

Clinton Valley hospital site pushed for GM Saturn plant

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

A state mental health facility is being pushed as a possible site for production of General Motors' new car.

Oakland County Commissioner James Doyon contends Clinton Valley Center would be an "innovative" place to build the futuristic Saturn.

"We've always looked at attracting new facilities on virgin land," said Doyon, a Democrat who represents Madison Heights and part of Troy. "This would change how people look at land."

CONCERNED about the impact on the patients and the historic buildings that house them, members of the county board of Health and Human Resources Committee refused to back the plan.

They urged locating the plant in Oakland County and suggested Clinton Valley be considered as one of the sites recommended to GM by the county's Economic Development Group.

Located on 431 acres along Telegraph and Elizabeth Lake roads just south of the Oakland County Complex, the former Pontiac State Hospital treats mentally ill adults. The city of Pontiac has an option to acquire about 200 vacant acres for development purposes.

SINCE GM announced it will build Saturn, area officials have been lobbying to locate the car plant in southeastern Michigan.

In a letter to GM Board Chairman Roger B. Smith, the I-75 corridor was suggested by Wayne County Executive William Lucas, Pontiac Mayor Wallace E. Holland,

Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy, and Flint Mayor James A. Sharp.

"General Motors, throughout its birth and growth to becoming one of the largest corporations in the world, has shared a long and profitable history with southeastern Michigan," the message read.

"We would like to continue this historic relationship with the Saturn Plant and are pledging our support to assist you in assuring that Michigan is afforded the maximum opportunity to be considered as the location for the Saturn Plant."

IN A PRESENTATION to the county's Health and Human Resources Committee Wednesday, Doyon said his prime goal is to get Saturn located within Oakland County.

"I'm not appointing a site. There are many good locations in the area," he said. "I believe the plant ought to be in Michigan."

Doyon sees Clinton Valley Center as an "ideal location with infrastructure, roads, utilities and access to the I-75 corridor."

Bringing General Motors to the site would also mean moving the state patients into a newer more efficient facility. "When we look at the staff to patient ratio there, it's very high — partly because of the building design," said the commissioner.

"Staff could be better deployed in a new building."

DOYON'S RESOLUTION was supported by the Pontiac Growth Group, which represents Pontiac's downtown development Authority, Economic Development Corporation, Tax Increment Finance Authority and Local Development Corporation.

Jose Santiago, industrial and commercial development executive, said Pontiac

has a "very strong desire to develop this property."

But commissioners on the Health and Human Resources Committee were lukewarm to the idea, mainly because of its impact on the mental patients. They also expressed concern about the historic buildings at the site.

DOYON SAID relocating the patients is a serious consideration, "but I think we should do everything we can to get the plant here."

Former committee chairperson Marilyn Goeling, R-Bloomfield Hills, said she shares the Democrats' desire to locate Saturn in Oakland County. "But I disagree that first we should get General Motors to agree and then worry about the patients," she added.

She said the trend now is to house mental patients in smaller facilities or in group homes.

"We are perceived as a county that does not accept group homes. I see this as bringing down ancillary problems for mental health."

COMMISSIONER Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park, expressed concern over the fate of the historic buildings on the property.

"It's always difficult to stand in the way of progress. But there are beautiful historical gems on that property, including a chapel," he said.

"I have no problem with the plan, but would like to see something done to preserve those buildings."

Pointing to preservation efforts by Kresge Foundation in Troy and General Motors in Detroit's New Center Area, Doyon said there is potential for saving the buildings — and even refurbishing them with federal money.

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