

Top stories of the '80s in Oakland:

See related column.

By Tim Richard
staff writer

OAKLAND'S top stories of the 1980s will be the top stories of the 1990s. That's because the county of 1.1 million is caught up in massive changes involving masses of people.

1. The D word. The '80s opened with double-digit unemployment, but investors in high-tech industry and offices found Oakland in a hurry. A high-tech belt stretches from Auburn Hills, Rochester Hills, Troy, Southfield, Farmington and Novi out to Ann Arbor. Two-thirds of all new offices in Michigan were going up in Oakland.

Late in the decade, neighborhood groups in a dozen towns were blowing the whistle on development — the D word. They were talking against traffic, overloading the infrastructure, shutting out the sunlight with high-rises. Even County Executive Dan Murphy, who promoted much of the growth, spoke out against urban sprawl. That kind of talk is likely to get louder.

2. Traffic. "We are at 110 to 120 percent of capacity on our main roads," said Rochester councilman Tom Werth, who sees no benefit to his older town from a megamall in Auburn Hills and the Oakland Technology Park. There was an almost universal feeling that two-lane roads couldn't handle rush-hour traffic. The state provided only one method of raising local road improvement money, and voters in 1988 rejected a vehicle registration fee 4-1.

The '80s provided no solution, and the issue of the '90s will be how to manage — not even plan for — the growth that already has occurred.

3. County home rule. Not from John Grubba, managing director of the Oakland Road Commission. OARC got some county general fund in the '80s but wants much more.

Executive Murphy is eyeing a home-rule charter under which the OARC could be absorbed by general government and public works could be consolidated. Murphy won't budget money for roads unless the executive can control where it goes. Will the road commission be willing to pay the political price?

4. I-696. For 30 years, the cross-town suburban freeway was stalled by arguments. As the 1980s dawned, the federal government approved a final route. As the arguments ended, the eight-mile freeway was opened. The Southeast Michigan Council of

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Governments predicted 500 fewer car crashes a year, a "dramatic" reduction of 11 Mile Road traffic and a one-third cut in congestion on other mile roads.

The Heather freeway, as it's subtitled, cities a chance for redevelopment — particularly since they had been eclipsed by growth along I-75 in the northern suburbs. The south end is becoming a new yuppie mecca, with art galleries, trendy restaurants and shops. There are feelings of hope, especially for newly arrived ethnic minorities who wouldn't be economically left behind.

5. Solid waste. A \$1 billion county plan for cooperative handling of stadium-sized trash began to come to fruition in 1988, with the letting of a contract for the first incinerator.

At the same time, the environmental movement of the 1970s was revived, and Oakland leaders vowed to do more recycling, less burning and burying. Every step will require long debate during millions of people-hours of committee meetings during the next 10 years.

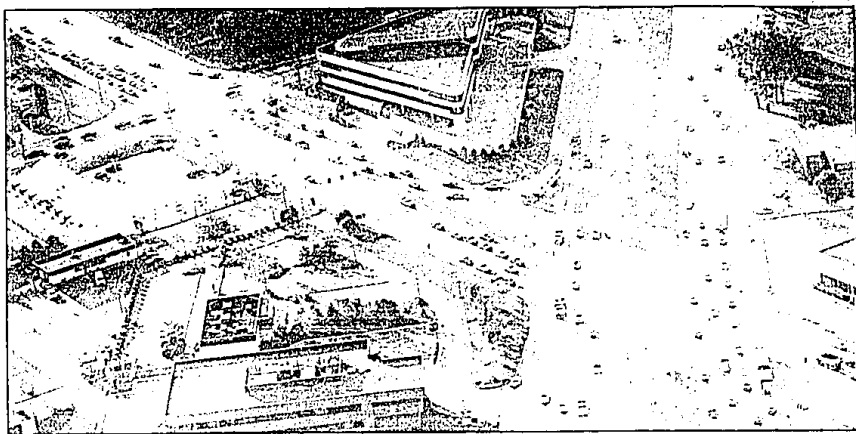
6. County building. A prisoners' lawsuit forced Oakland to build a new 488-bed jail.

Meanwhile, Oakland's economy and high numbers of lawyers have made its courts among the busiest in the state, far out of proportion to the population. A new court tower, a computer center and a law library are on the drawing boards. Oakland's court tower will be the first in Michigan since the State Supreme Court allowed news cameras and tapes in courtrooms.

Within a couple of elections, Oakland will see its circuit court bench grow by four judges (from 14) and its probate bench grow by two (to six). Political competition and advertising are likely to be heavy. If district judges and other politicians decide to move up, look for judicial musical chairs.

7. Partisan politics. An era ended in 1988 when L. Brooks Patterson, the tough-on-crime prosecutor, re-

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Part of Oakland County's record of the '80s - new office buildings and heavy traffic - are evident from this aerial view of Square Lake and Telegraph roads.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

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County board cites growth

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Uncontrolled growth and problems associated with urban sprawl dominated the 1980s and will likely carry over into the next decade, according to an informal survey of Oakland County commissioners. Roads, solid waste and adequate law enforcement were mentioned in one context or another by every commissioner contacted by The Ec-

centric in an informal survey to determine the major problems of the 1990s.

Commissioners were given no advanced warning or time to research their answers. They also were asked what issues were likely to confront county government in the next decade.

"Oakland County is growing so fast that all other issues flow from that," explained Roy Rewold, R-Rochester, who is chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

"The major issues of the '80s concern growth and they will undoubtedly carry over into the '90s," he said.

In the last decade, the county population increased by about 100,000 people, from 1,011,793 to an estimated 1,112,671, according to the Oakland County Planning Department.

THAT INCREASE overburdened facilities, Rewold said. Consequently the 1990s will be devoted to accommodating that growth as well as the continued growth projected into the next century. "Solid waste, roads, the environment are all concerns impacted by growth," according to Rewold.

"Roads will definitely be the pressing issue of the '90s," said Roy McConnell, R-Bloomfield Hills, who is vice chairwoman of the county board of commissioners.

"In the 1980s, we got a good start on a solid waste program," said McConnell, referring to the county's

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—Roy Rewold
R-Rochester
county board chairman

\$470 million proposal that includes a waste-to-energy incinerator, recycling and developing landfill facilities. "But roads will be the major concern over the next decade."

Commissioner G. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, said the growth of the 1980s has triggered a corresponding growth in county government.

"I'm amazed at how the county budget has gone from about \$60 million in the early 80s to more than \$293 million this year," said Caddell, chairman of the board's finance committee. "We've had to increase law enforcement, develop a solid waste program and deal with the demand for roads. I think roads will be the issue of the next decade."

THOMAS A. LAW, R-West Bloomfield, acknowledges the solid waste program drew a lot of attention in the 1980s. "We threw a lot of money at it, but I'm not convinced it was the major issue," he said.

"The jail was just as important as far as I was concerned," Law said, referring to the \$16.5 million jail annex Oakland County opened last March.

The jail annex — which more than doubled the number of beds available from about 480 to more than 970 — was built after eight inmates filed a class action suit in federal court saying the jail was overcrowded.

Law said the jail had a more prac-

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