

# Panel cites lack of master plan

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

Urban sprawl drew just a handful of people to a recent panel discussion on the subject.

Present development creates winners and losers among communities because the county has no master plan, said speakers at the event which was sponsored by the Issues Development Committee of the Oakland County Democratic Party.

"I suggest we raise our voice and demand of the county, all 112 miles of it, a plan by which we can develop together for the community good," said County Commissioner Larry Pernick, who represents Southfield. "We need a master plan that is not present today."

Under present development, Southfield in southern Oakland County is considered a loser. In spite of major investments in roads, schools and utilities aimed at luring new construction to the community, most developers are going north.

"ALTHOUGH WE'VE made major investments in Southfield, we're seeing it's not enough to induce new construction."

"A change in vision and philosophy" is essential if the county's present character is to be preserved in the face of continued development, said Edward Hueston, director of planning for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. "Change means restricting development."

Adopting a master plan is complicated by the 60 separate units of city and township government within Oakland County -- "each with an individual development agenda that pits one community against the next."

"We need a common vision that goes beyond individual communities. But do we have the political will to turn down development and lose property tax?"

PRESENT DEVELOPMENT is based on the economic gain of each community, panelists agreed. "The most immediate need for local government is more dollars. The way to

get them is through intense use of the land," Pernick said.

"One need not apologize because capitalism works," said Donald Tucker, a Southfield attorney who represents Western Development, the company developing the giant mall in Auburn Hills, just east of Pontiac.

The new mall, opposed by area residents who fear loss of quality life, is expected to provide \$6 million in taxes for Pontiac schools and 6,000 new jobs, Tucker said.

"WE ALL CHASE THE American dream. Our laws encourage it. Good developers today understand the politics of circumstance. Before you throw stones at the nasty developer, remember, we have 200 years of expansionist tradition behind us."

"And if we are to harness human nature that creates the disputes (between community governments), we must do better create an environment conducive to the refurbishing of our existing urban areas." New economic incentives are needed to attract developers to older urban areas.

Growth and change mean pain, said Eddie McDonald, an assistant to U.S. Rep. Robert Carr. Pain is a certainty because of past growth and the growth expected in Oakland County over the next 10 years. McDonald was a last-minute replacement for newly elected Pontiac mayor Walter Moore, who is vacationing in the Caribbean.

"The way to avoid it is by getting involved early, on community planning commissions, boards of appeal, whatever."

"My real concern is we always wait until the last minute to get involved. We operate by crisis management."

The next meeting of the Oakland County Democratic Committee is 8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 12, in the Board of Commissioners auditorium, 1200 North Telegraph, Pontiac. For more information, call 334-0971.

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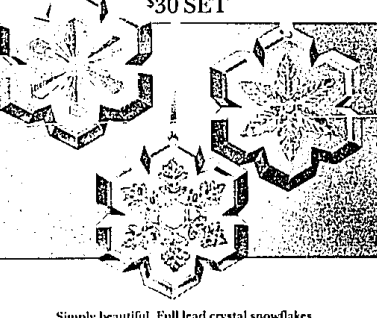
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