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# Building Scene

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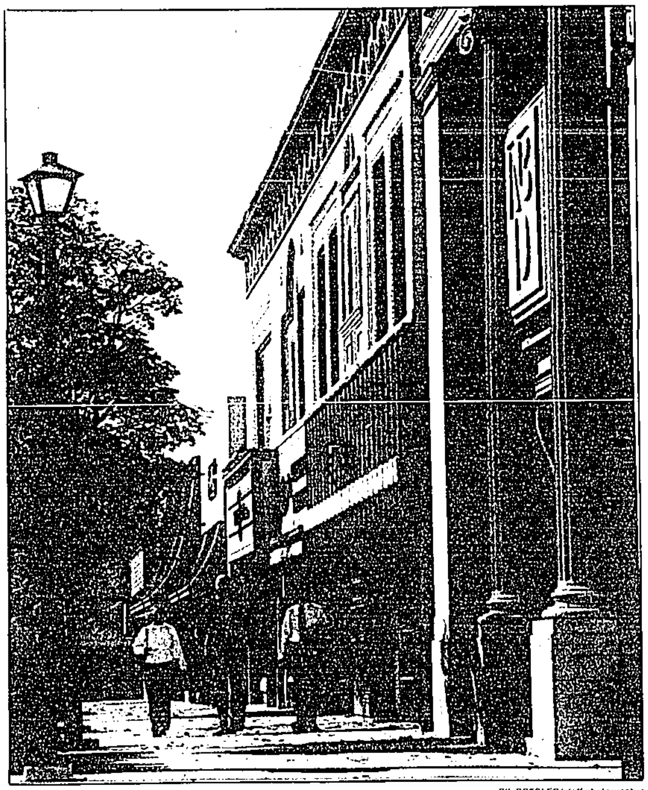

BIL BRESLER/staff photographer

Traditional downtowns, with little parking, suffered as the popularity of the automobile grew. But some see a backlash against cookie-cutter malls, which bodes well for downtowns such as Plymouth.

# Development:

## Looking back to the future to determine a course of action

By R.J. King
special writer

*'Those same tenants who pooh-poohed downtowns because there wasn't the traffic of malls are now taking a chance on Main Street again.'*
— *Sheldon Pont*

As more subdivisions, strip malls and miles of highways spring up around us, it's not difficult to predict what our suburbs will look like in the year 2000.

But if suburban sprawl continues to a point where every available inch is developed, it would signal defeat, say area architects, planners and scholars. Every suburb would look the same, traffic would be horrendous, quality of life would diminish and developers would start looking elsewhere.

Still, that appears to be where we're headed. While many suburbs went through a period of rapid growth following World War II, fueled in large part by the enormous impact of the automobile, many of the characteristics that drew people to suburbia — privacy, open space and mobility — are disappearing.

"Let's face it, nobody paid any attention to what was going up in the suburbs," said Roger Marz, a professor of political science at Oakland University and a former manager with the Oakland County Planning Division. "And if something's not done to cope with the problem, urban sprawl will continue unabated and sadly, the population won't be dense enough to warrant rapid transit.

"Trafic will continue to get worse," Marz continued. "And if you think we have problems now, wait five years and we'll be in the same boat as Washington, D.C., where there are no rush hours, but rush days, and things are tied up until 9 p.m."

THE GREAT EXPANSION of the suburbs has also taken its toll on a community's sense of character and place. Yet for the future, nothing could be more of a mistake than to allow new and existing suburbs to look the same, said Ron Rea, vice president of Peterhansrea, an architectural firm in downtown Birmingham.

"The development market is not real creative today when it comes to looking at things differently," Rea said. "The new buildings, especially strip malls, are void of any endearing detail or design, which is really a mistake."

"There hasn't been a traditional downtown built in Oakland County since World War II," said Ed Hustoles, executive director of planning for the Southeast Michigan Council or Governments (SEMCOG) in Detroit.

"Part of the reason is such downtowns as Detroit, Birmingham, Rochester and Plymouth were never created with the automobile in mind. It used to be you'd go downtown to shop and have to circle round and round or park some distance away.

"Then came the malls like Northland which offered parking, a close cluster of stores available under one roof and you didn't have to worry about the kids running out in the street. But now we've had a reaction to that. The regional malls are too crowded, parking is getting worse and you kinda hate to go there."

The next generation of development in the western and northern suburbs, Hustoles said, would involve a step forward and a step back. The future may include a proposed $300 million megamall in Auburn Hills, which will offer shoppers a series of small, street-lined courts devoted to retail shops, entertainment and even a hotel, allowing visitors to stay overnight.

