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Delays plague Orchard Lake as costs rise

Pipelines will be modified along the 2.8-mile stretch of Orchard Lake Road scheduled to be widened. Local officials had hoped part of the road would be widened this year.

The Panhandle Eastern Pipeline Co. and Consumers Power Co. are expected to start modifications on their pipelines within the next three weeks.

That will be the first step in the construction phase of the Oakland County Road Commission's largest road widening project.

Construction bids for the \$7 million project will be taken later this year, said John Grubba, managing director of the road commission.

The county will widen Orchard Lake Road — from Twelve Mile in Farmington Hills to Maple Road in West Bloomfield — from two lanes to five.

"We have notified (the utilities) that approval has been received from the Federal Highway Administration, which will fund the utility modifications as part of its 75 percent contribution to the project costs," Grubba said.

Utility work must be completed before the road can be widened.

The road commission is acquiring property for right-of-way along the north-south route through the two communities.

PANHANDLE MUST strengthen its pipeline for the full five-lane width of the planned roadway. The pipeline traverses the road near the north end of the project.

Consumers must depress and relocate its pipeline, which extends in the right-of-way on the west side for the entire length of the project.

The combination of heavy traffic and closely spaced turning movements has made the existing two-lane paved road one of the most hazardous in the 2,486-mile county road system, Grubba said.

Orchard Lake Road is the only north-south collector route in a 10-mile span of heavily populated sections of Oakland County.

It links to I-96 — the only east-west freeway in the county that connects the area with Detroit and Lansing.

At the north end of the project is the terminus of Northwestern Highway, a four-lane divided route that links to two other important freeways — I-696 and US 10.

Instead of a major interchange area, the road commission will expand the present intersection with turning lanes and two north and two south lanes.

THE WIDENING project has been delayed often.

Listed as a top priority project for

the Oakland County Road Commission in 1978, it was delayed to 1979 while an environmental analysis was completed.

In January, OCR Chairman Fred Houghten told the West Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce the project would be delayed again due to a federal law the commission hoped to have waived for the project.

But federal agencies wanted the commission to acquire all rights-of-way for the project prior to letting bids for construction.

In January, Houghten said the commission might be able to let contracts by June at least to start storm drains and utilities work.

"Waiting for federal and state approvals is ridiculous, but that's the way it is," he said.

Seventy percent of the project will be paid for with federal tax money. The rest will be paid by Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield.

During construction, temporary roads 11 feet wide will be used on both sides of Orchard Lake Road.

These are to be converted to eight-foot paths for pedestrians and bicycles when the roadway is completed.

"This will be the longest single widening project the road commission has ever attempted. It will also be the most expensive, both because of its length and because construction costs have greatly increased over the years.

"In just the two years this project has been programmed, the cost estimate have been revised upwards from \$3.2 million to \$7 million," Grubba said.

He added that a better idea of actual costs will be known when construction bids are taken later this year.



Meet our new queen

All smiles is Vicky Jean Whinnery following her crowning as Miss Farmington 1979, at Vladimir's Restaurant. Miss Whinnery now takes over the duties of Pam Prichard, Miss Farmington 1978, and will reign over the Farmington Founders' Festival. For the story and more pictures, see today's IB.

State aids campaign launched to house retarded

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Neighborhood presentations and homes designed to be as unobtrusive as possible are two of the ways in which Michigan's Department of Mental Health is quietly fighting for retarded residents to become accepted by the rest of the community.

With the cooperation of the Michigan Department of Management and Budget, the department is advertising for private investors to help construct community homes for mentally retarded persons in Oakland, Wayne, Macomb and St. Clair counties.

One of these homes is located in the Farmington area.

The project is designed so the department can offer homes suitable for physically handicapped, retarded persons.

Although the homes are modified to accommodate wheelchairs, they are designed to blend in with existing housing in a neighborhood, according to Virginia Saffronoff, property manager and leasing agent with the Michigan Department of Management and Budget.

Built with brick or aluminum siding so they will be easy to maintain, the homes have three bedrooms and two baths. Private investors, contractors or builders will construct the home following state specifications. The state will lease the building for 10 years and take care of snow removal and lawn maintenance.

Each home will cover 20,000 square feet. Basements are omitted from the plans.

BEFORE CONSTRUCTION each neighborhood will be checked by Saffronoff's department. State law requires that homes for mentally retarded persons must be at least 1,500 feet away from other homes.

Zoning regulations covering the neighborhood will also be checked. The departments won't ask for zoning variances.

With extras required by the state such as ¾ inch plasterboard and smoke detectors in every room, the homes will cost between \$75-\$93,000 to build, according to Saffronoff.

So far, three leases have been processed by the department, the result of a newspaper ad campaign.

