

# Opinion

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14(A)

O&E Thursday, December 19, 1985

## Quality of life It's in danger in the Hills

**YOU CAN'T** fool Father Time. Thirty years ago, dirt roads and cornfields marked Farmington Township, a rural area on the outskirts of Detroit's urban sprawl. Today, \$200,000 homes and office buildings help define Farmington Hills, one of southern Michigan's fastest growing cities.

Snarled traffic has been one of the byproducts of this change from a farming area to a prestigious address.

And the alarming increase in both traffic congestion and accidents has started to eat away at Farmington Hills' heart — its quality of life.

Unfortunately, there's no shortage of problem areas — I-696, Northwestern Highway, Orchard Lake Road, 14 Mile Road, Haggerty Road.

**BUT THE** worst areas are along 12 Mile Road.

The east-west thoroughfare has become a hotbed for commercial and office development. It's also home to a college, a post office, a library, schools and apartments.

Farmington Hills and Oakland County have tried improving 12 Mile, but you don't have to be an engineering whiz to recognize that road improvements haven't kept pace with development along the six-mile-long corridor. Traffic volume far exceeds road capacity.

Projections call for 4.9 million square feet of new office development along 12 Mile by 1991 — a three-fold increase over current square footage. That would mean roughly 18,000 workers, a 275 percent increase from the current workforce of 4,900, and roughly 46,000 auto trips along the corridor daily.

The stretch of 12 Mile with the greatest potential for future tax-rich office development is west of Farmington Road.

**OFFICES WEST** of Orchard Lake Road and stores to the east aren't the only generators of traffic along 12 Mile. Neighborhoods bordering the corridor are projected to eventually contain at least 5,000 households.

Within this backdrop, it's heartening to see the cooperative coalition of government, business and community leaders that City Manager William Costick has helped weld to fine-tune Farmington Hills' Twelve Mile Road Master Traffic Plan for 1986 to 1991.

Still preliminary, the plan furnishes guidelines for coordinated traffic improvements while being sensitive to new development, community aesthetics and historic sites along the corridor.

The goal is to prevent a gridlock — common during rush hour at the accident-prone intersection of 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road, site of the city's only access point to I-696.

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**CITY FINDINGS** call for general reconstruction of 12 Mile, east of Orchard Lake Road, as well as:

- a four-lane, landscaped boulevard with median cuts west of Farmington Road to Haggerty to 1) separate south-side offices from north-side houses, 2) reduce left-turn conflicts at intersections and 3) allow non-disruptive, signaled business driveways.

- five lanes between heavily traveled Middlebelt and Farmington roads.
- three lanes east of Middlebelt, a stretch offering fewer sources of traffic and which is more environmentally sensitive.

Interchanges near Drake and near Haggerty along I-696 — which parallels 12 Mile and heavily feeds it — also are called for.

The most controversial proposal involves the boulevard, which carries a \$16 1/2 million price tag (the city's share would be \$9.2 million) and comparatively higher maintenance costs. And at least one business in the area has publicly opposed parting with valuable frontage.

Clearly, concerns about the boulevard deserve to be publicly addressed before a final master traffic plan for the corridor is adopted.

**HOW WILL** proposed corridor improvements be paid for?

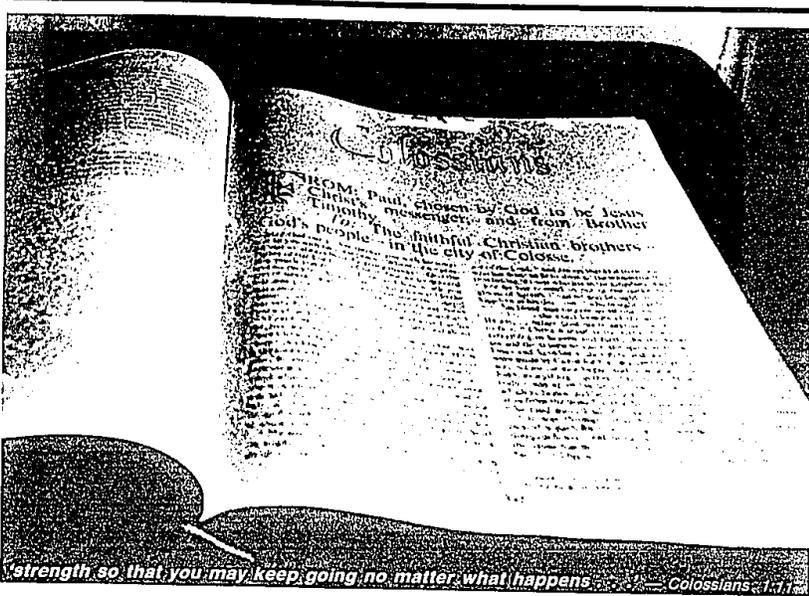
Projected options — a combination of state and federal grants and city funding — were unveiled publicly over the past two weeks. Predictably, robust discussion has followed.

Evaluating tax increment financing — proposed as the city's major funding source although limited to the boulevard — is fertile fodder for another day.

Such financing results from capturing all or a portion of the dollars generated by a development area's increase in assessed value from the time the area's latest assessment roll was equalized. Farmington Hills proposes capturing a portion of the increase from the other taxing units in the tax increment financing district for up to 12 years.

Before you fund a project, however, you need to substantiate its need. And the preliminary Twelve Mile Road Master Traffic Plan provides such substantiation — convincingly.

— Bob Sklar



This cool-covered Bible was found, opened to this page, in the chapel of Hospice of Southeastern Michigan where six died.

## To survive, spirit counts

I STOOD for a moment looking out over the crowd of saddened and ashen faces. This was supposed to be a morning of celebration and renewal.

