

Controversial rezoning backed by merchants



A reflection in the glass of a vacant store at Muirwood Square one morning last week underscores the vacancy problem in the Farmington Hills shopping center.

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Bertak representatives hope the council will follow the plan's recommendation for rezoning.

A 30,000-square-foot building on the center's western edge would be demolished to make way for the newer development, according to plans.

A year ago, Helen Barnett moved her business from that building to another one in the center not scheduled for demolition. Barnett owns a Mailboxes Etc. franchise.

"I'm doing better this year," she said, "but I know there's more room to grow."

"I hope to God it (the rezoning) goes through."

SOME OF the merchants believe concern by neighbors about increased traffic has caused even more problems. One merchant said people don't want to leave space at Muirwood Square because they are unsure what is happening with the center.

Local merchant Jonathan Bratman, whose name and telephone number appear in vacant store windows at Muirwood, did not return telephone calls.

The Farmington Downtown Development Authority, Farmington Planning Commission and neighborhood groups from both Farmington and Farmington Hills have spoken against the proposal, since Bertak announced the plans in January.

The company withdrew its request in mid-March, spending several months doing new studies and gathering information. The proposal was brought back to the city in November.

"The little centers — they can't compete anymore," Terterian said. "I want this done. There has to be a major anchor."



SHARON LE MIEUX/staff photographer



TOP: Dennis Moloney (left) and Paul Terterian, co-owners of Artisan's Jewelry, a long-time business at Muirwood Square, say they favor the shopping center's rezoning request.

LEFT: David Elfros, owner and manager of Elfros Drugs, the first store to open at Muirwood Square 10 years ago, said business has been slow. He is in favor of the shopping center's rezoning request.

Providence vows zoning fight

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It said Mayor-elect Jean Fox, "We didn't want to go around our attorney. If they have some new proposition, I think the city council is always willing to listen."

But, she added, that should be done through the city attorney.

THE CITY COUNCIL briefly discussed the matter at its Dec. 11 meeting, said assistant city manager David Call. He expects administrators to pursue the matter with the city attorney after the first of the year at the direction of the council, he said.

Providence is attempting to rezone 15.5 acres of a 21.3-acre parcel at Inkster Road and Northwestern Highway in Farmington Hills for a proposed 90,000-square-foot office building and outpatient clinic. After the city denied the request last February, the hospital filed a suit asking for damages last summer. Providence had hoped to break ground this year.

The site was the original Marillac Hall of the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center until the building was recently demolished. The city's master land use plan recognizes the existing use, known as "quasi-public."

The city denied the request at the recommendation of the planning commission, after an outpouring of concern from neighboring Woodcreek subdivision residents, upset with what they believe is encroaching commercialism along

Northwestern Highway. Former city councilwoman Judy Seronan abstained from the vote, citing possible conflict with her position as executive director of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce.

"Even though it is a very good cause . . . you still have the practical things in life to consider," said Fox, adding that the city believes the proposed building to be too large for the parcel.

12 Mile pathways planned

An 8-foot-wide bike/pedestrian path will meander through evergreen trees along the residential north of 12 Mile, west of Farmington Road. A sidewalk, 5 feet wide, will go in along the commercial north side.

The concrete pathways are part of a plan to widen and build a boulevard along 12 Mile, from Farmington Road to west of Drake — next year. A combination of state, county and city money will pay for the \$6.1 million project.

The Farmington Hills City Council approved the pathways Dec. 4.

The council also:

- Approved installing the typical traffic signals along this stretch of 12 Mile at four intersections — Farmington Road, Drake, Bunker Hill and White Plains.

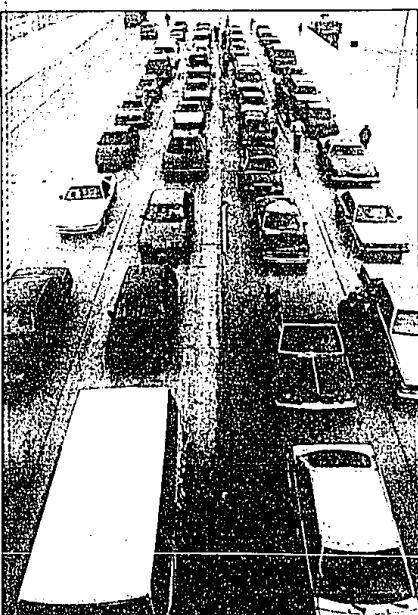
- Approved providing low-level lighting along the 8-foot-wide bike path on the north side, providing adequate up-lighting in the median and providing adequate overhead lights at the intersections.

