



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

OBSERVATION POINT

Change In Property Tax Plan Needed To Keep Suburbs Green

Spring arrived, praise be, on Monday. And with the frost out of the ground and lots of mortgage money available at fairly low rates, we ought to see the start of the long - forecast building boom here in the suburbs.

On one hand, this is very good; building promotes employment, adds tax revenues to strapped city governments, creates community development, etc., etc.

But, on the other hand, more buildings reduce the precious amount of open land still left green in suburban areas, and thus slashes at one of the chief charms about our semi - rural life style.

Why is there so little raw land left undeveloped as a green belt in suburban areas? Simple. It costs too much.

THREE, FOUR years ago, I talked to a guy who knew lots about property in Plymouth Township. He was beefing that a big wheel out there had a whole lot of land that he was farming, but that his taxes were real low because the assessor had under - valued the property.

"Why hell's fire," my friend said, "they've got that land assessed at only \$500 per acre, but I know that if they put it out for sale and development it'd be worth at least \$2,000 per."

The guy had a legitimate beef. And after a while, people began squawking about assessment practices all over, not just in Plymouth Township, and how they were under - assessing farm land, and how they ought to assess land according to what it would bring on the market.

So the assessors in the suburbs started clamping down, and people who had been farming or sitting on land assessed at \$500 per acre suddenly began finding that their land was being evaluated for what it could be sold to a developer. And they started seeing their taxes jumping by two, three, even four times.

And pretty soon it got just too darned expensive in taxes to hold on to land.

So a lot of land that had been green got sold to developers, who quite naturally developed it, and subdivisions replaced farms and woods.

NOW, IF YOU hold to the idea that having some green and open space mixed in with the subdivisions and shopping centers is a vitally important part of why we all moved to the

suburbs in the first place, you'll begin to wonder just what can be done to preserve some raw land here and there.

Merely cutting the property tax and replacing it with some kind of income levy won't solve the problem, because that would just be an incentive for big land owners to hang on to their land for speculation with no taxes or carrying costs and then sell it off for development when the price is right.

The Governor recently appointed a Commission on Land Use, which hinted in its report that the answer was statewide zoning and a land use policy.

Maybe, but I'm a little too disillusioned with the political process up in Lansing to have much confidence that such a policy would be much more than compromise written by lobbyists for the road interests, developers, and rich land owners.

A MORE SENSIBLE solution would be to modify slightly state and local property tax policies such that people could dedicate a particular piece of land to a specific use for a specific period of time, and

letting the use define the tax rate.

Suppose, for example, that a man owns 20 acres of land in Farmington Township. Let's say he was willing to sign a statement that he and his heirs would use the land only for farming or as green belt for the next 10 years. In that case, he would only pay, say, \$20 per acre in property taxes for that 10 years.

If at the end of 10 years he sold it to a developer, who would develop it, the new tax rate would be \$200 per acre.

If the guy sold it to a developer during the 10-year dedication period, say after five years, he would have to go back and pay taxes for five years at the rate of \$200 per year, per acre.

The advantage of such a plan is that it would make it economically possible for people to hold undeveloped land because the taxes would be low. It would at a minimum slow down speculation. And it would tax land intended for development at a fair rate.

And it would help us keep our suburbs at least partially green.

R. T. Thompson writes

Time Consolidation Foes Woke Up

There was an interesting recent development in the City of Northville and Northville Township that could have far reaching impact on the City of Plymouth and Plymouth Township and the City of Farmington and Farmington Township.

Petitions have been filed to unify the city and township of Northville through annexation. The action was taken by residents of both communities, and the petitions bore the signatures of 232 from the township and 120 from the city.

They ask the Michigan State Boundary Commission to annex the total unincorporated township area into the city. The township includes 17 square miles and the city two square miles.

UNDER EXISTING state law the Boundary Commission must act on the petitions, if they are determined to be valid, by calling for public hearings.

The hearings are for the purpose of weighing arguments

for and against unification. They must not be called sooner than 60 days following validation of the petitions but must be held within six months.

Following the hearings, the Boundary Commission may approve or deny the requests or it may decide to change the proposed boundaries.

If the commission decides the unification should take place, citizens in either or both the city and township have 30 days to file petitions for an election on the issue.

If no petitions are filed for an election, the total city - township area becomes a city of Northville under the existing city charter and the township government is dissolved.

AND THAT BRINGS up the matter of consolidation of the City of Plymouth and Plymouth Township and the City of Farmington and Farmington Township.

There have been forces in each area working towards unification but thus far haven't been able to get the Plymouth proposal beyond the talking stage.

