

Added SEMCOG strength needs more 'examination'

By JACKIE KLEIN
 "The crux of proposed legislation to formalize the structure of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) isn't whether local units should work together, but how they will."
 That's the assessment of Oakland County Commissioner Lawrence Pernick (D-Southfield), chairman of a SEMCOG ad hoc committee to study House Bill 5377 introduced by State Rep. William A. Ryan (D-Detroit).
 The measure, designed to convert the voluntary regional agency into a mandatory form of government, was introduced in the House in July. SEMCOG's executive committee met a few days later.
 "Last year, the executive committee passed a resolution opposing the proposed Metro Fund form of regional government after a cursory review," Pernick said. "Ryan is former speaker of the House and we believe his proposal should be examined in greater detail."

RYAN CONTENDS SEMCOG could do a better job as a more structured organization. Under his proposal, membership would include 20 elected officials, 20 elected from the ranks and a chairman.
 Currently, 104 of the 230 governmental units in the seven-county region (80 per cent of southeast Michigan's population) are voluntary members of SEMCOG.

Pernick said it would be 60 days before SEMCOG issues a policy statement on the proposed bill. The legislature isn't expected to consider the measure before October or November so speedy action isn't required.
 "We are meeting with Ryan to get his thoughts first hand," Pernick said. "We want to learn what his motivations are and what he considers are problems in the present structure."

"Most elected officials are satisfied with the voluntary agency and want to preserve local control which is the hallmark of home rule cities. But self-examination doesn't hurt and we shouldn't be blind to possible deficiencies."

ONE OF the problems may be that while all units of government benefit from SEMCOG, only a limited number pay the costs, Pernick said. Macomb County, for one, has declined to join.

Another deficiency, Pernick claimed, is that some home rule cities want to solve their own problems and still be eligible for federal funds.

"Many officials fail to realize you must be part of a larger base in order to qualify for federal money," he said. "SEMCOG's 40-member executive committee is composed of elected officials trying to mesh planning for everyone's benefit."

"SEMCOG isn't another layer of government. It's made up of the same people wearing different hats. The reality is that if applications for grants don't fit into regional plans, the federal government won't release the funds."

"Maybe the structure needs revisions or alternatives and we should be open to suggestions. The State Constitution allows for change."

THE RYAN BILL states that the seven counties in the region share common opportunities and problems, some of which transcend the boundaries of local governmental agencies. Despite substantial cooperation on a voluntary basis and significant activity by regional agencies, interdependent problems exist, the measure states.

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The bill calls for more effective coordination of planning on a regional basis and says the voluntary SEMCOG lacks authority to prevent actions that would be in conflict with regional plans.

"SEMCOG isn't directly accountable to the voters of southeast Michigan," the bill says. "Many special purpose regional agencies are spending large sums of public funds for important programs with minimal coordination and accountability."
 Ryan recommends a three-year period of "study, testing and exploration"

starting July 4, 1978. After July 4, 1979, he advised, the legislature should consider a permanent regional government based on findings during the first stage.

"NOTHING IN THIS act is intended to authorize the southeast Michigan planning and development agency to change territorial boundaries of any local government or school district," the bill states.

"The agency will be the only one in the region responsible for general purpose regional planning and development. It eventually may be responsible for coordination and supervision of special purpose regional agencies."

