

Transportation looms big in city/suburban forum

By SANDRA ARMHRUSTER
STAFF WRITER

Light rail systems from Detroit to the suburbs got a green light from three of four representatives from the region in what was the most heated exchange of the evening at the first Interregional Forum at the Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills.

Also sponsoring the forum Monday night, besides the Birmingham Temple, were Temple Shir Shalom of West Bloomfield and Congregation Beth Shalom of Oak Park.

Transportation seemed to be one of the "very important issues" Rabbi Sherwin Wine of the Birmingham Temple was referring to when he spoke in his opening address of a "new age" beginning with Tuesday's Detroit mayoral election.

"Can the two (suburbs and city of Detroit) cooperate to serve each others needs?" Wine queried to a capacity crowd of about 400 people.

Panelists Don Barden, a Detroit businessman with communications and real estate holdings, Maryann Mahaffey, a Detroit city

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Maryann Mahaffey
Detroit city councilwoman

councilwoman, and Edward H. McNamara, Wayne County executive, all said they supported a light rail system during the question and answer session that followed the panel discussion.

Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson was the lone dissenter, pointing to a new computerized vehicular traffic system that he called exciting. The system is now fully operational in Troy, and he said is soon to be introduced in Rochester, Auburn Hills and Pontiac.

What about the poor?

Disagreeing with Patterson was an audience member, who shouted out, "How do poor people ride your system?" Patterson and Mahaffey vied for the floor at that

point. Mahaffey, with arm extended and finger pointed in Patterson's direction charged he was interrupting her, but Patterson said he was interrupted by the audience member.

Patterson said the SMART system was available and that he was "opposed to a gas tax to fund the 2,600" ridership. Mahaffey picked up the debate, noting that many people still rely on relatives and neighbors for rides because of problems with the system.

"Appointments have to be made in advance and you can't count on it," she said.

Mahaffey earlier had brought up the subject of transportation, when the panel was asked by Rabbi Dannel Schwartz from Shir Shalom if the city of Detroit and

the suburbs needed each other.

"There's no connection (from Detroit) with the suburban transportation system," said Mahaffey, who withdrew as a mayoral candidate last May. "If (a Detroit) finally gets a job, but finds it takes two hours to get there and two hours to get back, they have to decide what to do with the kids."

Patterson agreed that there should be cooperation, but "not at the expense of Oakland County". He added that he was particularly opposed to any regional level authority, especially for "controlled growth." However, Patterson said there were areas where cooperation could be useful, such as in controlling solid waste, transportation, crime and roads.

In answering the question, McNamara chastised Patterson for his endorsement and fundraising party for Detroit mayoral candidate Sharon McPhail.

McNamara added that if he were mayor of Detroit, he would work to provide better basic services, such as garbage pick up, street cleaning and clearing burned out buildings.

But it was businessman Barden who drew the loudest applause of the evening when he described what he would do if he were elected mayor, a position he "thought about for a while, but the timing wasn't right". Barden, however, didn't rule out a future try for public office.

If elected, he would "call the people together — my African-American brothers and sisters — and tell them permissiveness is out. It's over with. Accountability and responsibility are in".

He said that people have to realize that their "plight is not necessarily some other person's fault. We have to recognize and implement a new tone, a new spirit of education, dedication . . . and not expect instant wealth and gratification".

Barden said he would call a "peace summit between neighbors" first and then meet with those "outside our own city to start to work together to resolve

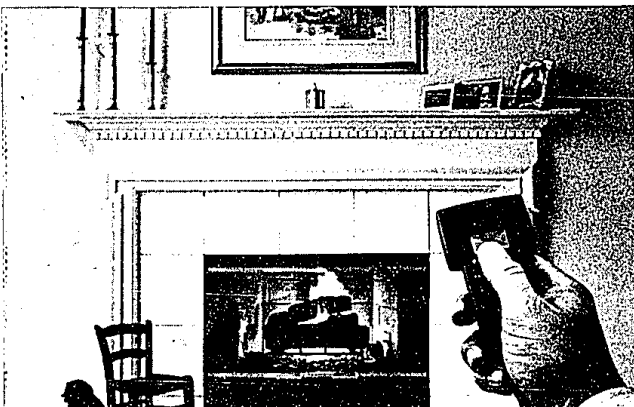
disputes". Barden said the city would no longer be a "sales marketing tool" for any media, or be the laughing stock of the region. We'll demonstrate that stereotypes are inaccurate."

On other issues, the panelists agreed that crime, or the fear of perceived crime is a big issue. Another is the uncontrolled use of drugs, although there was disagreement over how to deal with both issues.

Patterson suggests "locking up repeat criminals and throwing away the key", and he opposes legalization of drugs. Mahaffey says she hasn't discarded legalization of drugs, noting that prohibition didn't work. Instead she looks to more education and treatment for control.

Mahaffey met with favor from at least one audience member, Anna Cook of Southfield, who knew her before she went into politics. "She's intelligent, capable and caring — with all caps (capital letters)", she said.

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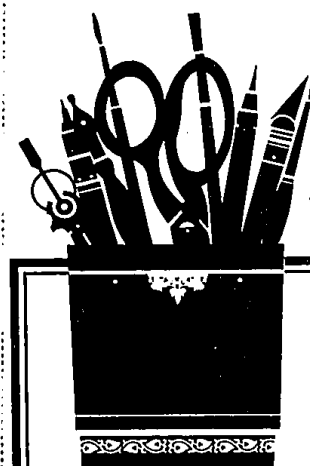
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