

# Opinion

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O&E Thursday, January 18, 1980

## DDA: needed in Farmington

LET'S WORK together.

That theme was hammered home last week when the Farmington City Council approved the concept of a Downtown Development Authority.

And cooperation is exactly what's needed to make a DDA succeed.

City council-appointed and with autonomous decision-making powers, a DDA is designed to promote economic growth, increase property values, help generate jobs and strengthen merchant ties.

We repeat: Rejuvenating a smaller central business district is only as limited as the enterprise of the landlords and shopkeepers.

The city council, in collaboration with the Downtown Farmington Development Committee, could lead the way, however, through a DDA made up of people with a vested interest in Downtown Farmington's well being.

A downtown is not only bricks and mortar. And Farmington already has two other key elements: a caring council and spirited shopkeepers. The trick is to maintain energy levels while courting the many absentee landlords.

QUITE CLEARLY, it's wiser not to wait until merchants have fled and buildings have deteriorated before striving to enhance Downtown Farmington's appearance and, in turn, bolster its tax base. It's easier to make downtown buildings attractive places in which to live, work and shop while the area is still vibrant.

In a recent Observer survey, downtown merchants reported a generally upbeat holiday shopping season. Parking lots were full and cash registers were ringing — both healthy signs.

Consider the other cities where DDAs have succeeded — Rochester, Northville, Royal Oak — and it's evident a DDA would be pivotal in helping promote Downtown Farmington's strengths: a small-town charm, family-run shops, free parking and competitive pricing.

A Farmington DDA also would be instrumental in helping:

- rehabilitate storefronts by combining the best of original architecture with contemporary design;
- expand parking on the north side of Grand River;
- improve pedestrian lighting and traffic controls;
- add such pedestrian amenities as benches and restrooms;
- establish a village green;



- cultivate common business hours;
- encourage cultural attractions;
- preserve historical sites;
- link Grand River with Shilawassee Park;
- develop theme activities, seasonal festivals and a downtown logo;
- recruit a small department store and other desirable businesses;
- weigh the potential for a minibus service;
- establish boutiques or restaurants in old houses along Grand River;
- promote development of one- and two-bedroom apartments to reinforce downtown's residential character.

IN SHORT, pooling resources means more than cooperative holiday and window lighting — although that's a good start.

A DDA also would have the tools to promote Downtown Farmington's character, architecture and heritage as well as both public and private investment. It would complement — not replace — the Farmington Beautification Committee.

The Farmington City Council and the Downtown Farmington Development Committee now must make shopkeepers and landlords feel their participation indeed is welcomed. It no doubt would cause havoc if the city tried to authorize a tax for public improvements repulsive to most taxpayers.

These past few months have proven a learning experience for all — councilmen, shopkeepers, landlords and residents alike. Let's now get on with the pressing need to re-establish Farmington as a retail hot spot.

Let's continue to accent cooperation — not confrontation.

— Bob Sklar



## Detroit's frown, upside down

ON SLOW news days of late, I've been poring over "Michigan beyond 2000," the Hudson Institute (HI) report for the state Senate. In the sometimes depressing chapter on Detroit, an old song from a Walt Disney movie leaps to mind:

*Everybody's got a laughing place,  
A laughing place to go ho-ho.  
Take a frown, turn it upside down,  
And you'll find yours I know-ho-ho.*

Detroit? A laughing place? Have I been awash in too much holiday punch? Did my brain cells freeze on an ice-fishing trip? Not so. There's genuine hope, says the Hudson Institute, for Detroit to become the capital of black America, and the turnaround could be visible by 2005.

DETROIT COULD have a lot going for it — provided its leaders "take a frown, turn it upside down."

In one generation Detroit has lost more than a million white residents, gained a half-million blacks and on balance lost a half-million. Since the 1950 peak of more than 1.8 million, the population loss has been 40 percent.

On the other hand, the HI report points out, land scarcity is no problem, as it is in many old cities. Just the opposite:

"Owing to abandonments, Detroit now has about 12 square miles of vacant land.



Tim Richard

Its central business district is strikingly underdeveloped."

And catch this potentially cheerful note: "The city holds bottom rank among the nation's 33 largest downtowns in the price (per square foot) of office space."

Cheap land! That used to be a rallying cry for pioneers in the 19th century. It could be again.

CAN DETROIT realize its "new redevelopment potential"?

More than half the kids are fatherless and on welfare, taxes on those with jobs are enormous, there has been "a 20-year crime explosion" — but yes, it could be done.

Our older neighbor to the southeast, however, must change its land policies. Instead of "passively marketing" dinky 30-foot lots at the rate of only 1,000 a year — meanwhile adding ever more land to its 27,000-lot inventory — the city should assemble those lots into larger parcels, HI suggests.

Politically, that's more easily said than done. HI recalls the massive resistance to the job-producing General Motors Pontiac project straddling the Detroit-Hamtramck border. HI sees Detroit as politically hostile to middle-class development, whether white or black.

But the supply of cheap land, both downtown and in the neighborhoods, is a genuine ray of hope.

