

Highway plan wins support

By CRAIG PIECHURA

Only one SEMCOG commissioner was swayed by impassioned pleas from Lathrup and Pleasant Ridge officials to turn down plans to link up separated stretches of the I-696 expressway.

Dorothy Navarre of Monroe voted against the proposal saying she didn't want to see Oakland County "lose good farmland."

Lathrup and Pleasant Ridge officials thanked her for the support but explained that there is no farmland along the proposed freeway route. In fact, one of the contentions of these fighting the freeway is that it will disrupt solid, long-standing neighborhoods.

But Mrs. Navarre still thought the cost of the expressway, estimated at between \$300-\$500 million, was too expensive a price to pay when existing surface roads throughout southeastern Michigan need repairs.

Her vote was the sole dissenting vote in a 7-1 decision by SEMCOG's regional clearinghouse review committee. By their decision, SEMCOG recommends approval of a Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) application for \$15.4 million in state and federal funds needed to purchase remaining property along the western 4.4-mile stretch of land in the remaining 7.9 miles of land needed to link up the freeway.

VINCENT ZATELL, mayor of Lathrup Village, Lathrup councilwoman Dorothy Warren and Pleasant Ridge councilman Charles Fillmore stridently urged SEMCOG committee members to recommend denial of MDOT's land acquisition proposal.

Lathrup officials said a cheaper and less disruptive solution to congested roads would be widening existing mile roads by applying for \$100,000 in federal funds under the withdrawal and substitution provision.

State transportation planning officials said they've been willing to work with officials in both communities to lessen the freeway's impact. But Lathrup and Pleasant Ridge officials haven't cooperated, said MDOT's G. Robert Adams, because they fear concessions could hurt them if there is a legal fight against the freeway.

"If somebody was trying to cut your throat would you fight back?" answered Pleasant Ridge's Fillmore.

"That's the kind of problem we've been having," Adams said to the commission in response to Fillmore's comment.

Representatives of five other cities along the proposed freeway path — in-

cluding Oak Park Mayor David Shepard who sits on the SEMCOG board — strongly recommended freeway approval, calling it a long overdue transportation priority.

Southfield City Planner Donald Gross stood up to tell commissioners Southfield is "in full support of I-696."

A 1975 Southfield city council resolution given to commissioners stated, in part, that "the need for I-696 is daily demonstrated by the critical traffic and capacity bottlenecks which occur on the east/west major streets in that broad corridor from Eight Mile Road to Mile Road, which, even in their ultimately expanded form, cannot be projected to handle increased traffic volumes at an adequate level of operation and safety."

AFTER the commission's vote, Lathrup Mayor ZateLL said he's still hoping that U.S. Transportation Secretary Drew Lewis will withhold funds for the freeway link.

"I'm sure they won't stop the funds (for I-696), ZateLL said. "It's a waste of money."

Mrs. Warren took a dimmer view than ZateLL.

Speaking "as an individual," a councilwoman, she told one reporter at the meeting she's afraid the freeway will be built. After its completion, she predicts it will be viewed as a costly mistake.

She said many Lathrup residents responded to the city council's suggestion to write letters to Drew Lewis at the U.S. Department of Transportation stating their objections to the freeway link. But the letters are being given to a subordinate who sends residents back a non-committal form letter, Mrs. Warren said.

"Right now I don't think there's anything we can do," she said. "It's sad because in 10 to 15 years people are going to say 'We could've built this — it's not necessary.'"

"It's like the closed schools we're seeing all over the place. You say, 'How could they have done this?' It's done because (planners) haven't been able to adjust to the times. They're just not listening to young people or they'd know they're not having babies, they're driving smaller cars."

Mrs. Warren asked MDOT officials to compare population projections made in the 1950s and 1960s to the 1980 census figures for southeastern Michigan. Representatives at the meeting said those figures were not immediately available.

Engineering firm wins 'Conceptor' award

For the second consecutive year, Neyer, Tiseo & Hinds Ltd. of Farmington Hills and Flint, received the Eminent Conceptor Award for engineering excellence from the Consulting Engineers Council of Michigan. The award is the highest presented in the association's annual Engineering and Land Surveying Excellence Competition.

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Last year, Neyer, Tiseo & Hinds Ltd. received the Eminent Conceptor Award for its hydrogeologic and geotechnical study of the proposed 40-acre Shamrock Landfill in Monroe County.

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