

Shifting patterns

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 between 1970 and 1978, average household size in the region declined from 3.3 to 2.9 persons per household. The most obvious effect of the smaller family has been empty school buildings in cities like Livonia and Southfield, which a decade ago were growth spots. Greater demand for multiple unit housing is another sign, Hustoles said. More than 50 percent of the households

across the country are childless, he said. In the Detroit, which probably has the highest percentage of elderly residents in the region, the childless household rate is 60 percent.

While more than half of all building permits issued in the region during the 1970s were for single-family houses, more than 40 percent of these new houses were built in such once-rural areas as Livingston County. SEMCOG links this event with major enrollment declines in the older urban and suburban school districts.

Most of the multi-family housing construction was in the three-county Detroit metropolitan area during the 1970s, but Hustoles says that may change.

"We're going to see more and more of that. I think they (multiple family units) are being built almost everywhere," he said.

SINCE 1970, the number of mobile home sites in the region more than doubled from 18,400 to 40,800.

The rapid increase was simply due to the detached single-family houses becoming too expensive, says Hustoles.

"Certainly the traditional single-family home is fast getting out of the reach of a large percentage of our population," he said.

The three-bedroom brick houses that filled the farmlands of Livonia and Warren during the post-World War II years cost \$15,000 or \$16,000, Hustoles said, and were purchased by people making between \$7,000 and \$9,000. Today, the same kind of houses sell for \$50,000 to \$60,000 "when people are maybe making \$20,000 to \$22,000," Hustoles added.

"The ability to buy that kind of house is not in their grasp," he said.

SUBURBAN SPRAWL has changed to the point where SEMCOG planners

divide the area into three categories — urban, suburban and rural. The older suburbs of Royal Oak, Southfield, Birmingham, Dearborn, Livonia, Redford Township, among others, are now called "urban."

Most of the older suburbs closest to Detroit lost population since 1970, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's preliminary 1980 census figures. But the number of dwelling units increased in many communities, another indication of smaller family size.

Despite the 1970s' trend of growth in Livingston County, western Oakland County and some Macomb County townships like Harrison and Shelby, Hustoles predicts an "in-filling of the closer-in areas."

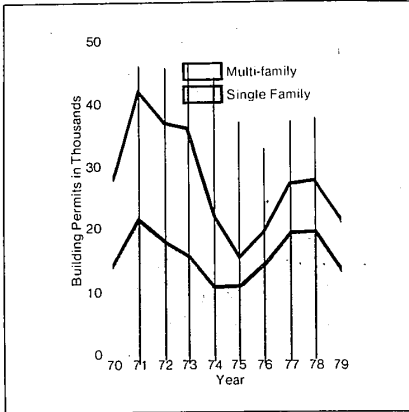
His reason: "Energy plus the general costs of the infrastructure — schools, sewers, roads."
 "People have now become aware it's

'Rapid population growth always carried mixed blessings to all, save the real estate industry.'

— Michael Glusac

very, very costly to continue to move out and out.
 School construction is one area where sprawl has been expensive, Hustoles points out. He cited one Macomb County school district which has closed

six schools while six miles north, new schools are being built in a neighboring district.
 Said Hustoles: "That's where the inefficiency comes in."
 Next: Industrial growth and jobs



Residential building permit trend in southeast Michigan. (Chart provided by Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.)

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