

## Opinion

Robert Sklar editor/477-5450  
Kathleen Moran assistant managing editor

33203 Grand River Ave./Farmington, MI 48024

Philip Power chairman of the board  
Richard Agnien president  
Dick Isham general manager  
Steve Barnaby managing editor  
Fred Wright circulation director

## DDA

## An idea worth exploring

**W**ITHOUT A financially secure downtown, Farmington's grip on survival would loosen dramatically.

In some cities, the central business district deteriorated to the point where reconstruction became crucial.

Obviously, it's wiser not to wait until that point before enhancing downtown Farmington's appearance and, in turn, bolstering its tax base.

It might not devastate the city, but economic collapse downtown would surely strip Farmington of much of its luster as a place to live, work and visit.

In this light, it becomes clear that a Downtown Development Authority (DDA) — still in the discussion stages — would be a significant planning tool for Farmington's city council.

By all accounts, Farmington's central business district has stood up well in the fierce scramble for consumer dollars. It's clearly the city's financial heart. Cash registers are ringing — and that's a healthy sign.

**INSTEAD OF** sealing the downtown area's doom, emergence of so many nearby shopping centers has prompted an influx of new and curious shoppers to the Farmington area.

What's needed is to play up downtown's strengths: its small-town charm, variety of stores, friendly merchants, nearby parking and competitive pricing.

Dying downtowns often lack an innovative approach to combating competition. Merchants often fail to develop novel marketing techniques and fail to combine creative selling ideas.

If Farmington — wedged between two major population centers — is to maintain its retail edge, some long-range planning commitments in the downtown area are mandatory.

That's where a DDA fits in.

A city council-appointed group with autonomous decision-making powers, a DDA is designed to promote economic growth, increase property values, foster more jobs and strengthen merchant ties.

A DDA can be a pivotal springboard to such revitalization as expanded parking, plantings, benches, public restrooms, historical preservation, better street lighting and signs, and a unifying downtown logo.

It also can serve as a rallying force for spruced-up storefronts: playing upon a building's original look, not upon design elements from an unrelated time period. The thought is that rehabilitating older



A special crossroads.

buildings helps establish a downtown as a source of community pride and a symbol of community vigor.

DDAs can go a long way in stimulating redevelopment through public and private investment while stressing a community's distinctiveness, original architecture and heritage.

People invest in downtown buildings for many reasons — generally as a money maker, but also as a hobby or out of a sense of civic pride. And just as any investor is better than no investor, a caring investor is better than an aloof investor.

A popular way for a DDA to generate operating money is by capturing for a given number of years the increase in the development district's assessed value from the year the development plan was adopted.

The money results from applying the general property tax rates of the city and other consenting taxing units in the development area to the captured assessed value. This tax increment plan is based on the belief property values will rise with revitalization, and increased revenues each year can be channeled into further downtown development.

**REJUVENATING** A smaller central business district is only as limited as the enterprise of the building owners and shopkeepers. The city could lead the way, however, through a DDA made up of people with a vested interest in downtown's well being.

It takes more than bricks and mortar to make a downtown. And Farmington already has two other key ingredients: a supportive city council and spirited shopkeepers. The trick is to keep energy levels high while courting the many absentee landlords.

We've got a natural in downtown Farmington. All we need to do is polish it up. A DDA would provide the necessary spark and guidance.

— BOB SKLAR

## Long line ahead

Freelance writer Penny Wright recently wrote a series of columns about the inadequacy of women's restrooms. She detailed how, in one place of public entertainment, after another, women had to stand in long lines during intermission — while men didn't.

With the help of dozens of area women who wrote to her, she demonstrated how suburban shopping malls are hiding their restrooms, on the penny-wise, pound-foolish theory that toilets don't make money.

Getting improvements will take years, and the process will have to start with new buildings rather than existing ones. Wright presented her findings and recommendations recently to the State Plumbing Board, the agency which writes appropriate regulations. (The agency was enriched, incidentally, by Gov. Blanchard's appointment of its first female member in history last year.)

## Defeat for secrecy

**THERE'S GOOD** news for common citizens, bad news for public officials who like to hold secret, closed-door meetings.

The state House of Representatives shot down House Bill 4871, which would have allowed local governing boards to alarm the doors during legislative deliberations at the written threat of a lawsuit.

