

# County commitment at issue on Eight Mile fix-up

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

If perception is as important as reality, it appears Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson has a problem: He's seen as soft on blight, at least as it's addressed by the fledgling Eight Mile Boulevard Association.

That view doesn't come from Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, former political foe Elizabeth "Betty" Howe or others normally suspicious of the executive and his policies. They may think Patterson doesn't care about Eight Mile Road. But in this dispute so far, they haven't said so publicly.

Concern that Patterson may

not care about Eight Mile Road is coming from supporters, or at least people who say they are willing to cooperate with the executive when it comes to communities in south Oakland County.

People like Southfield Mayor Donald F. Fracassi and Farmington Hills city councilman Jonathan L. Grant.

"I see a definite lack of interest (on the part of Patterson's administration) about Eight Mile Road," said Fracassi, "and I don't see much concern about Southfield and other communities along Eight Mile."

"I can't say if Patterson supports our efforts or not," said Grant, who like Fracassi is help-

ing to get the Eight Mile association off the ground. "I haven't talked to him directly. But I'm very concerned."

## Grants on tap

At issue is the Eight Mile Corridor Task Force, a group consisting of 13 communities, three counties and the Michigan Department of Transportation. Since its organization in 1990, the task force has tried to improve 27 miles of Eight Mile Road stretching from I-94 west to I-275. It has a modest record of accomplishment, but recently it has procured two grants of \$50,000 each for the revitalization.

"We hope that by cooperating

and leveraging our money, we can revitalize the Eight Mile Corridor," said Wendy Strip-Sittamer, executive director of the Southfield Downtown Development Authority who is a vocal member of the task force. "We've had excellent cooperation from Detroit, Macomb County and, until now, Oakland County. But we're concerned about continued cooperation from Oakland County."

Contributing to that concern was the conduct of Ken Rogers, who represented Oakland at the task force's last meeting. He seemed to speak volumes . . . by his silence.

On two critical issues — upgrading from a task force to an au-

thority and bylaws by which to operate — Rogers abstained.

The actions of Rogers, director of the county's community and economic development, prompted speculation. "Did it mean Patterson is against an authority to revive Eight Mile Road?" "What about his campaign pledge to rejuvenate communities in the southern part of the county?"

Among the most vocal is Fracassi. "For too long the south end of the county has been ignored," said the Southfield mayor and businessman who expressed

surprise at the seemingly mixed signals.

Hoping to get clarification, Fracassi called on the executive Wednesday to get some answers. "I'm a Republican, and I've been a political supporter of Brooks for years."

## Diverted to Grubba

Instead of talking to the executive, Fracassi was referred to John Grubba, one of two deputy executives. Like Patterson, Grubba is

See EIGHT MILE, 7A

# . . . but county backs grant

BY PAT MURPHY  
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Fears that Oakland County's new executive does not strongly support the fledgling Eight Mile Boulevard Authority eased a bit Friday.

That happened when Oakland County deputy executive John Grubba supported a resolution that SEMCOG (the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) endorse a \$5,000 grant from the Municipal Affairs Corp. to the authority.

The grant was relatively small. But support for it was symbolic for some, including Southfield Mayor Donald Fracassi, who questioned the commitment of County Executive L. Brooks Patterson to south Oakland

County in general and the Eight Mile corridor in particular.

Had Grubba, as Patterson's representative, opposed the grant as Fracassi and others feared, it would have confirmed fears the executive doesn't support the new authority.

"But apparently they've reached some compromise," said SEMCOG executive director John Amberger. "Because Grubba made the resolution (endorsing the grant to the authority)."

Amberger said he and others heard rumors that Patterson was at best lukewarm toward the authority. "But this is an Oakland County issue. It would be inappropriate for us to comment."

The Metropolitan Affairs Corp. (MAC), a privately funded organization formed to promote efficient

government, wanted to give \$5,000 to the authority, which has existed for almost three years as the Eight Mile Corridor Task Force.

That task force, however, is in the process of upgrading to an authority with a formal board of directors and a dues structure to support a \$90,000 annual budget. SEMCOG's approval of the grant was necessary before MAC would give the \$5,000 grant to the authority.

Patterson — and Grubba — were reportedly concerned about whether or not the new authority would have taxing power.

Patterson's support — or lack of — for the authority is likely to come up tonight when the agency meets at 8 p.m. in the National Guard Armory on Eight Mile Road.

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