

# Enterprise zones

## Senate bill offers help for depressed cities

By Tim Richard  
Staff writer

Older, depressed cities could set up low-tax "neighborhood enterprise zones" to attract new housing under a bill before the Michigan Senate.

"This is one of the most important and exciting bills you'll see this year," said Gary Wolfram, deputy state treasurer and top economic theoretician in Gov. Engler's administration.

As written, the bill would apply to Pontiac, River Rouge, Ecorse, Hamtramck, Highland Park, Detroit and older outstate cities — but not Inkster. And that bothers Sen. George Z. Hart, D-Dearborn.

"THE SENATE Local Government Committee recently gave the bill 4-0 approval. Chairman David Hongman, R-West Bloomfield, and the worried Hart were among the yes votes.

"Inkster meets every criteria but one — half of its housing stock was

built since 1950," said Hart, whose district includes Inkster. "It has the highest homicide and drug addiction rates in Wayne County. Sheriff (Robert) Picano has to send a run there every day," because local police are overburdened.

But the bill's sponsor, Sen. Jon Cisky, R-Saginaw, was reluctant to expand the definition to include Inkster for fear of opening a "Pandora's box."

TO BE ELIGIBLE to set up a neighborhood enterprise zone, a city of 10,000 or more must:

- Have an unemployment rate averaging 9.49 percent.
- Have a property tax burden of 65 mills or more or levy a city income tax.
- Have a housing stock in which 45 percent of the units were built before 1950.
- Suffered a population loss of 9 percent or more from 1970 to 1990.

A city council could designate a zone up to 10 percent of its area. That area should be one that has

seen no new construction and little rehabilitation in recent years. Property taxes would be cut by half or more on the buildings. New construction and rehabilitations would be eligible for a 12-year tax break.

Michigan has set up a business enterprise zone in Benton Harbor, but the Cisky bill would apply to housing, too.

Nationally, the movement is championed by Jack Kemp, secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

"WHAT BOTHERS me," said Sen. Gil Dinello, D-Clinton Township, "is that these are the cities that are always in trouble. There's no incentive to do anything on their own."

Wolfram said the Cisky bill was just the medicine to cure that ailment. "We have lots of legislation to raise property taxes. This is the only one to lower them," said the former U.S.-Dearborn economics professor. "This can get housing built this spring."

Said Hongman: "The only thing that sticks in my craw is that the city is designating the spots (enterprise zones). It could pick spots where the leaders get votes or campaign contributions. There could be lots of politics."

Wolfram said there would be no tax incentive if the city council played politics. City revenues would be enhanced only by new development or rehabs in areas that have seen no activity.

Wolfram said Detroit has issued only one new residential building permit in three years while Northville Township, in the same period, issued 1,500.

DETROIT HARBOR businessman Bob Jackson wanted to see zones larger than 10 percent of a city's area.

In a city with 30 percent unemployment where no private house or apartment has been built since 1974, "How do we pick?" he asked. "We will need more help, but we do need this."

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- Auburn Hills — The first session is 10 a.m. to noon Thursday, April 23, in Building B, Room 113. Gail Bryan is the facilitator/counselor. The campus is at 2900 Featherstone, east of the Pontiac Silverdome, Auburn Hills.

- Orchard Ridge — The first session is 6-8 p.m. Wednesday, April 22, in Building L, Room 114. Darlene Currier is the facilitator/counselor. The campus is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, south of I-696, Farmington Hills.

- Southfield — The first session is 6:30-8:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 21, at Lower Level, Room 113. Polly Bachrouche is the facilitator/counselor. The campus is at 22322 Rutland Drive, south of Nine Mile, east of Southfield Road.

- Highland Lakes — The first session is 3-5 p.m. Monday, April 20, at Highland Hall, Room 321. Roxanne Allen is the facilitator/counselor. The campus is at 7350 Cooley Lake Road, Union Lake.

To reserve a spot in any session, or for additional information, call Michelle Casanova, 340-6802.

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