

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

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Big Brother

Feds off base with mandate

THE FEDS should butt out and not try to mandate local policy.

The Environmental Protection Agency's push to require the six communities along the route to legislate wetlands protection has jeopardized construction of the Haggerty Road Connector.

Haggerty is much more than a two-lane county road. Its presence in booming west Oakland County controls the lives of many who travel it.

The best short-term solution proposed by the state to the peak drive-time gridlock on Haggerty seems to be the Connector, a multi-lane boulevard about a half-mile west of Haggerty, between 12 Mile and Pontiac Trail.

Some communities affected by the \$75-million improvement project, such as West Bloomfield and Novi, already protect their wetlands by ordinance. Others, like Farmington Hills, don't.

But that's immaterial. Heck, the project meets the state's environmental rules, which are far stricter than those set by the feds in scope and, equally important, enforcement.

The EPA has vowed to reject the Michigan Department of Transportation's pending environmental impact statement unless the Federal Highway Administration requires the locals to legislate wetlands protection. Rejection could throw up a roadblock so laden with bureaucratic wrangling, it could take years to penetrate.

U.S. Rep. Bill Broomfield, R-Birmingham, whose district includes southwest Oakland County, is one of eight Michigan congressmen who've accused the EPA of holding the project hostage.

"This is a case of bureaucracy run amok," said U.S. Rep. Bob Carr, D-East Lansing, in a particularly incisive comment.

Quite simply, it's a case of the feds infringing on state and local rights. The project's linchpin, a new I-696 interchange near Haggerty, is already a year behind schedule. It remains in the wings as Haggerty Road congestion worsens.

The net loss of wetlands from construction of the Connector is projected to be minimal. Meanwhile, future development that threatens wetlands adjacent to the Connector would have to pass muster with Michigan's tougher environmental rules.

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MAKING ROADS flow more freely often opens the floodgates to more growth and development. But in this case, much of the urban sprawl came first, leaving Farmington Hills and its neighbors stuck with incredibly crowded roads.

Killing the Connector won't stop the urban sprawl or make it go away. Development can't be stopped. But overdevelopment and damaging growth can — through local planning and zoning boards.

Home rule is a cherished American concept. But the EPA's bid to mandate wetlands protection ordinances undercuts the value of that concept. Bluntly put, requiring local ordinances doesn't fall within the EPA's purview.

If the mandate succeeds, will the EPA skip from town to town, requiring local wetlands laws every time a federal highway project approaches a sensitive area?

WE'RE AS concerned as anyone about our vanishing wetlands. But the inefficiency of such a mandate is mind-boggling. One town could stop a major highway project for political reasons, using lack of a wetlands protection ordinance as leverage.

If federal environmental rules are so weak, then toughen them, don't try to compensate by mandating local rules.

And if the locals sense a need for grassroots protection of wetlands, then they should make it their business to enact appropriate ordinances — through their initiative, with feedback from their residents.

It's none of Washington's business.

Guv's plan rewards those who stay put

GOV. JAMES BLANCHARD would give some nice property tax relief to people who already own a house.

But the young bucks and does planning to buy houses in the years ahead will pay "full retail price," as they say in the ethnic jokes about WASPS.

Assessments on suburban houses have been rising with the market, at double-digit rates in recent years.

Blanchard's plan is aimed at capping property assessments at the rate of consumer price inflation in Detroit.

The long-term effects of the governor's plan will be to reward those who stay in one place for many years and sock newcomers.

Here's how it could work:

SUPPOSE BLANCHARD'S relief plan had gone into effect 10 years ago. Suppose I had bought a house then for \$50,000. It would be assessed at 50 percent, or \$25,000.

Suppose market prices rose 10 percent a year compounded. In the 10th year, my house would be worth \$117,898 and assessed for \$58,949.

Ab, but Blanchard's treasury has been there to help me.

My effective assessment would rise just 5 percent compounded, the CPI rate. So I pay school property taxes on the basis of my original \$25,000 assessment times 5 percent compounded — just \$38,783 in the 10th year.

The state treasury pays my school operating property taxes on \$20,166 — the difference between the true SEV of \$58,949 and the adjusted rate of \$38,783.

A good deal for me, eh?

THE AVERAGE school tax rate in Michigan is about 33 mills, or \$33 per \$1,000 of assessment. Without Blanchard's relief plan, I would pay the full \$1,945 in school taxes in the 10th year.