The House refused, 64-36, to advance the bill to third reading. Leading that fight were state Reps. David Hollister, D-Lansing, author of the Open Meetings Act, and Rep. Jim Kosteva, D-Canton. (Incidentally, seems to be a

**TO THEIR** credit, Plumbing Board members seemed to appreciate the problem, though they dwelled long on how difficult it is to make changes — particularly since all changes in state rules and regulations must be scrutinized by the Legislature's Joint Administrative Rules Committee.

Thus, to the Women's Movement — if it still exists — a major priority should be to seek one or more seats on the Joint Rules Committee.

The goal is 2 1/2 to 1; in places of public entertainment, it will require 2 1/2 times as many water closets in the women's room in order to keep the waiting lines roughly equal.

All joking aside, "holding it" for long periods can cause women bladder infections. That is no joke.

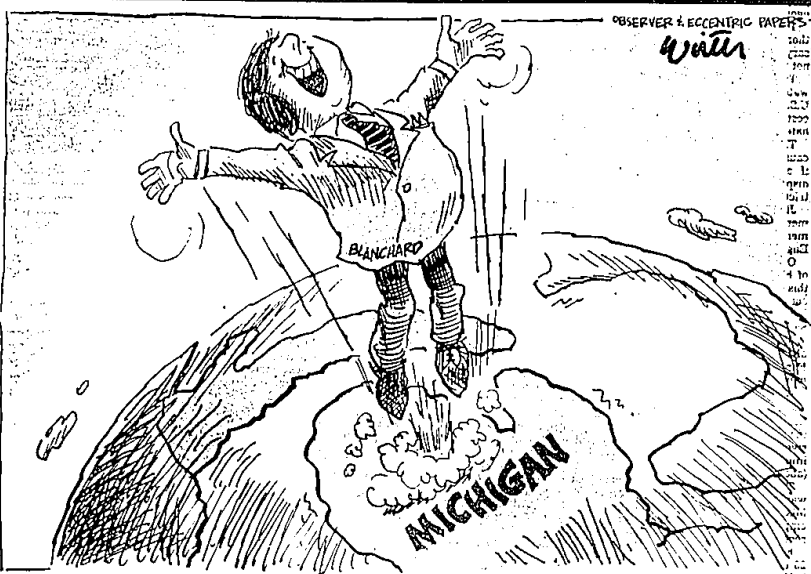
— OBSERVER &amp; ECCENTRIC

"comer" in political circles and should advance up the ranks.)

Black marks go to the lawmakers who tried to introduce more secrecy into local government, including W.V. Brotherton, R-Farmington.

The bill's sponsor, Rep. Willis Bullard, R-Milford, may try to put together 56 votes to advance his regressive legislation. But we're hoping he will discontinue his annual game of trying to blow holes into the Open Meetings Act.

— OBSERVER &amp; ECCENTRIC



## The payoff: 'Solvency Day'

**SOLVENCY DAY** in Michigan — Nov. 8 — probably will be remembered as one of the high points of Gov. James J. Blanchard's administration. If his day didn't start with him hopping out of the shower singing "I'm sitting on top of the world, just rolling along," well, it should have.

Blanchard is heading for the last year of a four-year term at the helm of a stable state government that, for the first time in 10 years, does not have a deficit. He has managed some impressive gains in bringing state government under better managerial control, and politically he is riding a crest.

Polls show that the state's residents give him one of the highest approval ratings enjoyed by a governor. His most probable Republican challengers — Dan ("I'm not dull") Murphy and Bill Lucas, the county executives of Oakland and Wayne — are not only not gaining any ground, they are probably losing.

**IF THE** election for governor were to be held today instead of in November 1986, Blanchard would be a shoo-in. Almost forgotten is the statewide recall drive in 1983 — started by those outraged by the Blanchard-engineered raise in the personal income tax, from 4.6 to 6.1 percent.

The tax increase was approved by the Legislature at some political cost — the recent ouster of two Democratic senators and loss of control of the Senate. But the tax raise, coupled with the fortunate improvement in the economy, has enabled the state to be labeled the "comeback state" by futurist authority John Naisbitt.



Bob Wisler

Whether the comeback really can be attributed to the Blanchard administration, the Reagan administration, Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker, the occasional boom times enjoyed in a cyclical economy or the gods is debatable.

