

SEMCOG delays call on Big Four plan

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Oakland County politicians, suspicious of a Greater Detroit economic development plan, stalled it for a month in the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

The plan was developed by the Big Four — the mayor of Detroit and three county chiefs — who Friday asked the SEMCOG Executive Committee for a simple declaration that their plan wasn't in conflict with SEMCOG's seven-county plan. "They've had plenty of time since February to study it," said an irritated Daniel T. Murphy, Oakland County executive and one of the Big Four. "Then they jumped all over it last week."

The SEMCOG Executive Committee voted 28-6 to spend a month on study.

world trade center in Detroit. It decries "urban sprawl" as wasting tax money for new infrastructure, disrupting the rural environment and damaging to older cities.

The Big Four plan favors "focusing investment in areas with underutilized infrastructure" — meaning older cities which already have paved roads, water, sewers and people seeking jobs.

The Big Four's effort to enlist SEMCOG support seemed routine until Oakland Commissioner Richard Skarritt, R-Milford, and board chairman Roy Rewold, R-Rochester, wrote a letter earlier in the week asking more study time.

"These policies," Skarritt wrote to SEMCOG members, "will have a major impact on future infrastructure and economic development in Oakland County." He said the board was unaware of the plan before a committee review April 17. "I spent two pages of the state of

the county speech on it," said Murphy, "and no one even asked me about it." The executive said Rewold and Skarritt, who chairs the government and transportation committee, wrote the letters without getting approval from a majority of the full board.

BUT OAKLAND and other outlying counties had some questions over what it will take to implement the plan.

"There were no details on funding," said Oakland Commissioner Marilyn Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, a SEMCOG delegate.

"The communities were not involved," objected Milford Township Supervisor Robert D. Foley. "Our Oakland County Township Supervisors group decided almost unanimously it shouldn't be adopted until there is more study."

SEMCOC delegates from Monroe and Washtenaw counties wondered why the Big Four were developing their own plans and who would pay for the programs.

MURPHY FOUGHT a longer delay, telling SEMCOG that state government in coming weeks will be making decisions affecting the economic plan.

Among the state-level issues, according to state Commerce Department official Bill Lantz, are:

- World Trade Center funding — other states have had state aid for trade centers.
- Toxic waste rules — a series of five hearings is due to start in May.
- A "wetland bank" proposal before the state Department of Natural Resources.
- Recreation bond money — voters approved \$140 million for recreation in 1988. Some Oakland officials are pushing a "rails to trails" plan to convert unused railroad rights of way to bike-hike-horse trails.
- Land assembly for redevelopment.

• Regional transportation support.

NORTHERN OAKLAND, western Wayne and Livingston counties believe they have benefitted from the "sprawl" decry by the Big Four and urban planners.

Much factory, office and sports arena development has occurred in what were formerly farm fields and meadows on two-lane blacktopped roads.

Politicians in outlying areas see that as growth in the property tax base, not as urban sprawl that drains older areas.

THE BIG FOUR plan calls for a

HUD raises limit for mortgage loans

The limit for obtaining U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development mortgage loans was recently raised for Oakland County from \$79,000 up to \$101,250.

The National Housing Act authorizes HUD to insure mortgages for single family homes and guarantees the mortgage in case of default. HUD is allowed to increase the mortgage ceiling limit to reflect regional differences in housing costs.

U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Michigan, announced the increase. He chairs the Senate's committee on banking, housing and urban affairs

which has oversight on national housing policy.

"Because of high and rising housing costs in Oakland County, many first time home buyers don't have the option of using HUD mortgage terms to lower their down payment costs. Many of these people would be given this option if they bought the same house in another lower cost community," he said.

"This increase in mortgage limits makes it possible for home buyers, regardless of where they buy, to have equal access to the HUD program," Riegle said.

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