But with his plan, the state treasury writes a check to my local district for 33 mills times \$20,166 or \$665.

I would pay just \$1,280.

The longer I stay in my house, the greater the share of my local school property tax paid by the state. In my hypothetical 10-year period, the state would have paid a total of \$2,722 of my taxes.

Moreover, the state aid I receive encourages me to vote higher tax rates for schools. Shucks, my young neighbors and the store owners pay the full bill, but I won't.



Tim Richard

LET'S SAY I sell my house in the 10th year for any reason — growing family, empty nester, retirement, a new job in a different town.

The newcomers start by paying the full shot of \$1,945 in school property taxes. That's not a nice thing to do to young people trying to start families.

The Greeks had a word for it: gerontocracy, government by the elderly.

from our readers

Old photos are needed

To the editor:

Would anyone in the Farmington area have a photo of:

1. The Greek Revival house that once stood on the west side of Farmington Road just south of the present I-696 Expressway; it burned in the early '60s.
2. The house that stood where the present NBD building is at the corner of Farmington Road and Alta Loma.
3. The large tree that once was smack-dab in the middle of the intersection of Farmington Road and 13 Mile.
4. The barn and house that were located in the '30s about ¼ mile south of the present U.S. Post Office in Farmington city.
5. The former Owen House, and until ca. 1980 the office of Dr. Lee Halsted. It was set back from Grand

Men, if you're about to turn 18, it's time to register with Selective Service at any U.S. Post Office.

THE IRONY is that Blanchard also is pushing a program called HOST, home ownership savings trust. The prospective house buyers put their savings in a state-operated, tax-sheltered fund and earn interest to accumulate a down payment on their first house.

With one hand, the state helps them save. With the other, it socks them with a property tax bill larger by half than the last one I paid.

Let's look at it from the pioneer point of view — westward the wagons, adventure ho, new opportunity.

What incentive do I have to take the risk of a new economic adventure elsewhere if I'm going to be punished for moving by paying \$665 a year more in property taxes for the same-sized house?

Tim Richard is director of the SCC News Service for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

River on the south side and a bit east of the Village Mall.

I am in the process of revising "Farmington: A Pictorial History," and I would like to include the above photos. Further, if anyone has a photo that was not in the first edition and would fit with any of the topics of the 1970 printing, I would be interested in hearing from you by phone or letter.

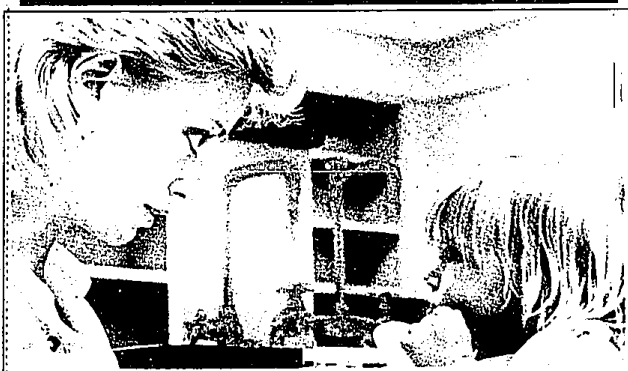
The new edition may be out in December, if not, then in early 1991. If you would like to receive notice of the pre-publication price, so inform me in writing.

The History Room at the downtown library is missing the bound volume of the Enterprises for the years 1923-24, which carried the centennial of Farmington stories and obituary stories: the death of Farmington's Gov. Warner.

Also missing is the 1907-08 volume. I used both in the earlier edition. Would anyone know of their whereabouts?

Lee S. Peel,
Farmington

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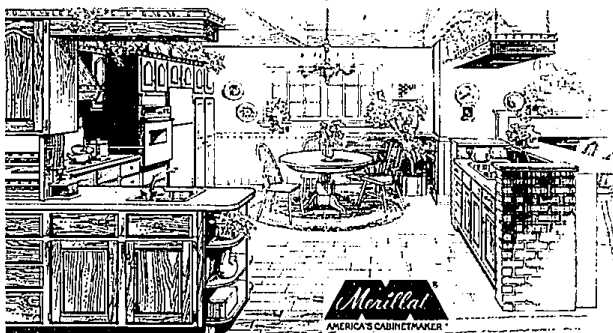
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