In the Plymouth area, for example, State Sen. Carl Pursell started such a study several years ago while president of the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce.

He called a meeting of prominent business, industrial, banking and civic leaders for a two - day conference at Hillsdale College.

The results of that session were compiled and presented at a second meeting of the same individuals, and the result was a resolution that a complete study of unification should be made and proper steps taken. Unfortunately, many of the governmental leaders failed to attend the second session, and the matter has been allowed to drag on without resolution.

In the meantime, residents of Plymouth Township were called upon to vote for or against the proposed City of



Plymouth Heights . . . and as expected, it went down to an overwhelming defeat.

This was only another of several polls on the same proposal, each failing by huge majorities.

THE BIGGEST protest against a city or annexation comes from the township officials. Most are firmly entrenched in well - paying jobs, and at election time each knows that he or she will be reelected.

But the big catch is that under unification, there would be only one set of jobs instead of two at present . . . one in the city and one in the township. And who would be out in the cold? No one knows, but the townships are unwilling to take a chance. They have jobs that they can keep under the present system; they might lose out in unification.

The same story would be true in Farmington.

Unification would result in one set of officials, one fire department, one police department, one department of Public Works, one recreation director and on down the line.

Apparently this has been thought out in Northville, and it appears time for the same kind of thinking in Farmington and Plymouth.

What works in Northville would appear to apply to the other communities. We wonder how long it will be before groups in the Plymouth and Farmington areas start annexation petitions. It will be interesting to see what the future holds . . . consolidation seems to be the answer, so why not start looking in that direction?

Leonard Poger writes

Need A County Service Center

For more years then we care to remember, the corner of Woodward and Jefferson Avenues in downtown Detroit has been where most people go for a variety of Wayne County governmental services.

But along with the exodus to the suburbs, it is now time to think about a formalized county service center in western Wayne County - particularly in Westland where most of the services are now located anyway.

ABOUT THE only important county facilities not located outside of Detroit are the marriage license bureau and a few circuit courts.

With a little bit of planning, the county could and should have those important county services more readily available in the suburbs. There are a couple of good

reasons for switching some of the frequently used services to the outcounty area.

One is that about half of the population is now outside of Detroit - a place which many suburbanites haven't visited in many years - and then only if they have to.

There now is an extensive list of county services - mostly in Westland - located in the suburbs.

THE COUNTY board of commissioners already owns large chunks of land near the Wayne County General Hospital complex in Westland and the location is ideally located for a secondary county service center.

For example, the Westland site already has the county hospital (which also houses the county health department); sheriff's department road patrol, suburban prosecutor's

DISSENT

View points expressed in DISSENT do not necessarily reflect those of Observer Newspapers Inc., but are presented in the belief that publication of all segments of thought on a public issue is a prerequisite to understanding and progress.

By RAYMOND KRAWCZAK
Mich. Cancer Foundation

An ex-smoker isn't worth his salt if he lets Jackie Klein's article go by without having his say, and a director of public education at the Michigan Cancer Foundation is duty bound.

The article rips away the "missionary zeal" veneer of the ex-smoker and tells it like it is - misery loves company.

At the same time it gives the cigarette smoker a good solid reason for continuing his habit.

He probably chuckled his way through the article lighting up cigarette after cigarette with gusto. He is now armed with a good reason for sticking with the habit.

Since every dog has his day, I would like to take a few pot shots at that reason.

This year approximately 70,000 people will die of lung cancer and the death toll is climbing at such a rate that one million of today's youth will die of lung cancer if the present smoking trends continue.

It's growing in epidemic proportions increasing 101 per cent in men and 85 per cent in women since 1953.

But there is no reason to be fatalistic. Three out of four lung cancers can be attributed to cigarette smoking. Think of it - over 75 per cent of all lung cancers could be prevented.

Prevention is your best protection against lung cancer. Like the man on TV used to say, "Don't start smoking. If you have already started, quit!"

If you don't quit, you should know that treatment offers little chance of cure for most lung cancer victims. Of every 100 patients hospitalized with lung cancer, it is considered fortunate if six of them will be alive after a five-year period.

Of every 16 patients that have lung cancer, 11 will be dead within six months, four can be helped temporarily, and only one will be cured. Less than two per cent of all lung cancer patients survive!

I rest my case and offer help because I did hear a cry for help in your article.

The help comes in the form of a Smoking Survival Kit, free to your readers. Just write the Michigan Cancer Foundation, 4811 John R, Detroit, 48201.

Editorial & Opinion

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