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Task force recommends EDC for county

By TOM LONERGAN

A county task force will recommend to an Oakland County Economic Development Corp. (EDC) be created.

EDCs, first permitted by state law five years ago, allow local units of government to help businesses obtain financing for expansion.

Late last year, a group of five businessmen, all members of the North Oakland Chamber of Commerce, requested the county consider an EDC. County Executive Daniel Murphy appointed a task force, which earlier this week decided to recommend Murphy propose establishing an EDC.

assistant planner with the county and advisor to the EDC Task Force, EDCs were designed to benefit small to medium industrial and commercial businesses — those usually employing fewer than 100 persons.

Corporations, such as General Motors or Ford, "don't have much need" for EDC financing, Kaczmarek said, but could use it. "They generally go to their own (financing) sources," he added.

An EDC may float up to \$10 million in bonds. But Kaczmarek said that since 1974, when EDCs were first set up, most bonds issued have been in the \$100,000 to \$1 million range.

THE EDC BENEFIT for communities, Kaczmarek said, is more jobs and an increased tax base.

But several township supervisors at a task force meeting Monday in Pontiac said they feared a county EDC would take away some local control.

"People are scared every time the next higher level of government gets into anything," said James Reid, supervisor of White Lake Township.

Task force members emphasized that state law gives local governments the final say over any EDC project in their area, including tax abatements an EDC may recommend.

While an EDC could not grant a property tax break for a business, Kaczmarek explained it could propose one in conjunction with EDC financing.

According to Jeff Kaczmarek, an as-

the City of Detroit has done. The final decision on a tax break is the local government's, he added. Tax breaks for industrial and commercial businesses are allowed by state law.

EIGHT LOCAL governments in Oakland County have EDCs, including Pontiac, Avon and Waterford townships and the City of Walled Lake. Four municipalities are considering them.

The effect a county EDC would have on local EDCs is not clear.

Task force member Harriet Rotter, a lawyer from Farmington Hills, said it may not be practical for local EDCs to continue "if the county is doing its job."

And while several task force mem-

bers said it's not the county's intent to have an EDC in competition with local EDCs, that's what worries Pontiac Township Supervisor Robert Grunick.

Rather than create an EDC, Grunick said, the county should have a department to "hire industrial and commercial businesses." That department would direct businesses to a local EDC "to handle the project," he said.

TASK FORCE members said the advantage of a county EDC would be a larger staff plus a broader base from which to select an EDC board.

If an EDC is created, a minimum nine-member standing board would be

appointed by the county executive with county board approval. Three of the nine EDC board members would be county government officials. Others, according to Kaczmarek, could be drawn from other areas such as financial institutions, developers, lawyers and planners.

Two interim board members would be added from an area for which a project is being considered.

The EDC board would be primarily involved with the financing of a project, task force members said. New developments and business expansions

would still have to meet all the local zoning and other requirements.

Catherine Cartwright, of the state commerce department's office of economic development, said the first question about EDCs usually involves local autonomy. "Some communities don't want development," she said, "and that's perfectly legitimate."

But she said county EDCs have several advantages over local ones, including a better chance of getting federal funds for administrative costs and to act as an information source for possible plant or store locations throughout the county.

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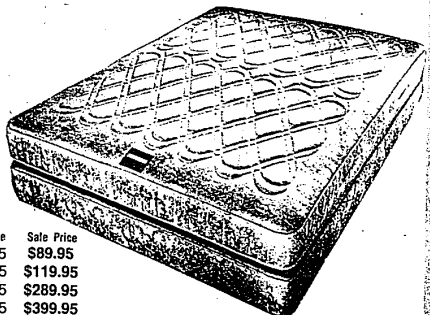
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