

# Building Scene

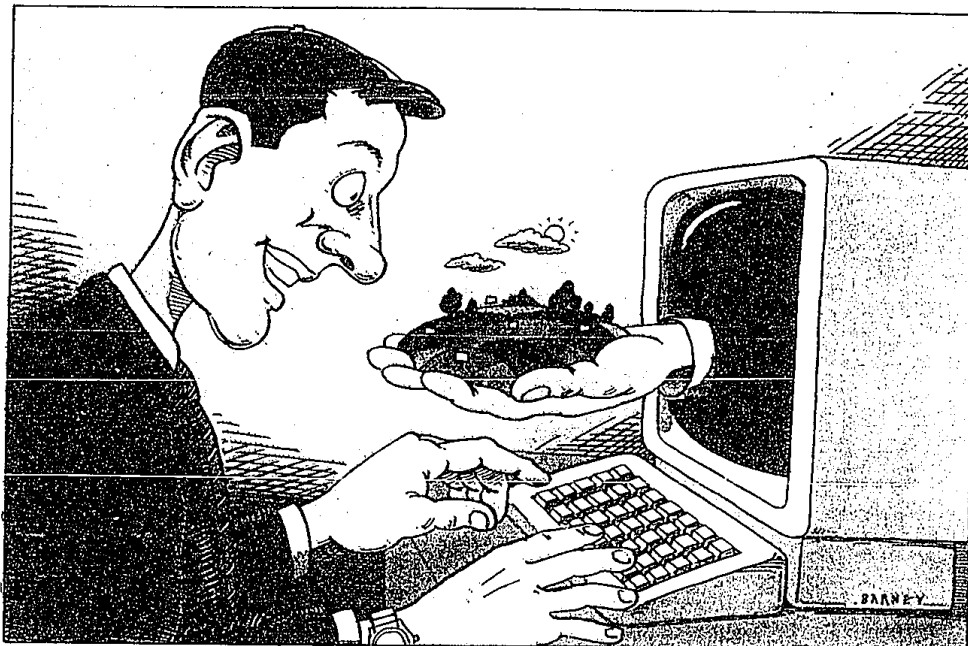
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Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300

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## Zero in on building sites electronically

By Gerald Frawley  
staff writer

The Information Age — it was only a matter of time before some sharp entrepreneurs would start specialized information services geared to the needs of land and building developers.

Land Data Inc., founded in December 1988 by Steven and Kathy Golden, and TOXICHECK Environ-

mental Services Inc., founded in 1987 by Mark Bennett, cater to the needs to know about land.

Land Data, in West Bloomfield, offers an on-line computer database on vacant and developed property and a hardbound directory that includes plat maps of improved and vacant lands, according to Kathy Golden, vice president.

A commercial multi-list of properties for sale, a mortgage rate in-

dex and a mailing label service are also available.

"ANYONE WITH a computer, phone and modem can access information by zone and street (or other parameters) and get legal descriptions, ownership, assessed value, taxes, school districts and other information," Golden said.

The database is also valuable for keeping a general tab on a particular

piece of property or the real estate market in general, she said.

Directories include plat, zoning, vacant land, water line and sewer line maps, as well as a vacant land directory sorted by zoning and location with sidwell numbers, owner information, school districts, assessed value and a property address if assigned, she said.

PREVIOUSLY, THOSE looking

for similar information would spend hours in county clerk offices, Golden said.

"The time savings is incredible — we allow small companies to compete with the large and middle-sized companies."

"Now you can punch in a name, or a street, or a parcel and out pops all the property they own in the county."

A user can also learn who owns

nearby property, how it's zoned, and how it's used.

"And it is easy, she said. "We designed it so we it would be easy — our market is basically one with little or no computer experience."

Land Data's database, which already covers Oakland and Wayne counties, will expand into Livings-

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## Growth management bill readied

By Gerald Frawley  
staff writer

As pressures for controlling growth in southeast Michigan and in boomtowns on the west side of the state mount, draft legislation designed to give local communities more authority over development is nearing completion.

In the works for nearly two years, the legislation according to its authors, strives to balance the interest of existing development against the need for new development.

But builders are concerned efforts to restrict or stop development could be disastrous to them, the local economy and the freedom of people to choose where they wish to live.

Neither side expects to see growth management legislation introduced until after the November general elections.

According to Mark Wyckoff, president of the Planning and Zoning Center, an Ann Arbor planning consultant firm, current planning and zoning regulations were adequate for the past, but they approach growth in a piecemeal fashion.

"They were designed for the problems of a different age," Wyckoff said.

Wyckoff and Gerald Fisher, an attorney with Kohl, Secret, Wardle, Lynch, Clark and Hampton in Farmington Hills, presented an early draft of the new legislation at a growth management meeting in Southfield sponsored by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) and five communities.

The legislation, developed for Independence, Oakland, Waterford and West Bloomfield townships and the city of Rochester Hills, will not be introduced in the Legislature until next year.

Wyckoff stressed communities are cautious about controlling growth for fear of stifling it. "Despite what developers believe, these are not anti-growth efforts."

IRVIN YACKNESS, executive director of the Builders Association of Southeast Michigan (BASM), said he hasn't examined the proposed legislation, but regulations that inhibit development should be scrutinized closely.

The builders association is committed to growth management, but it is concerned the builders' and public sector's definition are widely different, he said.

Most growth management proposals appear to be no-growth based, which is why a continuing dialogue is needed, Yackness said.

Limiting or slowing development through any means restricts the right of property owners to develop their land, increases housing costs and prevents people from choosing where to live.

"It is wrong for people to stop development just because they have their house in the suburbs," he said. "They (the rights to choose) were certainly important to the citizen who earlier had the opportunity to move to the area."

"Stopping growth will not stop traffic congestion, loss of wetlands and woodlands, rising property values or protect the environment," he said. But building does have a direct effect on the local economy, Yackness said. Building not only adds to the tax base, but creates and sustains jobs as well as providing a continuing source of revenue for local businesses.

"If we want an ongoing economy, we must have ongoing construction," he said. "I think we can all recall what 1981

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— Irvin Yackness

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FISHER OF Kohl Secret said an important tool would allow communities to transfer and purchase development rights. Transferring development rights from one property to another permits dense building in one area in exchange for light building in another regardless of current zoning.

To ensure a land owner is not deprived of property rights, new legislation would permit communities — through special assessments or other means — to compensate owners for lost profits, he said.

New legislation establishing urban and general service districts spelling out where water, sewer, paved roads and other infrastructure will be provided would enable developers to know well beforehand that a given parcel will not support dense development, according to Fisher.

Closely related, he said, is legislation requiring a "concurrency of services and facilities" that would tie new development and infrastructure construction together. Currently, infrastructure construction — particularly roads — lags behind development, which results in traffic congestion and gridlock, he said.

To ensure a concurrency of services and facilities, the legislation would allow communities to establish impact fees — monies payable for improvements that are substantially related to and provide a material benefit to the new development, Fisher said.

NEW LEGISLATION would also require public agencies — including city, village, township, parks and recreation, county road agencies — to designate areas intended for public development.

When a developer makes a proposal conflicting with a master plan, the affected agency would be required to acquire the property itself or amend the plan to allow the development, Fisher said.

The legislation also proposes a regional impact coordination act that would require developers to present an impact analysis to surrounding communities.

"The difficulty," he said, "is in preserving a community's right to home rule." During site plan approval, the home community would bear testimony from other communities and determine if theirs is an "unreasonable impact." Fisher said if the home community discovers "an unreasonable impact," the project would not be approved until the impact was mitigated.

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