

Oakland County, Detroit on opposite sides of bill

By TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County and the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce came up on different sides of a state Senate bill helping older cities to spruce up for economic development.

"I want to encourage private investment in older cities," said the sponsor, Sen. Lana Pollack, D-Ann Arbor.

"We need to stabilize town centers," agreed deputy Oakland Executive Joe Joachim.

"There's no concrete revenue source, and there's another layer of government," objected Ann Parker of the Greater Detroit Chamber.

SB 659 got its first hearing last week before the Senate Local Government and Urban Development Committee chaired by David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield. The questions showed that at least two of the five members have serious doubts.

Pollack said, "Two or three years ago, at the Detroit chamber conference on Mackinac Island, a devel-

oper told us, 'Government gives us lots of incentives to develop in green fields. Why don't they give us incentives to develop in cities?' This is an attempt to level the playing field."

Without identifying a money source, Pollack's bill would allow communities within a regional council to borrow from a state revolving fund for certain economic development projects.

These could include land assembly, relocation of existing uses and demolition. Others could be envi-

ronmental cleanup, infrastructure, planning and application preparation. The community would repay the loan when it sells the improved real estate.

Pollack and the Eastern Michigan Environmental Action Council think it will reduce urban sprawl — the tendency to build on green fields when there's no population growth. "Government has distorted the market," said EMEAC's Jim Bush, citing sewer extensions.

Parker of the Detroit chamber said the bill wouldn't work.

She objected to a "cumbersome" 10-step process for setting up councils. She noted only 10 percent of the fund could be used for environmental cleanup, which is costly, and concentrates on assembling land parcels.

"It's bizarre that the chamber would oppose this," said Pollack. "This is not an environmental cleanup bill."

I don't wish to take power from existing municipalities," she added. "It doesn't create another layer of

government. It does encourage cooperation."

Joachim said Oakland Executive Daniel T. Murphy has focused on urban cores because random growth was disturbing the quality of life in rural areas.

Joachim said the policies in Pollack's bill were almost identical to policies of top political leaders in southeastern Michigan — the executives of Oakland and Wayne counties, the chair of Macomb's board and the mayor of Detroit.

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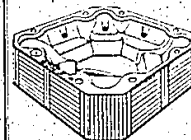
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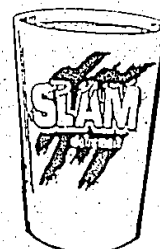
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