**BUT MICHIGAN** is enjoying the benefits of a recovered economy, and Blanchard and some of the architects of Michigan's effort to reduce the state deficit — particularly state Treasurer Bob Bowman — enjoyed their day in the sun, albeit it was raining.

The governor proclaimed Nov. 8 Solvency Day and noted that the economic recovery plan for Michigan "raised Michigan's credit rating from the worst to the best, saving millions of dollars in interest costs, making possible increased state investment in education, prisons, economic development and other vital service (while) paying off the deficit."

The deficit inherited from the previous Republican administration of Gov. William Milliken amounted to \$1.7 billion — \$800 million in accumulated debt and \$900 million in operating funds.

OF COURSE, Blanchard noted, as he

should have, that none of the progress would have been made had not the people of Michigan supported the state government's efforts to balance the budget. The people, indeed, deserve credit for biting the bullet and for refusing to be shortchanged in dealing with a problem that had been mounting.

The public held out for fiscal sanity in state government even when it was possible to approve Proposal C last November, an approval that would have made the individual tax burden lighter but certainly would have postponed and made much more difficult state government stability.

Credit should be given to Blanchard for stepping forward early in his administration to deal strongly with the horrendous fiscal problem that he had inherited. He moved quickly and surely to bring the necessary votes out of the Legislature. Solvency Day was the payoff.

The investment bankers and experts are now looking favorably on Michigan and Michigan's governor and that should make Blanchard and treasurer Bowman feel that their efforts were justified.

Of course, there is also a demand for Republican political maneuvering — Lucas and Murphy — that the governor cut the income tax rate from the present 5.35 to the 4.6 rate that we had three years ago. Perhaps the tax rate can be lowered further, and the governor has said he will consider an earlier tax cut, to 5.1 percent in December.

But such political demands are more opportunistic than substantive. What else can the Republican candidates talk about? Blanchard is on a roll.

## 'Buy American' isn't always best

You've heard all the talk. Buy American and save a job. Mmmm, sounds good all right. But I wonder...

A recent article in The Detroit magazine started me thinking about all this debate. Listening to those folks in Washington certainly doesn't shed light on the situation. But we know the D.C. bunch is in another world anyway — even those who pretend they are outsiders.

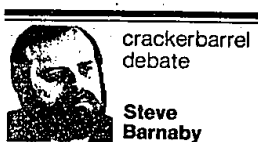
But let's look at some of the cold hard facts around suburban Detroit. A recent article in The Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce magazine makes a body sit up straight.

In truth, you could be cutting your own economic throat or that of one of your neighbors if you stick too closely with the buy American credo.

Another truth is that your community may very well be on an economic roll because of foreign investment. It's coming to the point that you've got to wonder what your town would be like without the foreign bucks that help to defer your property tax.

**FOR** many, that foreign company may even provide you with a paycheck.

In the Observer & Eccentric circulation



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

area, 154 foreign businesses from 19 countries have offices and provide residents with 14,641 jobs. That's a hunk of investment.

The big winners in the foreign investment sweepstakes are Southfield with 54 businesses, Troy with 38, Livonia with 29 and Farmington Hills with 17.

While Southfield got the jump on everyone else, Farmington Hills was late into the game and already is prospering. Fifteen years ago, Farmington Hills was a rural township, replete with farms. But the farms have been replaced with offices and light industrial complexes.

Other cities such as Rochester (four firms), Birmingham (six firms) and Bloomfield Hills (six firms) are starting to cash in on foreign investment.

Even Lathrup Village has one foreign investor.

**AND IT'S TOUGH** to tell the players without a program. Those militants who believe they're buying American may very well be doing the opposite.

Following is a list of a few of the businesses around these parts with all-American names but which are owned by foreign firms.

Hygrade Food Products in Livonia, owned by Hanson Trust PLC, London.

Detroit Race Course in Livonia, owned by Ladbroke Group PLC, London.

Baskin Robbins in Ann Arbor, owned by Allied Breweries Ltd., London.

Nestle Inc. Co. of Dearborn, owned by Nestle Alimentana, Switzerland.

Great Lakes Steel of Ecorse, owned by Nippon Kokan, of Tokyo, Japan.

The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Co. (A&P Supermarkets) in Southfield, owned by Tengelmann Group, Ruhr, Germany.

The list could go on, but you get the picture.

Oh, and for you folks who have a quarrel with Japan, that country has 45 firms that have invested in the metro-Detroit area.