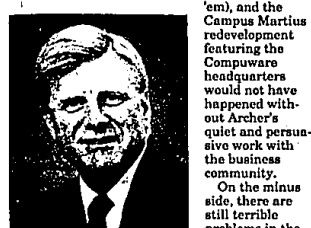


Archer's accomplishment was to end city-suburb feud

A lot of newsprint got consumed last week in printing all the commentary — most of it "on the one hand, on the other" variety — that followed Detroit Mayor Dennis Archer's surprise decision not to run for a third term.

On the plus side, Archer contributed substantially to economic development in his city. Comerica Park, Ford Field, the casinos (love 'em or hate 'em), and the



Phil Power

Campus Martius redevelopment featuring the Compuware headquarters would not have happened without Archer's quiet and persuasive work with the business community.

On the minus side, there are still terrible problems in the neighborhoods and in getting the city bureaucracy to function properly. There are still thousands of vacant homes waiting to be torn down. The streetlights that mention the city-owned power plants don't work all the time. Deep-seated problems remain with both the fire department and the police. Archer never seemed to get around to confronting the powerful and entrenched municipal unions, and he had to be dragged by Gov. John Engler and the Legislature into facing up to the mess in Detroit public schools.

But any fair-minded assessment of Dennis Archer's tenure as mayor must begin — and, in my view, end — with the reality that his election ended the petty and increasingly nasty estrangement between Detroit and the rest of the state that was the primary sad legacy of Coleman A. Young's too-long term in office.

It was a terrible time for anybody who believes that Michigan simply cannot stand to let its largest city float off into the Detroit River. On the surface, Young pitted the city against the suburbs; underneath lurked worsening race relations and naked racial politics. Repeatedly ignored and occasionally insulted, the business community basically picked up its briefcase (and checkbook) and went home. The news media, initially entranced with Young's tough-talking (read: "profane") style, soon began to ask tough questions about how things were really going in Detroit.

Things were very bad. And nobody could see a way out until there was a new mayor.

When Archer decided to run for mayor in 1992, early on he called Nellie Varner, then my col-

league on the U-M's board of regents, and me. He needed expert academic help, he said, in developing a program for the city. But he couldn't rely on the folks at Wayne State, who were probably in Coleman Young's pocket. So, he asked, could we pull some experts together to help him think through Detroit's problems.

For months, we met every couple of weeks in my office in Livonia, ironically at that time one of Mayor Young's main targets in the "all-white suburbs."

Watching Archer in these meetings was a revelation. We all knew he was smart, well educated, a distinguished lawyer. But he showed us an open curiosity, a willingness to learn, a capacity to put together seemingly unrelated things into a coherent political package.

When Archer was elected in 1993, most people were enthused. Here was an honest, intelligent, well-meaning man with the political skills to survive a tough election and a stated intention to bring the city and the state back together. By and large, that's what Dennis Archer has accomplished during his eight years in office. Sure he can be criticized for not being a detail-oriented, kick-but manager, and he can be blamed for being unwilling to hire somebody who was. His style — fair-minded, even judicial, always seeking to build consensus — sometimes seemed more well suited to a court or boardroom than to the rough-and-tumble politics of a blue collar city.

But these criticisms pale, at least in my mind, next to his great achievement — an achievement that is necessarily linked to precisely the dignified, well meaning and honest person he is: He brought Detroit back into the mainstream of Michigan.

Other succeeding mayors may be tougher managers or better street fighters. Maybe they'll be able to face down the unions, restore the neighborhoods, change the nonchalant bureaucratic culture. But at least they won't have to figure out how to reconnect Detroit with the civil society of our state.

Dennis Archer is a fine man, a man of integrity and good will. As Mayor of Detroit, he performed an enormously valuable service to his city and his state. And, possibly most of all, he displayed uncommonly good judgment in knowing when to step down without overstaying his welcome.

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Joni Hubard

gan left turns. And why Tuesday is always Coney Day.

Along the way, however, I have learned to ask for help, as has been the case with the proposed shopping center at 14 Mile/Northwestern/Orchard Lake. To be perfectly honest, I don't get it.

Why build 350,000 square feet of space for retail stores in an area that is already home to every conceivable retailer from Borders to Zany Brains? Why propose a "big box" home improvement center on land right next door to property owned by Lowe's — one of the country's largest home improvement store chains?

Fred Marx of Marx Layne, a Farmington Hills-based marketing firm, has watched the retail scene in this area long enough to comprehend what those of us looking in from the outside might question. He doesn't have any trouble at all understanding what's going on in the northeast corner of our fair city.

"There's usually a gravity," he told me recently. "It becomes a magnet, an appeal. The more the merrier."

Shopping clusters like the one developing around the Farmington Hills/West Bloomfield border aren't anything new. Rather than diluting the pool of shoppers, Marx said, "It makes the pie bigger so everybody's slice can be larger."

Retail developers quite naturally gravitate toward busy streets and intersections, and this corridor certainly qualifies. The kinds of businesses people can expect to see anchoring shopping centers have evolved, from department stores like Hudson's or Crowley's to specialty stores like Old Navy, Bed Bath & Beyond and Home Depot.

"A Hudson's really doesn't carry what they once did," Marx said.

What drives today's retail engines? It's a concept simple enough that even an editor can understand.

"I think people look at two kinds of currency: money and time," Marx said. "These stores are easy to shop."

Think about it. If you've got all Saturday afternoon, you don't hesitate to head toward Target or

14 Mile shopping center will have a life of its own

In the fourth decade of my life, I have begun to accept there are things I will never understand.

Love, for instance. Michigan.

KMart or Meijer to pick up the collection of things on your weekly shopping list.

When you're late leaving the office and somebody calls to remind you the bathroom drain is stopped up, you're more likely to stop at a specialty store where you don't have to park as far from the entrance and you can pretty much count on getting in and out quickly, because everyone else is doing the same thing.

"We have a very impatient society," Marx said. Doesn't take a marketing expert to know that. But what does it all mean? Well, chances are

Simply put, economic development is a balancing act. City officials have weighed the evidence and taken their last, best shot on a project that appears to strike that balance.

the people who already crowd into that area to shop will frequent these new stores as well, because — let's face it — consumers find Grand Opening sales irresistible. And while we will all hold our collective breath as the years pass, there's little chance a shopping center of this magnitude will fall to rack and ruin.

Retailers will hire people who'll spend money in our community and folks who come here to shop will also be drawn to other businesses in that area. The property itself will pump valuable dollars into a tax base that will soon take a big hit as Compuware moves its headquarters into Detroit.

We'll pay a price in congested roads and, of course, the loss of open space that makes a city seem even more crowded than it really is. Those costs are incalculable, because atmosphere and character are priceless commodities.

Simply put, economic development is a balancing act. City officials have weighed the evidence and taken their last, best shot on a project that appears to strike that balance. Time will tell whether they made the right decision.

In a general sense, Fred Marx offers a ray of hope for this project. He believes today's mega-shopping centers have a place in this world, one not easily shaken.

"These new ventures have a life of their own," he said.

Let's hope so.

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