They're off and running on last Reuther segment

By Tim Smith
staff writer

At long last, the final segment of the I-696 Walter P. Reuther Freeway officially opened Thursday, following a 5 p.m. ribbon-tying ceremony in frigid weather on a bridge overlooking the brand new super-artery.

Symbolically joining the east and west ends of the 9.1-mile stretch with the ribbon tying, just west of Woodward Avenue, were Gov. James Blanchard and Michigan Department of Transportation director James Pitz.



JERRY ZOLNICKY/staff photographer

Revving up their engines, westbound motorists wait Thursday for the official opening of the final segment of I-696.

Minutes earlier, during an indoor ceremony at the Oakland Community College Royal Oak campus, Blanchard, Reuther's daughter, Elisabeth Reuther Dickmeyer and a host of other luminaries spoke about the successful culmination of a 32-year project.

"My commitment is to make sure this is a good day, not only for transportation, but for the people of Southfield" and the other communities which the new segment transverses, Blanchard said during the ceremony.

Blanchard also said the stretch will "help redevelop south Oakland

County," and improve communication between the east and west sides of metropolitan Detroit.

"THERE'S THIS SAYING that 'east is east, west is west and never the twain shall meet,'" said U.S. Sen. Carl Levin, D-Detroit. "Today, the 'twain' is meeting under the broad banner of Walter Reuther."

Reuther, the former UAW president, died in a 1970 plane crash.

"I believe that Walter Reuther would be smiling today," said his daughter, Dickmeyer, later added that people, when driving the new I-696, would remember her father's vision of a compassionate world community."

UAW president Owen Bieber urged the suburbs and Detroit to "rededicate ourselves to mending the ties of brotherhood and opening the bridges of opportunity that Walter spent his entire life trying to create."

Listening to the testimonials in the OCC auditorium were state transportation employees, past and present, and freeway contractors, among others.

Donald F. Fracassi and Margaret Dickinson, both of Southfield, and Lincoln Village mayors, sat on the stage along with mayors for the other cities and townships the new freeway runs through.

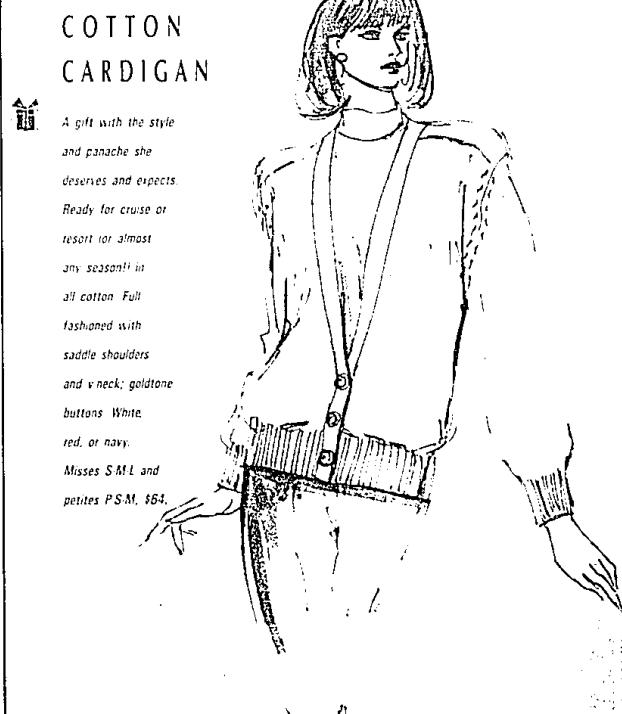
OTHER DIGNITARIES on hand were U.S. Rep. Sandy Levin, D-Southfield; U.S. Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Flint; Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and state senators Jack Faxon (D-Farmington Hills/Southfield) and Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield.

"Most of the people in this room will gray or die with gray hair when we're 500 years old," in 1957, Riegle said. "In fact, some people now without hair had hair then."

Riegle then talked about the consummate team effort required to finally complete the 28.2-mile freeway, which cost \$765 million to build.

"The team gathered today reminds us of all the things we do when we band together for a common purpose," Riegle said.

THEN, WITH spectators watching (many standing on the freeway pavement below the bridge) in frigid weather, with eager motorists lining up to get the green light, "east met west." A firework display subsequently punctuated the beginning of a new transportation era.



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