

editorial opinion

Senior citizens need housing in the Hills

This is a note to all of you folks out there celebrating the Farmington Hills City Council's decision to place an advisory referendum on the November ballot concerning the wisdom of zoning for senior citizen housing.

Remember, it's an advisory question. The determination of whether there will be senior citizen zoning in Farmington Hills rests in the same hands it did more than a year ago when the decision was first made—with the city council.

At issue is the zoning, designated RCE-1, which would allow construction of multiple dwellings for the elderly up to 60 feet high.

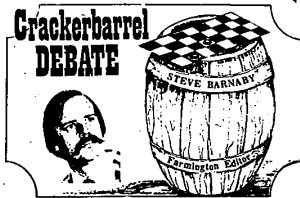
For a couple of years now, this issue has been banging around town, causing all sorts of rumors and feeding on many imagined fears.

About the only thing this election will do is cause a lot more of the same. But in the end, the question will be identical: What is Farmington Hills going to do to provide affordable housing for older residents of this community?

The question is rhetorical—the answer obvious. The only alternative in a civilized society is to ensure that the adequate housing is provided. Studies show that within the next 30 years a vast proportion of Americans will be senior citizens.

Admittedly, not everyone of those persons will have to live in rent-subsidized multiple dwellings. But most will.

The realities are undeniable. Housing, as most of us realize, is expensive under the best of circum-

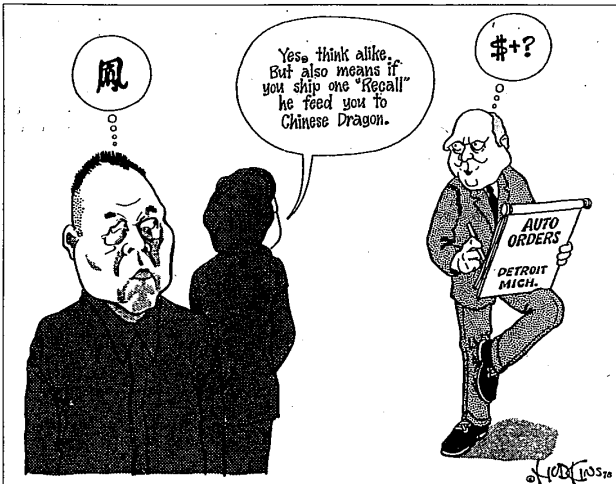


stances. Single-family housing nearly is unaffordable for many Americans.

Unfortunately, too many persons are the proverbial ostriches who would rather keep their heads buried than admit the economic truths.

But Americans fear growing old. Some of the most ardent opponents of the senior zoning concept are persons who soon will be classified as elderly. Their incomes will be fixed, their children moved away from home. That safe, secure home will suddenly be a burden to maintain, both physically and economically.

Give some deep thinking on this issue when you hear the arguments for voting against the RCE-1 issue. Someday you may find the need to live in a 60-foot-high multiple dwelling in Farmington Hills.



Auto show chairman

An optimist about cars

My bookie tells me it's 3-to-1 you have met personally at least one of the 257 new car dealers in the metropolitan area. He makes it even money on your having done business with one or more of their showroom salespersons. They're a fascinating lot, right?

You may be among those who have chortled upon the closing of a deal in the thought that you got the best of it, realizing your trade-in really wasn't worth as much as you were allowed.

Or, you still may be after the salesman's hide, screaming foul epithets because your windows fell out half a mile from the dealership.

Take this as fact: No matter how pious he may be in other directions, the customer looking for a change in automobiles, new or used, can be just as conniving as the horse trader across the desk.

Whoever is the best closer wins.

Now comes a nine-day truce. The customers get to share glitter and glamour with the sales folks, from industry moguls on down the line, all putting their best foot forward. The showcase making this possible is the 63rd Detroit Auto Show, opening Saturday at Cobo Hall.

LEO CALHOUN, a Ford dealer who lives and does business in Plymouth, is this year's show chairman on behalf of the sponsoring Detroit Auto Dealers Association.

Like virtually all of his colleagues, Leo is an optimist. He likes to think big, think favorably. I am sure that at birth up in Cassville he already was chalked in on destiny's drawing board as a car salesman.

"The show drew 443,000 people last year, and I think we'll do even better this time—maybe close to half a million," he told me a few days ago. Then he added:

"At our own agency, calendar 1978 was the best sales year in our history. I think '79 will be a good year too. The way the first quarter has started out it may be even better. I'm optimistic."

Realize, if you please, the 52-year-old Calhoun is speaking with the background of one who has been in auto sales since 1950, the year he graduated from U-M. After sales and management roles with four different Detroit area dealerships, he bought out Paul Weidman Ford in Plymouth in 1962.

Listen to him again about the Auto Show, which runs through Sunday, Jan. 21.

"IT USED TO BE that the show was held in the fall," he said. "Several years ago we switched it to January to gain sales impetus. Has it paid off? Damn right it has.

"I have had a super committee to work with. Every member has devoted tremendous time to



setting up the plans. We've also had great help from Dan Hayes, executive vice-president of the dealers association.

"Every car dealer knows that the annual show translates itself into increased automotive interest. That means sales. Every dealership of all major American and many foreign manufacturers will have sales personnel on the scene. They'll be taking orders right there as well as building their prospect lists.

"Our theme is 'Best of Everything.' This describes exactly what the public can expect to see."

MOST OF THE TIME, the public sees only the dollar side of the automobile trade. The pressure right from the corporate top makes this necessary.