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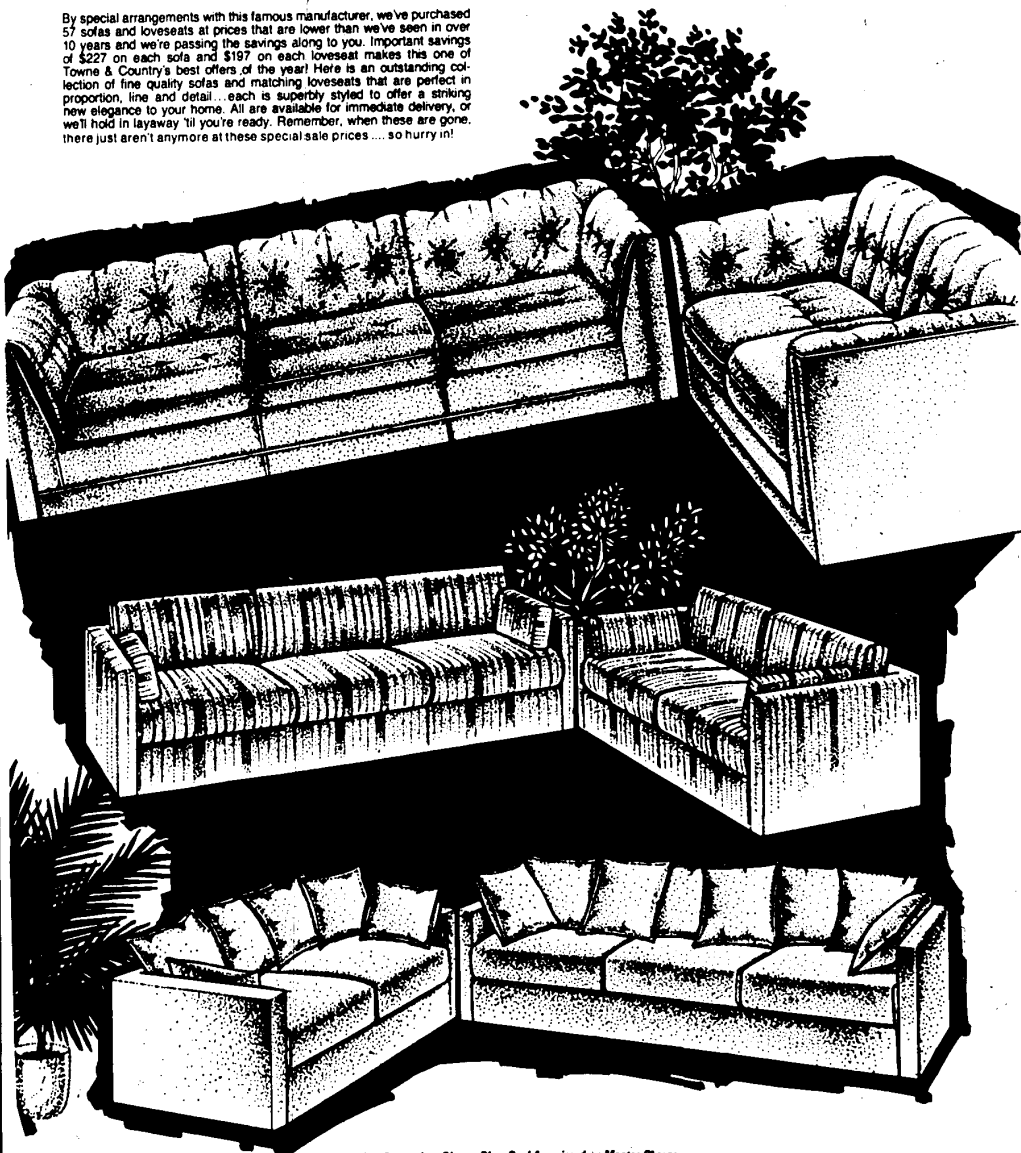
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Students dig up history

Twelve Oakland University students are aiding the bicentennial effort and gaining field experience in archaeology in the process.

They are participants in digs at the site of an Indian village and at the site of a 19th century American fort. Both sites are in the Fort Huron area.

Among the students are Kevin Burk of West Bloomfield Township, Cathy Carlson of Oak Park, Candice Dana of Rochester, Thomas Dooley of Birmingham, Bruce Hawkins of Rochester, Susan Morey of Rochester, Marlene Shapiro of Bloomfield Hills and William Wilkins of Royal Oak.

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