For five years we had struggled to survive against what at times seemed like overwhelming odds. Selling a new concept in America is tough. And when it has to do with the care of the dying, it's even tougher.

For me, this was supposed to be a special annual meeting for our group. I had been preparing for months. This morning I was to become the president of the Hospice of Southeastern Michigan.

But the celebration in my heart turned to a hardened lump when the early morning phone call of the day before carried the news of a fire.

**WITHIN MINUTES** that fire killed six persons.

Those of us who believe in the hospice concept are comfortable with the idea that death is part of life. Hospice attempts to make the transition as peaceful and comfortable as possible. But we all mourn the violent deaths of those for whom we have cared.

And those who work in hospices come to care for both the patients and families they serve. It is the antithesis of the



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

American business psyche. Hospice employees and volunteers really learn to care for the patients, families and each other.

So as I stood at the podium that Monday morning, my prepared statements seemed shallow. I could offer only what came from my heart:

"WE'VE TALKED a lot about being leaders in our field. Well, I've got news for you. Leaders succeed. And we will succeed. Not only will we succeed, we will prosper despite what happened. That will be my goal."

I could say little more to those who had struggled so valiantly over the years.

Under most circumstances, being a corporate board member is a job full of aloofness and authority. You play with other people's money and make decisions

about people you will never get to know.

But the hospice board has been a reflection of the struggle that the concept has weathered in America.

So my words that morning, meant to give hope, also admittedly were tinged with a feeling of combativeness.

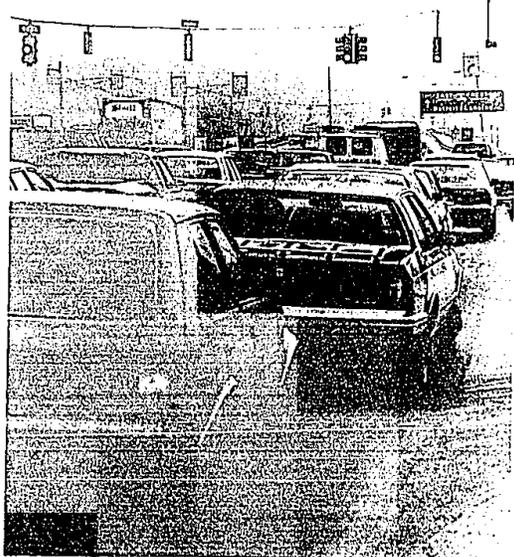
**WE'VE NEVER** had other people's money to play with. Most of the time, the hospice hasn't had any money at all. We just sort of survive.

And that concept, so important to the future of America, has survived because of the spirit of a dedicated staff that works so very hard for so very little in monetary return.

You learn quickly at hospice that money really isn't everything — not even in America. You watch doctors and nurses work day and night with persons who they know are going to die. And they do it for very little money.

Each one of these highly trained staff members could go out and join the ranks of their highly paid colleagues in the health-care business. But they choose otherwise.

Instead, they choose to work with the dying and their families. Their spirit will carry us through. And they'll be there when your family needs them. I'll betcha.



A view of Orchard Lake Road at 12 Mile Road, looking south, during rush hour.

## Execs right in long drain battle

**HANG IN** there, Dan Murphy. Hang in there, Bill Lucas.

The two county executives have something in common besides a yen for the 1986 Republican gubernatorial nomination. Both are fighting the good battle for unification of county administration.

Oakland County voters asked for that when they adopted the county executive system in 1974 and elected Murphy to that slot. Wayne County voters gave the same kind of answer when they approved a home-rule charter in 1981 and elected Lucas in 1982.

The fight is over unifying the drain commissioner under the executive.

**UNTIL THE VOTERS** spoke out against the 19th century system, both Oakland and Wayne counties had no less than three public works agencies apiece:

1. A road commission pretty much independent of county government.
  2. An elected drain commissioner.
  3. A public works department that sort of reported to the county board.
- Under the new forms of government, the two county executives took over the public works departments.

In the mid-1970s, Murphy sought state legislation to allow the combining of the drain commissioner post and the public

works department, a change that would have abolished the elective post of drain commissioner.

But Drain Commissioner George Kuhn got hold of Republican legislators, county Democrats lobbied Democratic legislators, and the odd combination frustrated Murphy's and the voters' aim.

Last week the county board passed a resolution to unify the two departments under Kuhn as public works commissioner. Murphy threatens to veto it — as he should.

The voters of Oakland County bought a plan to unify county administration, not pull a department away from the executive and set up a rival center of responsibility.

**LUCAS, WORKING** with a home-rule charter, has had a bit more luck.

He was able to break down the castle walls of that little duchy known as the Wayne County Road Commission, unifying it with the public works department under the executive's Public Services Office.

Lucas is now talking about a charter amendment to bring the office of Drain Commissioner Charlie Youngblood under the executive's wing.

County commissioners, with a 2-1 majority on the Drain Board, are seeking to

pull employees away from the drain commissioner and place them under the Drain Board. They allege Youngblood has a poor track record as an administrator and operates in his own, expensive little world.

Their analysis may be correct, but they don't have the solution.

The solution is to place a charter amendment on the ballot and unify the drain commissioner under the same office as the public works department and road commission.

**SUCH A REFORM,** if enacted, would make Wayne County, a name heretofore synonymous with cronyism, the first in the state to consolidate all three public works agencies under a single roof.

Oakland would have a rival as the most progressive administrative system in the state.

Because Lucas and Wayne County are so close to success, it would behoove Murphy — even though some of his fellow Republicans are despairing of ever consolidating the drain and DPW departments — to veto the county board's resolution creating a separate public works commissioner.

Keep the faith, Dan. You too, Bill.