Environmentalist revolt aims at urban sprawl

atelf writer

An environmentalist revolt would stop urban sprawl by reducing the power of local government.

It would educate people out of selfishness and their anti-tax mentality, it would make long-range plans for the seven-county region.

"We're in a revolution — with deep changes in some deeply held deliefs," said Alice Tomboulian, president of the East Michigan Environmental Action Council.

She addressed 130 students, local public officials and environmental-ists recently at the close of EMEAC's day-long conference on "Land Use in Southeast Michigan" of the Council of the Counc

TOMBOULIAN, a former state TOMBOULIAN, a former state representative who lost her seat after one term for her support of public transit, likened economic growth in southeastern Michigan to a game of Chinese checkers.

"You have the same number of marbles. You move them around the board, Jump around and leave holes behind.

"We are treating our cities like throwaways. We can reuse them," she said.

The current outcry over urban

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The current outery over urban sprawl was Ignited by the Auburn Mills mega-mail project — a 2.5-million-square-foot shopping center that will eat up open space and wetlands, draw shoppers from many counties and require much road with ching. Environmentalists complain that a city of fewer than 20,000 is having a tax and commercial effect on a region of four million, but the

The enemy, they agreed, was provincialism in local government and corporate greed that will eat up 40 percent more land for a mere 6percent population growth in the next 20 years.

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IN A DOZEN small group conferences, members of the Birmingham-based EMEAC, joined by staff members of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, explored concerns and brainstormed for solutions. Among the most common themes:

themes:

• Membership in SEMCOG, a 22-year-old agency, should be mandato-ry, or it should be changed into a re-gional government. nal government.

Industrial and commercial tax

base should be shared across a wide area, not kept by communities where a factory or mail is located.

• Tax incentives to business and

Tax incentives to business and competition between communities for development should be halted.
 "Get at the no-tax attitude of the electorate. Educate and involve the public into a sense of regional community." "There is a lack of political will in the populace."

• "Dilute the home-rule powers of communities."

• Make development in green

● Develop public transportation for several reasons — to bring the poor to suburban jobs, to reduce pollution and to alleviate the need for more, wider and sturdier roads for expensive, single-occupant cars.

Preserve older cities, where the infrastructure — roads, sewers, water and utilities — already exist.

SUMMING UP the recommenda-tions, Chuck Wilbur, a former De-troit community organizer and now news anchor of public radio station WDET-FM, said the job would be tough politically. tough politically.

"I was struck by the odds this future might face," Wilbur sald. EMEAC would provide the leaders fight "parchalists and extreme privatism," he said.
David Hales, director of the state Department of Natural Resources, said "the Michigan my grandparents knew in last disappearing."
Hales likened freeways to "a ring of concrete — a fortress — that cuts us off from the rest of the state. We don't have access to the land, when insulated ourselves with technology from nature."
From a plane at 4,000 feet in the evening. southern Michigan is "blanketed with artificial lights"—indicating development everywhere.

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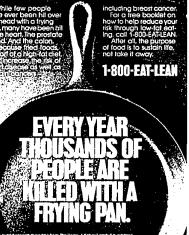
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