

County told to develop contacts with business

By Tim Richard
Staff writer

Oakland County is becoming a hotbed of high-technology industries which should be encouraged, the County Board of Commissioners was told.

But commissioners who wondered how county government is to do it were left scratching their heads.

The book-length plan submitted by the 19-member Business Attraction and Expansion Strategy Committee was strong on words like "cooperate" and "coordinate" but vague on who is supposed to do what.

But the group's philosophy was clear and emphatic: County government should "establish a stronger and more service-oriented relationship with the business community."

THE I-696 FREEWAY corridor through Southfield and Farmington and the I-75 corridor through Troy were identified as a "destination area" for high-tech and robotics firms.

And Joseph Champagne, Oakland University president, asked commis-

sioners to "initiate a concentrated effort to facilitate development of the Oakland Technology Park" in Avon and Pontiac townships.

The 1,800-acre park is bounded by I-75 on the west, University Drive on the north, Oakland University on the east and M-59 on the south.

Champagne visualized it as ranking in importance with the "Sunset Corridor" in Portland, Ore., "Tech Island" on Long Island, N.Y., and "Satellite Alley" in Montgomery County, Md.

CHAMPAGNE, who read part of the group's report to commissioners, outlined this plan of action for the high-tech park:

- "Assist current developers" with "the necessary infrastructure to make the park readily marketable"—access roads, internal roads, water, sewers.
- Provide technical assistance to Pontiac and Avon townships and the commercial developer "... for zoning ordinance planning, preparation of necessary environmental impact statements and related planning activities."
- Give special help to local governmental leaders and assist in the transition of Pontiac Township to the city of Auburn Hills to facilitate the development and marketing of the park.
- Provide special assistance in public relations to park developers.

What is needed to make an area attractive, he said, are the presence of such higher education institutions as Oakland University and Oakland Community College, the freeway and interaction with industry.

NEVERTHELESS, the committee and County Executive Daniel T. Murphy underlined the need to save exist-

ing businesses, particularly in the older, developed parts of Oakland.

"The primary focus of the county's economic development efforts," said Murphy, "will be to retain businesses currently operating in Oakland County and help them expand, which in turn helps develop a positive arena for attracting new businesses."

J. Philip Lenihan, vice president for marketing and industrial relations of Detroit Edison Co., underscored the

role of existing small businesses.

"Over 80 percent of Oakland's 25,000 businesses are small and employ fewer than 20 employees," he said.

He cited research showing that companies with fewer than 100 workers account for 50 percent of new jobs.

Edison's position, he said, is that "we're rooted here. We don't have the opportunity to move South. And we deal with every employer in Oakland County."

THE COMMITTEE said Oakland County needs to "develop and maintain a network of professional contacts — bankers, savings and loan officers, attorneys, certified public accountants, venture capitalists, consultants, etc. — with experience and interest in assisting start-up companies."

"By 1990," Murphy said, "the county's work force is expected to grow to 569,000, an increase of 20 percent."

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