

'Unfairly painted'

Report's racial slant offends suburban officials

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Many suburban officials are offended at charges that racial bias is "the dominant social factor" behind urban sprawl in the seven-county region.

"It painted us unfairly," an angry Plymouth Township Trustee Abe Munfakh said at the executive committee of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG). "Negative... degrading to the minority population," said Plymouth Township Supervisor Fred Korzon, who in written comments urged SEMCOG to tone down the racial charges.

The conclusion states that racial discrimination is the prime cause of urban sprawl," said trustee Richard E. Allen on behalf of Northville Township. "I think nearly uncontrolled crime is a more significant factor that seems to be neglected throughout the (report)."

THE REPORT of the Regional Development Initiative task force was intended to be "provocative," said Gerald McCaffrey, Macomb County school official who chairs SEMCOG.

But while SEMCOG leaders expected controversy over perceived attacks on local home rule, they appeared startled at the furor stirred up by the RDI panel's racial charges.

"There are a multitude of social

factors — crime, education, economics — which are factors in fringe development and urban abandonment," said a Macomb County board resolution. "To cite only race as 'the dominant factor' masks many other equally relevant social issues."

Macomb commissioners offered an amendment to cite racial discrimination as "a factor."

"The contention that racial discrimination is the cause of this (sprawl) problem is presumptuous and incorrect," said Plymouth Township's Munfakh.

The RDI report addresses urban sprawl — the eating up of 40 percent more land to serve a 6-percent population growth by 2010. It calls "business as usual" wasteful of future taxes and an abandonment of older cities' infrastructure.

WHILE MUNFAKH and the Macomb delegation were ready to do battle last week, the SEMCOG execu-

tive committee Friday voted only to "accept" the report and forward it to the General Assembly in December.

There it will be shuffled through the committee structure. Months of debate lie ahead.

Other RDI recommendations that generated letters of protest were:

- Tax base sharing — RDI calls for municipal tax base sharing (on top of the school tax base sharing enacted last week by the state Legislature).
- Mandatory regional review of major developments — Many see this as intrusion into local home rule.
- The meaning of "sprawl" — Livingston County board Chair David Peckens said RDI should recognize that "many portions of the perimeter counties have real needs for roads, sewers, schools and other services brought about by decades of growth."

• "Concurrency" — RDI proposes that developers be charged for necessary infrastructure improvements, and that the improvements be built at the same time as development.

A FEW OFFICIAL, and many non-official, comments praised RDI. Southfield City Administrator Robert Block: "I believe the cultural, ethnic and economic attitudes of southeastern Michigan's middle class toward race drive the decisions of investment in the metro area. All other issues evolve as a consequence of these attitudes."

Frank E. Smith, president of the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce: "Excellent work," except for reservations about tax-sharing.

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County extends battle on 'porn'

Oakland County prosecutor Richard Thompson's announced war on pornography has extended into a Wayne County suburb.

The Oakland County Sheriff's Department and police units from Farmington Hills and Pontiac joined other area law enforcement agencies Wednesday to search a Livonia video distribution company.

The Livonia company was called "one of the largest suspected distributors of obscene material in the state," in a statement made by Richard Thompson, Oakland County-Prosecutor.

The 9 a.m. raid at General Video Michigan Inc., 13200 Levan south of Squirrelcraft, was part of a crackdown on pornography being conducted jointly by the Wayne and

Oakland County prosecutor's offices, said Livonia Police detective Lt. Mike Murray.

No arrests warrants were issued in conjunction with the raid, Murray said.

An attorney representing the company questioned the propriety of police in conducting the raid and said the action was "totally without merit."

"It's premature to comment at this point on whether anything will be seized. We're still inventorying," Murray said two hours after officers arrived at the warehouse.

The search warrant was issued Wednesday by 16th District Judge Robert B. Brzezinski after a lengthy investigation by police in Hazel Park, Pontiac and Waterford Township.

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