



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Regional Thinking Makes Sense In Suburban Life

Consider an average family living here in the suburbs. Their house is in a subdivision in Livonia.

The kids go to a school in the city of Westland, but part of the Livonia school district. After school, they buy Cokes from a drug store in Westland, and that city's solid waste disposal system takes care of the empty bottle.

The husband works in Southfield, where his company pays personal property and real estate taxes to the City of Southfield. Because there is no area wide mass transit system, he drives to and from work in the family car, on roads controlled and financed variously by Wayne and Oakland Counties and by the State Highway Department.

His wife's parents live in Plymouth, and when she goes shopping she'll do so at one of the Livonia shopping centers or in downtown Plymouth when she visits her folks. While she drives through Plymouth Township, she keeps her eye out for the Wayne County Sheriff patrol, which handles traffic and police work in the township.

When the family comes home

at night for dinner, the water for coffee comes from the Detroit metropolitan water system.

When the family goes out with the kids, they go to the Detroit Institute of Arts or to the Detroit Zoo, which are controlled and supported by the City of Detroit. Admission fees do not cover the cost to the city of their visit.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

It is.

We may live in Plymouth or Livonia or Southfield. But in so many of our daily activities we are interconnected by a bewildering maze of government units and services into the entire metropolitan area.

That's the real point behind the argument that "regionalism is an idea whose time has arrived," presented by Metropolitan Fund president Kent Mathewson last week at the annual meeting.

Mathewson, whose organization is the key supporter for the Southeastern Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), has been making this point for some time. He's also become aware

that pure regionalism doesn't make much sense: "The type of regional system which separates the regional functions from the purely local, which strengthens local government by allowing local officials to spend 100 per cent of their time on those matters purely local in nature."

The problem, of course, is to sort out which functions are local and which regional. Then it's a problem of getting the politicians to go along with regional programs.

IN RECENT weeks, we have seen some developments which bear directly on Mathewson's ideas for regionalism.

In Lansing, the House finally has passed legislation for a metropolitan area mass transit system, which is clearly regional in scope. The challenge to the local property tax as a base for school financing has led to ideas about state or area wide school taxes. Belle Isle, down in the Detroit River, will be transferred to the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, which has worked

effectively to build regional recreation facilities.

Much of the push behind these moves to regionalism is coming through SEMCOG, which has had a hard time lately.

School systems in Livonia, Plymouth and Farmington, have recently quit. And although Schoolcraft, Oakland and Wayne County Community Colleges are still hanging in, it's no secret that school people are sore at what they consider to be SEMCOG's failure to perform.

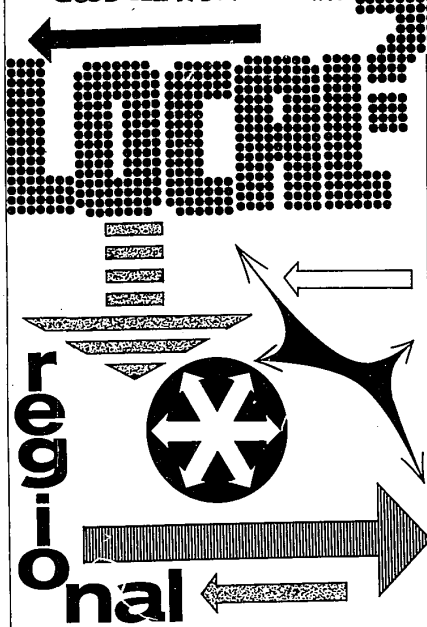
Further, when school budgets are tight, it's an easy item to cut.

My own feeling is that the schools and SEMCOG never really figured out how best to use each other's talents. In fact, it may be that schools have so many of their own service organizations that SEMCOG never could do the kind of job some hoped it would.

But it has acted as a very useful catalyst for developing regional thinking over the past four or five years. And as the mass transit package proved so clearly, regionalism is coming.

The only question is how and where it comes.

REGIONALISM DESERVES GOOD CLEAR DIRECTION...



Why Property Tax Just Can't Be Worked Well

The simple principle establishing property taxes in some long-last century has little if any legitimate basis for a continued existence.

The Observer and other journals have editorially argued for the abolition of property taxes — or at least a substantial reliance of it — for public school support.

A good argument can be made for reducing or eliminating the property tax for other governmental services for the same reasons — it is unfair, unjust, forces low-income and middle income families to pay more than their share of the taxes and is generally something that should be dropped.

But only a few persons are willing to discuss the other valid reasons for dropping the property tax as a means for supporting governmental services — the basic administration of the tax.

One of the most serious problems in the administration of local property taxes is the sheer lunacy which leads to the final tax bill businessmen and residents get twice a year from city hall.

The state constitution requires that property be assessed for tax purposes on a uniform basis. It also requires that property be assessed up to a maximum of 50 per cent of market value — for tax purposes.

IN SIMPLE terms, this should mean that a man owning a \$20,000 home (to keep the figuring easy) in Detroit, Plymouth, and Timbucktoo, Mich., should have as closely as possible the same property assessment — that is \$10,000, which represents 50 per cent of true market value.

But it never works that way. The Wayne County bureau of taxation — which has a lot to say about the eventual tax bill in Detroit and its suburbs — has a different method of determining the market value.

IT LISTS all of the sales of homes in a specific town and matches the sales price with the local assessment listed down at city hall.

In the current housing inflation, the county finds that the local assessment is far under the 50 per cent of market value level and applies an equalization factor to bring the assessment up to 50 per cent.

But there are a few inherent problems in the system used by the county — which has been told about it but still refuses to do anything about it.