The homes will be used to augment the existing Macomb-Oakland Department of Mental Health program. The program uses existing houses for its program.

The attention to detail is part of the Department of Mental Health's counter argument against fears of residents who believe that the homes for the retarded will hurt the area's property values.

"WE WANT HOMES we can be proud of 10 years from now," said Jerry Leismar, director of community service development for the Macomb-Oakland Regional Center.

That's the theme of the presentations the department gives to concerned neighbors of the community homes. So far this year, the department has put on between 100-150 presentations.

They aim at dealing realistically with neighborhood fears.

So far, there are 50 group homes in existence in Macomb, Oakland and St. Clair counties. At most, six retarded persons live in each home.

The community home setting allows the retarded resident an opportunity to make up for gaps in his education caused by living in an institution. I setting. Such day to day chores as eating with utensils, learning to communicate and using a pay phone are part of the educational process of living in a community home.

County waits on federal funds for congested intersection

By MARY GNIEWEK

Short term improvements are in the works, but Oakland County Road Commission officials say that a major road redesigning project for the 10 Mile-Grand River area is still uncertain.

The project, initially slated for completion this fall, was rescheduled behind another county road commission project now underway at Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi.

Now officials say the amount of funds available for 10 Mile-Grand River, estimated to cost in excess of \$500,000, will depend on the amount spent on the Novi project.

"We're allowed a specific amount

each year. This years funds are committed to Grand River and Novi roads," said William Fogini, director of transportation planning for the road commission.

"We are only given tentative promises from the Federal Highway Administration, so we can't make promises. The funds are limited.

"We don't expect to hear (from the federal government) until sometime in November. New monies are put into circulation Oct. 1."

Meanwhile, traffic signs that proclaim the right lane of eastbound 10 Mile near Research Drive, which is the main entrance to the Farmington Industrial Park, a "right turn only" lane will be posted within two weeks.

"The work is out to our crews," said county traffic official Gerald Holmberg.

HOLMBERG ADDED the commission's proposed program for 1980 is being prepared now, but will ultimately depend on available funding.

"There's going to be a public hearing in November. We expect to get input then," he said.

Another interim project now underway: installation of a traffic signal at 10 Mile and Research Drive within a month. The city of Farmington Hills will spring for one third the cost, \$1,435 and the county the other two-thirds, \$2,870. Work has already been dispatched to Detroit Edison crews.

These measures are intended to cut heavy traffic flow and provide better control in an area Farmington Hills Public Service Director Ralph Magid characterizes as "potentially high hazard."

Ten Mile between Research and Grand River has been the site of several accidents this year, including two fatalities.

The 10 Mile-Grand River widening project, plus complete widening of Grand River will relieve quite a few problems," Magid said. "But federal participation funds are not yet available."

The federally funded project would include widening 10 Mile from two to five lanes.

Youth hit at festival

An 11-year-old Farmington youth suffered contusions and possible internal injuries after being hit by a car in the downtown Farmington center park.

ing lot during the Farmington Youth Festival Friday morning.

Timothy Allen Homwyzyn, of 22819 Brookdale, was admitted to St. Marys Hospital in Livonia.

The youth was pinned against a game booth by a car that bucked 40 feet out of a parking space and into the wooden booth.

According to eyewitness reports, the youth was leaning against the side of the booth playing a game of darts when the mishap occurred at 10:54 a.m.

No ticket was issued against the driver, 71-year-old Joan Nelson McNicol, also of Farmington.

Ms. Ballmer plays Clara

Shelly Ballmer, daughter of F. H. Ballmer of Farmington Hills, appears in the Michigan Repertory 79 production of "Hay Fever."

She plays the comic role of the maid, Clara in the rather Bohemian Bliss household. This longtime favorite summer play presents the Bliss family in a rather eccentric weekend frolic. The mistress of the house is a recently-retired empress of the London stage who creates high comedy from the boredom of domestic life. The Noel Coward comedy plays on Aug. 2 in Power Center for the Performing Arts in Ann Arbor.

Ms. Ballmer is a University of Michigan senior who will complete her B.A. in theater.

Tickets are available at the box office or at Hodson ticket outlets.



That's some balloon

So found out staff writer Chuck Rink when he wandered out to Twelve Mile and Drake to take a ride on the big hot air balloon. Helping to inflate the balloon is Lucretia Ray. For Rink's reaction to his ride, turn to Monday's Commentary on Page 8B. (Staff photo)

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FREE BEER AND PIZZA

Believe it or not Willoughby Wink has decided to run as a candidate for the Farmington Hills City Council. To see what his political ambitions have to do with his favorite food, turn to Monday's Commentary on Page 8B.