

LIT's budding architects eye renovation of Eight Mile strip

By CRAIG PIECHURA

There's a national trend in architecture "toward redesigning and renovating rather than rebuilding," says Robert Champlin, professor of architecture at Southfield's Lawrence Institute of Technology.

In recognition of that fact, Champlin's design students have begun an urban renovation project to remodel businesses along the Eight Mile strip from Southfield Road to Telegraph. Working with the students are Southfield City Planner Donald Gross and the city's planning commission.

Gross said the students' survey of merchants and industrialists along "the strip" was uncharacteristically well-received.

Nearly 35 percent responded to the students' questionnaire and the data received was surprisingly candid. Champlin thinks the students had better luck than city planners because "the business sector is immediately suspicious of government intervention."

"The city can't get the kind of response the students can get because the students are taking a non-political approach to the problems."

Renovation would benefit them and the city, said 87 percent of the businesses surveyed.

However, that figure dropped to 40 percent when students asked the businessmen if renovation would improve their building.

"THE NUMBERS start to drop off when people say 'Oh, you mean me. You're saying I've got to clean up my act,'" Champlin said. "But the fact that 75 percent of the people contacted would be willing to participate in a renovation program encouraged us. We thought that was super."

Champlin and city planner Gross say 40 percent participation in an urban renovation program that could cost businesses money is an encouraging and significant number.

Gross is so impressed with the LIT students' work that he has asked them to appear before the city's planning commission March 14 to give their report and show plans and recommendations for the area.

Students looked into the history of development on Eight Mile all the way back to the Base Line Indian Trail. Traffic and pedestrian patterns (almost non-existent today) have been traced; along with a breakdown of the diverse land use along the strip.

Everything from old homes, cement factories and carpet stores co-exist on the deteriorating main drag.

The most encouraging statistic in the report, according to Champlin, is that 75 percent of the respondents said they'd participate in a subsidized renovation program.

City planner Gross said that because of the students' work, he is more confident that the city council will set aside a good portion of federal block grant rehabilitation monies to provide low-

interest business loans to city commercial and industrial residents.

GROSS WILL PUSH for an allocation of \$175,000, he said. The city has been allocated \$571,000 by the federal government for block grant projects in fiscal 1979-80.

One LIT architecture student called the Base Line road revitalization project an opportunity to do "real work with real limitations, instead of dreamy, hypothetical busy work."

"WE DEFINITELY want to see some of our work become a reality," said John Barker of Birmingham, a senior at LIT. "Eight Mile Road right now is rapidly becoming a slum. We're trying to help save it, rather than destroy it and try to start all over."

The students in Barker's class said they would like to see a more organized, logical zoning along Eight Mile.

"Industry is leaking down the side streets," Barker said. "Industry is developing farther and farther back into old, residential neighborhoods. The city has got to develop a system to stop that."

The students recommend rezoning some residential blocks to industrial parks that share a common use and are separated from homes by greenbelts and berms.

"There's a very hard edge between commercial stores, industries and residential property right now," said Brad Borkowski.

While none of the students expect Eight Mile to become a showplace overnight, Borkowski said renovation could be phased in gradually and civic improvements tend to snowball through peer pressure.

"You start with one block and two-block strips," said Borkowski.

Both Borkowski and Barker work part-time for architectural firms in the area. They call the on-the-job experience invaluable. Borkowski works for Harley, Ellington, Pierce, Yee & Associates of Southfield, while Barker is employed by Peter Elze & Assoc. of Birmingham.

Fran Little, another LIT student on the Eight Mile project, works for the building division of General Motors.

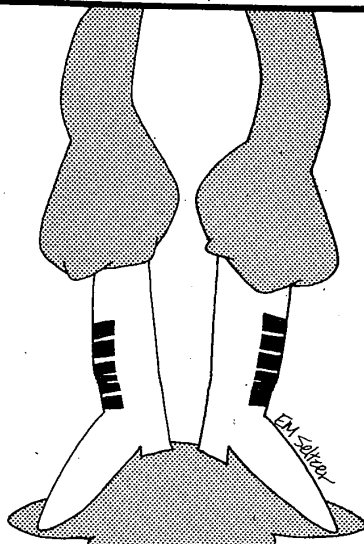
She said as an architect, it is her responsibility to work first with people, not materials.