FIRST OF all, suburbs with a quick turnover of homes are more apt to have a longer list of home sales than cities within 100 miles which have little movement in the housing market. And that slow movement tends to keep prices — and thus assessments — considerably lower than in other cities with a faster changing housing market.

In addition, the sales price listed in the county records downtown includes more than just the lot and home. In many cases, it includes carpeting, appliances in the kitchen, and a portable swimming pool the seller didn't want to take with him.

THESE little extras can add up to five per cent to the basic price of the house and is reflected in the county's figuring local equalization factors.

And this doesn't even take into account the realtor's commission and mortgage "points," which the seller has to pay but obviously is included in the selling price of the house.

Another problem is that assessments for land itself bounce around like a ping pong ball in a national tournament.

IF A home or business is already assessed at about 50 per cent of market value, the application of the state equalization factor will boost the equalized value of that land and building beyond the constitutional maximum of 50 per cent of market value.

There is a good possibility that the pure administration of local assessments compounded by the state equalization factor could lead to a homeowner being assessed for tax purposes at 100 per cent of market value.

This could happen if a family moves into a new \$30,000 home, watches city hall set an assessment at \$15,000 (which is 50 per cent of market value) and have the state equalization factor of 2.0 boost the equalized valuation back up to \$30,000 — or 100 per cent of market value.

Fascinating, isn't it?

R. T. Thompson writes

Safety First At Tourneys

State basketball tournament time is with us again...the zaniest, wildest period of the entire schoolboy winter sports, one that requires some cool heads to keep the situation in control at all times.

Observerland, which includes the seven communities covered by the Observer Newspapers, has been awarded four district meets and it would be a sad state of affairs if there would be unforeseen incidents.

Why bring this up after the teams have played all season with no reported incidents?

The principal reason is that there have been incidents not reported that could have resulted in serious trouble. The reason they were not reported was that cooler heads intervened immediately and the hot heads were rushed into the locker rooms before they actually began throwing fists.

TOURNAMENT TIME is always a big headache to the tourney directors, usually the athletic boss of the sponsoring high school.

Knowing their team is starting its bid for the much coveted state championship, team followers who haven't bothered to

attend many games during the regular season suddenly get the urge with the result that seating capacity is overtaxed, and in some instances the doors are closed to hundreds of latecomers.

This leaves the tournament director with two alternatives: (1) close the gates when the seats are taken and not allow any standees or (2) allow admissions until the floor is completely ringed with wild-eyed spectators.

In the first instance, there is a good chance that those shut out will begin hammering on the doors and cause a ruckus that only police officers can handle.

In the second case, tourney officials can be sure of trouble — and big trouble — from those gathered along the sides of the court. If the game is close, the supporters of the losers are almost certain to claim they were "robbed" if it is a runaway, then backers of the losing team take their disappointment out on any one that happens to be close by.

AGAIN THE QUESTION, "Why do we think this way?" We must point to experiences of the past few years, experiences that have been detrimental to high school sports of all types.

We point to the fact that a

near riot broke out last year in Crisler Fieldhouse at the University of Michigan after the class A final where Flint Northern upset Pontiac Central.

So what did the Michigan High School Athletic Association do to try and prevent such happenings this year? It has ordered the A championship to be played on a Saturday afternoon at Michigan State University. The state board shifted the final schedule so that the two big games in B and A will be played in the morning and afternoon with C and D in the evening.

The reasoning is that it can better control the conduct of crowds in daylight than at night when incidents can break out in the parking lots.

ONE CAN be assured that each of the district managers in the four Observerland tournaments will have adequate police protection if he is able to convince city officials that such protection is needed.

But here again, there is a question of the money to pay special police and those members of the regular staff who are on an overtime basis.

It is our understanding that some of the cities involved are demanding that the tournament pay the full costs of police protection. That poses an additional problem since each manager has guidelines that must be followed, and they do not allow enough to cover the costs of police officers.

It is our opinion that each of the cities or townships involved should be proud of the fact that a

high school in the area was selected for a tournament.

It also is our opinion that arrangements should be made to have adequate protection, regardless of whether the costs are borne by the tournament or the communities involved.

THIS IS A STRANGE world we are living in, and strange things have happened at basketball games this year. It is much better to be prepared and not have anything happen then to try and rush forces to a gym with a brawl in progress.

On the other hand, it's about time some of the die-hard fans, young and old, grow up and realize that someone has to win and someone lose and take the outcome in stride.

Those that can't, and feel they should show their feelings with fists and hard words, will do everyone a favor, including themselves, if they stay home. Thus their blood pressure won't soar, they won't make fools of themselves, and the calm ones will be able to enjoy the games.

Sense And Nonsense

The calls always come in the middle of dinner.

Or just when you're trying to sneak in a nap.

Or just when you've waxed the floor and can't conveniently answer the telephone.

The sweet young thing began her rehearsed spiel about "a vacation paradise just a few short hours away from your home at the low, low price of..."

Wearily, you listened and then politely said, "Sorry, we're not interested."

But ever so often her description of "acres and acres of beautiful trees...sparkling streams...peace and quiet..." made you wonder...

But not anymore. Not after the recent disclosure that 550 Detroit area families "bought" lots in one of those vacation paradises only to learn sadly that the person they purchased it from didn't even own the land.

Sense And Nonsense

The Redford Township chapter of NAG (National Action Group), which opposes inter-district school busing, recently had a contest in which the first prize was a 30-30 hunting rifle with a scope.

And all the while they've been telling us they want to "BUS judges..."

Editorial & Opinion

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