

Wolfram: Sprawling growth drains Oakland

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Often Bill Wolfram sounds like Dan Murphy — particularly when he talks about a home rule charter for Oakland County.

Other times Wolfram sounds like few candidates in either party — as when he talks about "urban sprawl" and uncontrolled growth.

"He's a nice guy, but he's tired," said Wolfram, 42, the Democratic candidate against Murphy, 64, a Republican who has been county executive since the post was created in 1974.

"I'VE BEEN walking the 'swing' precincts — the ones carried both by (President) Reagan and (U.S. Sen.) Carl Levin," said Wolfram, in his first try for public office.

"People ask, what does the county executive do? Who's your opposition?"

"It's the second most powerful post in the state, with a \$280 million budget. The executive is responsible

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— William G. Wolfram
Dems' executive candidate



for all departments not under another official," he answers.

"You know who Coleman Young is. You know who Jim Blanchard is," he continues. His pamphlet characterizes Murphy with an empty chair.

It's the same theme F. Thomas Lewand used in the 1980 campaign. Murphy's reply: You know about executives whose operations are in trouble. You don't hear about the ones doing a good job.

WOLFRAM, SPEAKING TO Ferndale Democrats last week, turned thumbs down on the \$25 per vehicle registration fee whose fate voters will decide Nov. 8. It would raise \$20 million a year for 10 years for Oakland roads.

Wolfram prefers a charter county where the county executive could absorb the semi-autonomous Road Commission operation. It doesn't bother him that Murphy advocates the same thing. "What's right is right," Wolfram says.

He distrusts the fluctuating "needs" numbers calculated by the Road Commission — \$740 million for 10 years, recently rising to \$900 million.

His solution: After getting a better shake of state and federal road funds, Wolfram would attack the

problem of growth that is being allowed to sprawl into rural townships while older urban areas decline.

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He sees too many "strip" shopping centers scattered around and major developments popping up on narrow roads that can't handle the traffic.

Wolfram says the \$25 fee will produce only \$20 million of the \$75 million (or more) a year that is needed, and on top of that it's "regressive — it hits the poor and rich the same way."

AN APPELLATE lawyer with offices in Franklin Village, Wolfram was a virtual unknown in political

circles until his filing late in May. Earlier he contributed to the campaign of a former law partner, Jack McDonald, who was seeking the Republican nomination for prosecutor.

Democrats had wooed former Oakland parks director R. Eric Heikel, who finally backed away from the executive race because he couldn't afford to leave his Wayne County job.

Murphy's polling shows any Democrat has an uphill race. But even if Wolfram loses, he wins resume points. Oakland, officially only "marginal Republican," is studded with Democratic lawyers who want to be appointed to judgeships.

So Wolfram is working — and hitting Murphy on issues. Win or lose, he has a message.

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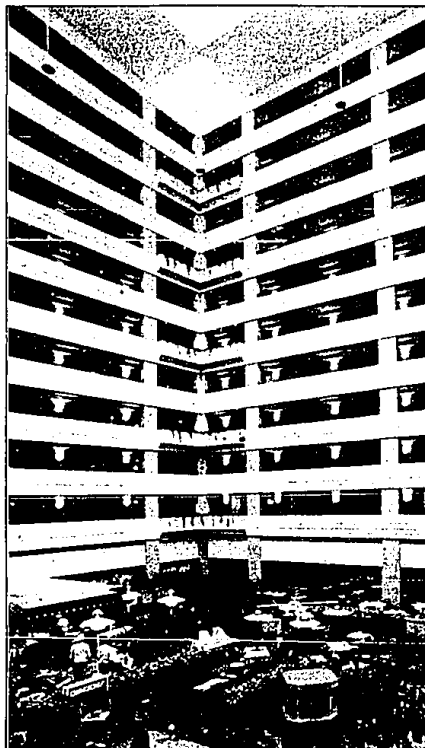
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