By the time the demand for results has been relayed from division sales manager to zone manager to field manager to dealer, only sales count.

Many a family can tell you of another, warmer side.

It isn't just of the vehicles dealers have donated to drivers' ed programs in our many high schools. It isn't only of the generosity of auto interests in providing engines and other trifies for students to work on in their shop classes.

The Soap Box Derby was made into a worthy world-wide event for kids by Chevrolet dealers for many years. Punt, Pass & Kick has filled a needed niche for Ford in reaching families through youth.

Plymouth's Trouble Shooter program in which this year alone the representatives of Chrysler-Plymouth are offering \$245,000 in scholarships and other prizes is another example of brilliant marketing and public relations.

At the Auto Show, thank Leo and the dealers of all makes for things like that as well as for showing you pretty cars and pretty girls.

Regional rapid transit: Narrowing the choices

Detroit is the only major metropolitan area that fails to provide public rapid transit for its residents.

It's probably understandable because it is the Motor City, and its economy is dominated by persons who build and sell automobiles.

Michigan as well as Detroit has one of the best freeway systems for moving cars in the nation.

With the questions of availability of fuel in the future and its cost, public transportation is becoming one of the main issues affecting people in Greater Detroit.

Other major metropolitan areas have been working on their public transportation systems for decades. There is no possibility Detroit or Michigan can catch up quickly because there just isn't enough money around to do anything but make a startling gesture.

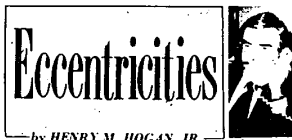
THE FEDERAL government has granted south-east Michigan \$600 million for a regional transportation system. The problem is that the region must come up with a 20 per cent match—or \$150 million.

While several plans have been considered, there are now really only three on the table.

The first alternative is an all-bus proposal, including increased Dial-A-Ride in Oakland, Macomb and western Wayne counties with the addition of commuter trains from Ann Arbor and Mt. Clemens to Detroit similar to the SEMTA-Grand Trunk line presently serving the Pontiac-Detroit route. It would also include a "people mover" in Detroit which would surround downtown Detroit with a system similar to the people mover that connects Fairlane Shopping Center with the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn.

This could be accomplished with the funds available.

THE SECOND proposal adds to the first a light rail or streetcar-type of transportation out Woodward Avenue to Eight Mile Road at surface grade except for a small portion underground in the downtown Detroit shopping area.



This would require more than \$900 million from the federal government, which is probably available; but the local match of \$250 million is not presently anywhere to be seen without new taxes.

The third plan would be like the second but would be completely underground from downtown Detroit to Six Mile (McNichols) and at surface grade to Eight Mile.

This would require more than \$1 billion from the federal government and \$290 million in local match.

The subway system, when completed, would cost less to operate than the all-bus system by nearly \$1 million a year.

THE QUESTIONS now are: Should we try to raise the extra money and build the subway and make a start for the future when these lines could be extended farther out Woodward and into Macomb and western Wayne counties?

Or should we live with what can be built with available funds now and probably never have a rapid transit system because escalating costs would make it impossible?

It's not a simple question, but it must be answered in the next six months by the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.

(The columnist is a SEMTA board member.)

Those drab, costly plates

Some reflections on the 1979 auto license plates: I don't understand why the incumbent secretary of state must put his name twice on the envelope we receive with the order form for our plates. Every company, every politician, every individual puts his name on the envelope once, if at all.

In this year's packet is a pink slip explaining why license plate fees have gone up. But Richard H. Austin doesn't put his name on that.

Actually, I do understand what he is doing. The incumbent secretary of state seeks free advertising on favorable or neutral material but keeps his name off tax material that might get the voters sore. It's Austin's way of campaigning at public expense.

In the 1978 campaign, you hardly ever saw him. The Austin campaign was almost non-existent. The reason is that he had been campaigning with state envelopes and state TV ads for eight years.

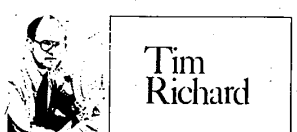
By the way, if you have a friend who has received a driver's license suspension notice, ask to look at it and see if you can find Dick Austin's name.

ZOLTON FERENCY, whose chances of being elected to anything are so slim that he can afford to tell the truth, once remarked that the secretary of state's only job is to pick the license plate colors, and he botches even that.

He was talking about James Hare when he said it, but the comment applies to our 1979 black and white plates, the drabest and most unimaginative in anyone's memory.

Austin must be getting some heat for this year's selection, because his public information officer this week sent out a fact sheet on the topic. It says:

"Colors are selected based on strong visibility factors of color combinations. In a study conducted



several years ago, the conclusion stated; 'Legibility is best when letters and background have high contrast such as black on white or the reverse.'

The quote is from T.W. Forbes of the psychology department and the Highway Traffic Safety Center at Michigan State University. Austin's name can be found in the letterhead, in very small type. In other words, he's not proud of the 1979 plates.

MICHIGAN'S 1976-8 plates, with their combination of a flag theme and the waves of the Great Lakes, were the most distinguished in the nation, in many folks' views.

Another dandy is Colorado's, with the letters on a silhouette of the Rocky Mountains.

FUNNY THING about the license applications we received in the mail:

There are return envelopes so you can subscribe to the Michigan Natural Resources and Michigan History magazines, but no return envelope to the secretary of state—Dick Austin's oversight.

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