the growth of the area.

Hardly a sprawling industrial complex, Farmington now lists about 128 industrial firms, according to the chamber of commerce.

The largest is Omni Spectra Corp., at 24600 Halwood Ct., a designer and manufacturer of electronic components.

The smallest is Elmer the Welder, 31650 W. Eight Mile, whose president, Elmer D. Ormsted, does industrial welding mainly by himself.

In between are small firms and branch offices of large corporations which manufacture, design and sell a large variety of products.

Industrial property accounts for about eight per cent of the \$371 million assessed valuation of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

There is a slightly higher proportion of industrial property in the Hills, mainly because it is the location of the industrial park.

A study from Farmington's assessing office indicates in-

dustrial land accounts for 3.79 per cent of the tax rolls, but contributes over seven per cent of the valuation.

It is this kind of tax bargain that makes city officials look kindly on industrial expansion.

Services demanded by local industry are generally low, compared to any kind of residential construction — tax revenue is normally high.

The nice things about industry are often tough to see, obscured by clouds of smoke and foamy water. But Farmington has at least one built-in protection.

"Actually, the area isn't extremely attractive to industry — mainly because there isn't a railroad," was one candid comment.

As a result, heavy industry is non-existent, and unlikely to even be contemplated locally.

Looking over the list of plants, it is apparent a lot of them aren't even industry in the usual meaning of the word.

Many are sales offices, warehouses and points of distribution for products manufactured elsewhere.

White Castle hamburgers and supplies are stored in the industrial park for distribution, as are Japanese radios; via Panasonic, tape for 3M Co.; and fork-lift replacement parts at Elwell-Parker.

Actual manufacturing is done in only a minority of businesses.

A typical Farmington industrial tenant tends to make no more noise than the



IF NORTHWESTERN Highway isn't extended, says Oakland County Road Commission Chairman William Richards, there won't be any other alternative to handle the 52,000 vehicles estimated daily 1980 traffic volume on the

easterly segment of the proposed extension. Richards says Oakland has been making regular annual payments of \$90,000 in debt service on the 1957 bond sale and will compel the state to fulfill its contract obligation.

sound of a truck shifting gears, and emits no more smoke than necessary to heat the place in the winter.

With the exception of several concrete-products companies along Grand River, the output tends to be small items that come in small, neat packages.

Few are major employers — only nine of the 128 claim more than 100 employees.

These are Adler Tool and Gage, Diamond Automation, Mills Products, Orni Spectra, Perkins Engines, Selastomer Detroit, T.H. Brehm Co., United Kettering and W.W. Sly Mfg.

With the decline and sale of the Star Cutter plant, the Farmington School District is the biggest single employer in the area.

Star Cutter, which once employed about 600 in the

manufacture of cutting tools, joined the LaSalle Winery as the kind of major manufacturer that is on the way out in Farmington.

White Motors, which recently purchased the Star Cutter plant, represents the typical kind of service-oriented "software" industry that is moving in.

White, a major component of truck and automotive components, is planning to move research people from Sterling Heights and California to a new center in Farmington.

About 80 people in basic research and design will eventually be employed at the White center, and one wag commented "even the janitors will have a bachelors degree."

The White move is significant because it is the first plant move-in credited to the

work of the new industrial development committee, set up by then — Township Supervisor Robert McConnell, now Farmington Hills' mayor.

McConnell appointed Russ Gilbert, Lester Collings, Ed Lane, Bob Smith and David Stader to the committee.

The list included Gilbert, a City of Farmington resident, although it caused some comment from the township board.

McConnell expects to incorporate more input from "old city" people as the committee becomes more active.

White is also the first company to be considered for active economic concessions. Still being negotiated is the idea of financing part of White's investment through municipal revenue bonds.

Economic incentives com-

ing from an affluent suburb are unusual, usually coming from depressed, job-hungry areas.

The future of this kind of approach remains to be seen. The industrial park, located at the junction of two expressways, has seen the most growth recently.

There have been four new tenants, and several major expansions in the park this year.

Richard Tupper, head of the Industrial Park Assn., says there is a steady demand for the lots.

His biggest headache this year has been traffic problems, partly resolved, stemming from the construction of the expressway in the area.

The park with its spacious, well-planned sites and landscaping, is living

proof industry and residential communities can live from depressed, job-hungry areas.

An industrial sales pitch always includes the notion that being a five-minute drive from work is kind of nice.

But there are many communities, particularly in the Detroit area, which are offering a similar pitch, and not all of them have been successful.

The Winery property, the still-vacant Arrowsmith Tool and Die plant, and the long vacancy of the Star Cutter property are warnings that all is not rosy in the future.

There is a constant pressure at the zoning level for some kind of re-zoning of industrial land.

Some parcels have gone this way most recently: a piece near the industrial park, now slated for a

high-rise motel.

Other industrial land goes to non-industrial use, like the tennis club in the industrial park.

While this means little in the way of planning, a potential tax source is lost to the community, since industry pays taxes on machine tools and inventory, while non-industrial users do not.

Attracting industrial tenants to the remaining property, particularly the older, vacant plants, will be the main problem of the industrial development committee in the future.