CAN DETROIT do it? Reading between HI's lines, yes:

"Together with rapid growth of the black professional class, a new generation of political leaders is emerging. . . . A less abrasive and street-wise political style, and far greater skill at networking and alliance building."

HI suggests, as I noted last week, holding the lid on city wage increases. It also suggests more regionalization of services.

There are other assets: riverfront condos; corporate involvement of Ford, American Natural Resources and Stroh in downtown redevelopment; the successful campaign for tri-county taxation to pay for Cobo Hall expansion.

All of us in the suburbs are paying big federal and state taxes to support Detroit. Some of us who were raised there have a soft spot in our hearts for the old town. Anyone with any humanitarian spark should want to see it succeed.

"Take a frown, turn it upside down."

## A look ahead — it isn't all roses

FUTURISTS these days are making big bucks (I love that term). It started out, I suspect, on TV games and became an accepted part of the patois of newspaper reporters, government officials, business persons and clergymen. It signifies an imprecise amount of money but probably more than the average McDonald's burger-server makes in a lifetime.)

Futurists define the future's parameters (another vague word used mostly by professional phonies) so that we normals stuck in our own day-to-day troubles can point ourselves in the right direction. I have decided to get into the futurist racket so that big bucks will come my way.

AS A starter, I predict that the average person will have to come to terms with the following trends:

- Travel time to airports will lengthen so that any airport trip will take at least as long as the time spent in air travel.
- Unions will begin bargaining for legal coverage as well as medical, dental and optical benefits to keep pace with the fact that in the future there will be one lawyer for every 100 residents and an average of three lawsuits per family.
- Testing of employees for new job will include such things as lie detector tests, testing for drugs, urinalysis, TV and sound monitors and drug and contraband-sniffing dogs in the work place. Two-way mirrors are also possible.



Bob Wisler

AIRPORTS AROUND the world are gearing up for more and more security as terrorists continue to strike. All it will take will be one attack at a U.S. airport and the airports will institute a series of Checkpoint Charlies. Passengers will have to have engraved tickets with as many swirls as dollar bills to pass inspection at scanning devices.

People accompanying passengers will no longer wave goodbye at the plane door — they'll be three miles down the road at a special wave goodbye parking lot where they will drop would-be passengers off for a jitney ride by armed guards to the airplane.

The old waiting areas in airports will converted into dressing stalls, where people can disrobe down to their undies for weapons checks.

Needed is an invention for airplanes which will untie a stream of gas to put passengers to sleep whenever a sound monitor picks up the word "hijack" in any of 42 languages.

LEGAL COVERAGE is definitely a must. People will have to have different legal specialists for different situations. One for wills

and legal papers, another for various civil suits, etc.

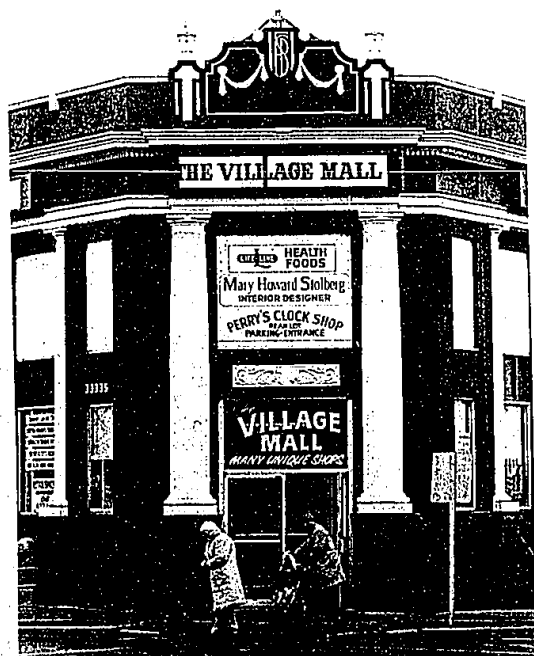
For example, if you mailman sues you for having an eyesore frontyard overgrown with vegetation and littered with children's toys — which, he alleges, caused him to feel undue stress and seek early retirement — you want a lawyer who is familiar with such cases.

You certainly don't want the guy you have retained to sue the local police department for harassing you by insisting that you break up a noisy party that a neighbor said caused undue stress to his eardrums at 3 a.m. Each lawyer has his specialty, like some deal only with back injuries, others handle only workers comp claims and others will deal only with suits against markets which have sold unrefresh fish.

EMPLOYEE LITIGATION coverage will mean you will be able to have lawyers on hand instead of picking them out of the yellow pages or from advertisements on TV.

In the area of employee testing, more scrutiny will be the watchword. One company, Capital Cities, which owns ABC, said it will start a program at its Kansas City newspaper of having dogs run through the building at night to sniff out possible drugs. Some companies have installed TV monitoring devices to keep an eye on whether employees are performing adequately, or, perhaps to ensure that employees think someone is watching at all times.

In the novel 1984, it was the government watching citizens. The reality may be that in our brave new world it may be our bosses.



The Village Mall, formerly a bank building, stands at the southeast corner of Grand River and Farmington Road.