

# SEMCOG socks feds for Oakland road grant

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

Detroit has one million people, Lake Angelus 400, but both won help from the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments in their regional battles.

SEMCOG's Executive Committee last week voted to:

- Object to the federal government's giving a "demonstration grant" for road work in the Auburn Hills megamall project area north of Pontiac without a SEMCOG regional planning review. Lake Angelus is fighting what many call an "urban sprawl" project.
- Ask the state Air Pollution Control Commission to reconsider its 6-4 decision to shut down Detroit's trash incinerator.
- Endorse state legislation allowing Detroit to continue levying a 5-percent tax on utility bills.

LAKE ANGELUS Mayor Francis McMath, whose city is in court fighting environmental permits for the megamall, objected to the Oakland County Road Commission's request for a federal demonstration grant to widen and pave Lake Angelus road between Baldwin and Joslyn roads.

"That road is two lanes of dirt and doesn't go anywhere. Its only purpose is to serve Western Development for its megamall," said McMath.

Auburn Hills megamall, in the city of Auburn Hills, would cover 1.8 million square feet when built. The project is favored by Auburn Hills and Pontiac for the tax base it would provide Pontiac schools and for retail and construction jobs.

But SEMCOG staffer Carmine Palombo said federal highway officials told him "our review and approval were not a prerequisite for

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D-Southfield

approval of federal dollars" because the project is a demonstration grant, not part of the regular construction program.

"THIS IS HOW Congress deals," added G. Robert Adams, No. 2 man in the Michigan Department of Transportation.

"Congressman (Bob) Carr (D-East Lansing) got the demonstration project. He's trying to get money that is being spent all over the country and we don't get any. Michigan is a donor state already," Adams said.

The SEMCOG Executive Committee gave 27-0 voice approval to a resolution which doesn't oppose the grant to the Oakland Road Commission, but objects to Congress excluding it from SEMCOG review. SEMCOG is a seven-county agency which does regional road, water, housing and transportation planning.

"None of us looks unkindly at

demonstration grants," said Larry Pernick, Oakland County commissioner from Southfield. "But we've spent time making a regional plan. Wouldn't it make more sense to spend it (federal money) on things in the regional plan?"

TWO CHIEFS of SEMCOG blistered the April 17 action of the Air Pollution Control Commission in ordering the shutdown of the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority incinerator, an east side trash-to-energy burner serving the city and some suburbs.

"I almost fell out of my chair," said SEMCOG Chair Milton Mack, a Wayne County commissioner. "They made a mistake. If you wanted to harm the environment, you'd shut it down. If you wanted to improve the environment, you'd let it operate."

The Sierra Club representative (on the MAPC) made the motion and

said it was her duty to control air pollution. What they (Detroit) did with trash was up to them."

Mack said there would be a "ripple effect" with Detroit trash haulers lining up at landfills, where the trash could contaminate groundwater. The continued use of landfills throughout the region would do more harm than the incinerator, Mack said.

SEMCOG Executive Director John Amberger said the MAPC audience was "a very strong anti-incinerator crowd. They behaved abominably toward our (SEMCOG) staff, saying 'I hope your children have cancer some day.' There was a lot of abuse."

A VOICE VOTE was about 20-2 in favor of asking MAPC to reconsider its vote to close the incinerator.

SEMCOG noted the city and state Department of Natural Resources were agreeable to a consent order under which the city would install new equipment to remove excess amounts of mercury from the emissions.

Holly village president Ardath Regan, however, urged SEMCOG not to send the wrong message with its resolution.

"There is a risk to SEMCOG's credibility. Are you saying (to MAPC) 'Set aside your strictures under law?'"

"We lost the TSCC (state Toxic Substance Control Commission),

whose members resigned en masse when they failed to get support," said Regan. "Don't let it be miscommunicated to the public that the Air Pollution Commission should be the next to go."

THERE WAS NO controversy over SEMCOG's resolution asking the state Legislature to pass a permissive law restoring Detroit's 5 percent tax on natural gas, electric and telephone bills.

"SEMCOG has a long history of support for local government home rule and empowering local governments to address their own fiscal situations," the resolution said.

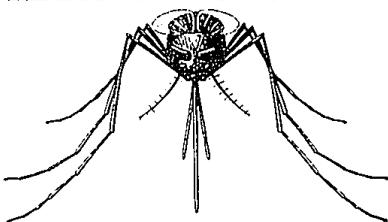
Wayne Circuit Judge Marvin Stempfen in February ruled the tax uncollectible after mid-1988 because of a "sunset" provision in the enabling act. Detroit is now before the State Court of Appeals.

If Stempfen is upheld, Detroit would have to 1) refund \$100 million in back taxes and 2) lose \$60 million a year in future revenue.

The Democratic-run House has passed a new enabling law, but the Republican-run Senate is holding up action until Democrats agree to pass GOP property tax cut plans.

Another question, unaddressed by SEMCOG and the Legislature, is whether the new utility tax would have to be approved by Detroit voters under the Headlee tax limitation amendment to the Michigan Constitution.

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