But the mammoth 2.3 million-square-foot project — Auburn Mills, planned for I-75 and Baldwin Road — has run into bitter opposition from such communities as Southfield, Rochester Hills and Lake Angelus. Officials have charged the megamall will isolate jobs and money in one region, instead of spreading it more evenly across the suburbs.

The developer for Auburn Mills, Western Development, said the mall would create 2,000 temporary construction jobs and 5,000 permanent jobs. But the company is based in in Washington, D.C., meaning the development's profits will travel out of state.

THE IDEA OF NEW and existing

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# Office market stays healthy

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

Despite continued office construction and fears that developers will overbuild, metropolitan Detroit's major office market continues to thrive.

Concern that construction would eventually dwarf demand, resulting in high vacancy rates, has yet to materialize, according a third quarter report on major office markets compiled by Cushman & Wakefield of Michigan.

Overall, vacancy rates in the southeast Michigan suburbs fell 1 percent from the same period last year, according to Lewis "Bud" Kasselman, vice president of Cushman & Wakefield, Southfield.

Suburban vacancy rates range from 6.4 percent in Dearborn to 45.6 percent in Novi. The average vacancy rate for major suburban office markets is 19.3 percent. *(See accompanying chart.)*

A suburban vacancy rate of 20 percent is generally considered to be the national average, Kasselman said.

During the third quarter of 1989, the Birmingham/Bloomfield Hills area, Livonia and Southfield all showed increased office leasing, according to the report.

SOFT MARKET fears are unfounded because office construction has been so strong in recent years, Kasselman said.

Novi and Auburn Hills, which has a vacancy rate of 32.7 percent, could probably be called soft — they are examples of communities where office space has clearly outstripped demand — but a 20.4-percent vacancy rate in Southfield or 20.7-percent vacancy rate in Troy is less alarming, Kasselman said.

Most major office markets continue to show substantial growth, according to Cushman and Wakefield's report.

For example, Southfield has almost 500,000 square feet of office space currently under construction. More than 209,000 square feet of space is under construction in the Birmingham/Bloomfield area — one of the hottest office markets, according to the report.

DESPITE HIGHER vacancy rates than in previous years in Troy, developers are building an additional 120,000 square feet, the report said. Farmington Hills, with 120,000 square feet under construction, also has a growing office market.

Even Novi, with the highest vacancy rate of all the major markets, has almost 102,000 square feet of office space under construction.

In West Bloomfield, developers are building 33,000 square feet. No office construction was in Livonia and Auburn Hills as of Oct 1. Since then Livonia has seen ground broken on an office building in its Victor Corporate Park.

Both Southfield, which has nearly 15 million square feet of available office space, and Troy, which has more than 11 million square feet, still have substantial markets, Kasselman said.

"(Leasing activity) may be slower than in previous years, but that is an indication of how strong those years were — not an indication of a weak market."

BUT OFFICE building is falling off, Kasselman said. During the first quarter of 1989, approximately 6.3 million square feet of office space was under construction. By the start of the third quarter, that number had fallen to slightly more than 3 million square feet.

Some of this decline can be attributed to the perception that there is a softening market, Kasselman said.

"Some people are publishing stories that the market is soft and the developers and investors get nervous."

## Status report: Major office markets

| City | # of Buildings | Square Footage | Available for lease | Vacancy Rate | Average rental |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Detroit | 39 | 11,698,986 | 1,253,971 | 10.7% | $14.49 |
| Southfield | 122 | 14,925,389 | 3,051,189 | 20.4% | $16.57 |
| Farmington Hills | 66 | 4,010,419 | 715,799 | 17.8% | $16.44 |
| Novi | 10 | 714,050 | 325,264 | 45.6% | $17.97 |
| West Bloomfield | 12 | 572,746 | 99,797 | 17.4% | $16.36 |
| Birm./Blfd Hills | 86 | 5,417,127 | 776,284 | 14.3% | $19.91 |
| Troy | 110 | 11,021,168 | 2,1285,929 | 20.7% | $17.65 |
| Auburn Hills | 11 | 821,419 | 268,959 | 32.7% | $16.13 |
| Livonia | 27 | 2,150,170 | 341,549 | 15.9% | $16.48 |
| Dearborn | 14 | 1,672,149 | 106,443 | 6.4% | $16.92 |

Source: Cushman & Wakefield of Michigan, Inc.