The long-term future of industry is a nice, comfortable tax base, but the average Farmington breadwinner will still head out of town each morning, for a long time to come.

## To Be Or Not To Be

# Which Way Northwestern?

By JACKIE KLEIN

The Department of State Highways and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) take conflicting stands on the need for a proposed \$53 million extension of Northwestern Highway through Oakland County.

In the first day of testimonies Tuesday at a special House committee hearing in Pontiac, SEMCOG representatives termed the proposed 3.6 mile extension from Telegraph to planned M-275 in Clarkston a "marginal improvement" over existing facilities.

A SEMCOG report, requested by the State Highway Dept., advocates upgrading arterial roads instead of further freeway construction.

State Highway officials

maintain Northwestern will be in trouble if the extension isn't built and the improvement will have a "tremendous impact on the entire freeway system."

SEMCOG's plan was lauded by committee co-chairman Rep. Michael Novak (D-Detroit) as more conducive to local residents.

Controversy erupted this summer with allegations that private developers pressured highway officials to speed up the project.

Keith Bushnell, of the State Highway Dept., denied charges the SEMCOG report had been suppressed until Gov. Milliken forced its release Monday.

Bushnell claimed Tuesday the report was a "technical memo," which isn't necessarily to be made public, and the study analyzed a limited corridor area instead of the

entire road system.

He said the SEMCOG report indicated there isn't a capacity problem on Northwestern, but the study assumed Oakland County roads would be widened to five lanes.

Committee chairman Rep. Philip Mastip (D-Hazel Park) commented the State Highway Dept. ignored the SEMCOG study in its highway report.

"The highway department views the extension as a link to a system. SEMCOG looks upon it as a regional artery to serve local residents."

About 80 per cent of the projected 100,000 trips per day on Northwestern would begin and end along the proposed freeway strip and only 20 per cent would be through traffic, Mastip commented.

Travel along Northwestern as proposed would double, he added.

Jim Trainor, director of SEMCOG, testified the state highway department is in daily contact with the regional government unit and "suddenly the highway department is aware of our different conclusions."

Trainor said the 1990 regional transportation network plan indicates a shift from freeways to upgrading arterial roads.

Northwestern was inherited from the Transportation and Land Use Study (TALUS). One advantage of a freeway is that land use can be controlled. We could deal up with strip development such as exists on

Eight Mile and on Telegraph."

Trainor, however, maintained development isn't inevitable along Northwestern unless there is "a reasonable chance to make a reasonable profit." He added he doesn't favor the extension beyond Orchard Lake Rd.

Gary Krause, program manager for transportation and land use planning for SEMCOG, commented that the Northwestern corridor can be served by I-696 to reach M-275.

Cost of construction of the freeway would be less than annual savings for drivers, he said, but added pressure on Southfield Rd. and Lodge Freeway could eat up some of the savings.

Krause said arterial roads need improving whether or not the freeway is built, but admitted the SEMCOG region could meet only 30-35 per cent of its road needs in the next 20 years even with matching federal funds.

"The money is there to build the Northwestern freeway, but not for arterial roads."

Irving Rubin, former assistant to State Highway Commissioner John Mackie and former director of TALUS, testified construction of the Northwestern extension has been considered since 1926 as a route from Detroit to out-state Ludington.

In 1957, \$25 million in bonds were sold for Northwestern improvements, but other projects took top priority, he said.

"There weren't any commitments as to when to build the extension. Mackie's 10-year plan projected completion of preliminary planning for the improvement by 1967. Development in Oakland County doesn't depend solely on highways. Sewer and water tends to stimulate development."

"Northwestern is designated as a federal aid primary route eligible for 50 per cent federal funding out of a limited pot."

"I'm never worried if developers wanted to make millions or homeowners wanted to sell land or politicians wanted to get their ticks. Pressure is part of the game and I was subjected to pressures for and against the freeway."

Mastip commented the State Highway Dept. has a liability to honor the contract with the Oakland County Road Commission and bond holders to complete the Northwestern extension to M-275.

"It'll be an interesting lawsuit," Rubin reflected. "If developers are purported to reap financial benefits from Northwestern, the legal profession shares it."

"The highway department ran out of money, but never ceased promising to build the extension. The fact that the highway department hasn't been sued by Oakland County bears out the fact that there wasn't a definite commitment. You can't project available revenue in advance."



WELCOMING Gilbert Williams, (far right), who will head White Motors' new Farmington office, are Ed Gilbert and Bill Flattery, of the Farmington Chamber of Commerce. (Evd photo)

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## Gill Road Paving Set?

Gill Road, a muddy track that bogged down school buses and caused the closing of two schools this spring, may yet be paved.

The Oakland County Road Commission will finance half the cost of paving, despite the recent incorporation of Farmington Hills, according to Acting City Manager Floyd Cairns.

Financing was in doubt

when the city was incorporated, since cities are responsible for maintenance of most of their own roads.

Arguments between the school board and the old township board about sharing the cost lasted several months, delaying the project until after incorporation.

Cost estimates are well above early rough estimates