"We would hope our work has application to the quote, 'real world,'" said Ms. Little. "We'd like to see this kind of thing done."

Her classmate, Barker, says there is the theoretical approach to architecture, where megastuctures abound and money is no object and the practical side to architecture—learned at the office.

"At the job, you design with the price scale in the catalogue right in front of you," Barker said.

"They just look at you funny when you tell them what you learned in school," said Ms. Little.

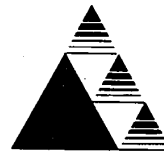


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Grand River building project boosts Farmington economy

The southwest corner of the Farmington area got an economic shot in the arm this year with a massive \$4.62 million building project which will employ 200 persons.

Included in the project are a car dealership, two restaurants, an office and a warehouse.

A 109-room Red Roof Inn is another of the businesses to be constructed on the project site on Grand River, just west of the old I-96 expressway.

The new motel will be built north of Grand River just before it intersects Ten Mile, in the new Sinacola Industrial Park.

In the development, a new Mountain Jack's restaurant has been constructed while a new headquarters for Dynamic Construction Co., a Detroit firm also was built.

Also under construction is a seven-building personal storage area by Nolan Brothers, a Minneapolis business.

Just west of the industrial park, Bob Sellers Pontiac dealership also made its entrance into town. Across Grand River, a developer awaited a construction permit for a new Bonanza Sirloin Pit restaurant.

Except for the Bonanza restaurant, all the businesses will be north of the stretch of Grand River already crowded with a Holiday Inn and the still-growing Farmington Freeway Industrial Park to the south.

The largest single development of the area will be the \$1.8 million motel, according to Don Wallace, spokesman for the 34-motel chain.

"It will be a reasonably priced motel," he said. "We're looking forward to opening this one."

The inn will consist of two buildings, 56 and 53 units set side by side, but staggered on the 2.75 acre site. A cut-rate motel operation with the philosophy of providing inexpensive lodging, it won't include either a swimming pool or restaurant.

About 20 persons will be employed full-time at the new motel, the fourth in the greater Detroit area.

The chain has a better than 95 percent occupancy rate in its 11 Michigan motels. All are located on interstate routes.

Wallace said the company picked the site because of its easy accessibility to the old I-96 expressway and the heavy traffic on Grand River. The site is also just off the terminus of I-275.

Although the company opened a similar motel in Plymouth about two years ago, Wallace said the company isn't worried about saturating the market.

Across newly-paved Sinacola Drive is the Mountain Jack restaurant.

The \$500,000 restaurant is owned by Foodmaker Inc. The building has 28,000 square feet and is located on a two-acre site.

Clint Keller, a spokesman for Foodmaker, said the restaurant will employ about 150 persons. Primarily a steak and seafood restaurant, the business won't serve breakfasts.

Another Mountain Jack is located in Troy.

Residents who need extra space for storage will be able to take advantage of the mini-warehouses on the northernmost portion of Sinacola Industrial Park.

Seven storage buildings, which will be divided into a number of separate units, are planned for the five-acre site, owned by Nolan Brothers. The warehouse buildings have a total value of more than \$500,000.

Moving from Detroit is the Dynamic Construction Co., which has a \$100,000 office warehouse building planned for the industrial park.

"We wanted something close to the expressways and we wanted a relatively new and growing community," said Andrew Kowal, owner and president of Dynamic Construction.

Kowal said the firm may use part of the rear warehouse space for preassembly of construction components and rent out the rest of the space.

Dynamic Construction is a general contracting business. It has done renovation work at Tiger Stadium.

Bob Sellers Pontiac moved into the

Hills from its old site on Grand River near Telegraph. The new \$1.5 million facility is on a 7.75 acre site.

The new Bonanza is valued at about \$300,000 and is on a one and one half acre site.

Save Mart chain opens in this area

An updated version of the neighborhood grocery store concept is being put into effect by Ashland Petroleum Company, which is offering convenience merchandise and gasoline at some of its stations.

One of the stations is at 28451 Ford Road in Garden City.

The new Save Mart outlets provide gasoline, convenience foods, motor oil, automotive supplies and other common goods.

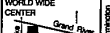
The Save Mart chain, according to William R. Davis, vice president for retail marketing for Ashland, has been successful throughout the eastern United States.

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