Suburbs still buck compact housing trend

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Social scientists tell them one thing. Buyers and suburban governments tell them another.

House builders feel they're in the middle in the necessary effort to reduce the sizes of single-family houses and lots.

"Out west where land is so expensive, it has been done," said builder Robert Z. Halperin of Union Lake. "Sociologists have been talking about it, but the public hasn't been demanding it."

LIKE AUTO manufacturers, the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan has been 1) suffering from a depression since 1980, 2) seeing an upturn in 1984 that will continue into 1985 and 3) trying to build its product smaller and better in quality.

But whereas the auto industry has received official encouragement to build subcompacts, there is no such encouragement to builders to produce the 900-square-foot house for a young family that is increasingly headed by a single parent.

Paul Robertson Jr., president of the association and of Robertson Brothers Co. in Bloomfield Hills, said BASM will continue to hold "task force" meetings with local officials to reduce "restrictive and unreasonable" regulations that produce "not better housing but costlier housing."

The "Leave It to Beaver" family of the 1950s — a working parent, a child-caring parent and several kids — constituted 63 percent of households in the post-World War II years, he said. By 1975, such families were 25 percent of the market; in 1985, only 16 percent; and in 1990 projections, only 14 percent.

"There are more singles, more divorced men and women; they need smaller lots, smaller spaces, a more maintenance-free home," Robertson said.

He said his own firm is building fewer 3,500-square-foot houses and more 2,300-square-foot houses "but no one jumps up and down about it. We eliminate a room and make all the rest larger," he said.

BUILDERS REPORTED some progress in their efforts to reduce the burden of local governmental regubn.

"It's been getting better everjar," Robertson said, "but municilties have been slow in response to tharket place. Some even go backwa."

Melvin Rosenhaus, of Unitedanagement Corp. in Farmingtodills, said the 50-foot lot of 20 or morears ago is "a rarity today," when 11 ordinances demand a 75- or 100-fowide lot. (A large lot means a costlierestment in paving, sidewalks and ities, necessitating a larger house tostify the costs.)

Halperin complained of a lacf uniformity of building codes amolocal governments. He added that somnits still require felt paper under rshingles, although experience shothat paper absorbs moisture and is to rot.

"It took a long time to getastic plumbing permitted," he added.

Robertson and Irvin H. Ypese, BASM general counsel, said thuilders group task forces in Troyarmington Hills, Novi and Rocher are making progress. "It's beeen rking very, very well, and we are ag to intensify our efforts to have a nningful dialog," Yackness said.

OTHER PREDICTIONS for 85:

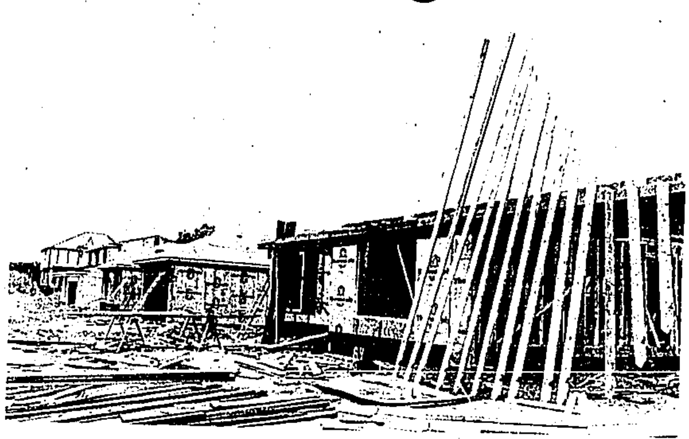
- Building permits will bssued for 7,500 units in the seven-cty region of southeastern Michig compared to 6,500 in 1984 and 00 in 1983. That is far better than 1,742 in the bottom year of 1982 buell below the 1978 peak of nearly 10.
- The market for multipl apartments and condos), once estited at 2,000, may rise to the 4,000 c,000 in 1985, several builders said.
- The popularity of bricrill return. Brick had been less avble and affordable on new housing se 1976. Housing quality — particula insulation and energy efficiency is improving.
- Metro Detroit's procts are very good for three or four rs, with the stimulus of the Oakland thnology Park, the doworiver Ma plant, Chrysler's expansion iSterling Heights and the expansion Detroit's Cobo Hall. Some auto connies are even bringing in executiveom marginal plants closed in other states.

Housing is a regional industry, and *other parts of the* country aren't doing as well. "Houston is literally a disaster," said Robert R. Jones of West Bloomfield.

- Area hot spots will continue to be northern and western Oakland County, northwestern Wayne and the Sterling Heights area in Macomb.
- Despite reports that a simplified federal income tax will reduce tax breaks for homeowners, builders doubt it will lead to a reported 20 percent reduction value on large homes, at least in southeastern Michigan. Robertson said the effect on homesteads would be short-term, at worst, though values of secondary houses might be more adversely affected.

The "American dream" of home ownership is still alive in metro Detroit, which continues to have the highest rate of home ownership in the nation and some of the lowest metropolitan housing prices.

- There may be some easing of interest rates later in 1985. The upward pressure on materials prices will be no greater than the consumer price index. Builders have two-year labor contracts which won't expire until August 1986, assuring labor peace.



staff photo

New housing starts will be up in 1985, but the trend to downsizing will continue, according to the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

'There are more singles, more divorced men and women; they need smaller lots, smaller spaces, a more maintenance-free home,'

— Paul Robertson Jr. builders' association president

3,900 at GM to keep jobs

An estimated 3,900 General Motors job opportunities could be retained in Detroit over the next several years as the result of GM plans to continue building cars at its Fleetwood-Clark assembly facilities, the company said.

The southwest Detroit operations had been expected to cease production as early as December 1985, after GM's new Detroit-Hamtramck "Poletown" plant begins production later this year.

GM President F. James McDonald said current GM plans call for the operations to continue production "through the 1989 model year provided, of course, that the market sustains our production plans and customer acceptance and dealer orders for our products remain strong."

The Fleetwood and Clark operations currently employ about 8,500 persons. Of these, about 4,600 had been expected to transfer to the Poletown plant under a GM-UAW agreement on transfer rights, leaving 3,900 job opportunities that would have ceased to exist without the continued production operations at Fleetwood-Clark.

The plants currently produce rear-wheel-drive Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham two-door coupes and four-door sedans, along with Oldsmobile 88 sedans and station wagons, on a two-shift basis.

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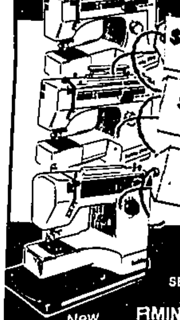

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87x84 2W	324.00	105	267.00	86	235.00	76	226.00	73
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