

# Bill to curb urban sprawl stalls

BY TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

A state Senate-passed bill to curb urban sprawl is in trouble in a House committee, where many former backers are now neutral or opposed.

Rep. Bob Brackenkridge, R-St. Joseph, chair of the House Local Government Committee, will take up the controversial bill again Dec. 4.

"We don't have anyone giving overwhelming support," Brackenkridge said at a Nov. 20 hearing. On the other hand, he said, "they're not adamantly opposed."

The trouble arose when he amended the bill so much to win over the Michigan Association of Realtors that he lost the support of other groups.

The measure is Senate Bill 112, a revision of the 1967 Subdivision Control Act. Sponsored by Sen. Leon Stille, R-Spring Lake, it aims to require that developers:

- 1) Plat more housing lots, which would bring them under local water, sewer, road and sidewalk rules.
- 2) Halt the slicing up of farmland into "bowling alley" lots — large parcels with narrow road frontage that extend deep into former farms. Stille said such development has taken out of agriculture an area greater than

Washtenaw and Livingston counties in the past 10 years.

Newly-elected Rep. Nancy Cassis, R-Novi, joined Rep. Beverly Hammarstrom, R-Tempereance, and committee Democrats in surprising Brackenkridge by striking out one provision the real estate interests wanted — a 10-acre size limit on a restriction on going into lots.

Cassis seconded Hammarstrom's amendment to remove the size limit entirely so that it would apply to all developed parcels. Brackenkridge found himself on the short end of a 6-1 vote. The chair adjourned the meeting without taking a final vote to report the bill to the full House.

The Senate version had applied the "bowling alley" restriction to lots larger than 2.5 acres. It said lots could be no deeper than four times the width.

Here is how support of SB 112 has changed since the bill was weakened:

- Michigan Association of Home Builders — from support to "neutrality," said spokesman Lee Schwartz.
- Michigan Environmental Council — "supported in the past, now silent or neutral. We prefer the original version. We have major concerns," including the diluting of the 4-1 ratio of depth to width on lots, said spokeswoman Julie Stoneman.

The testimony revolved a fundamental difference between pro-planning forces and the real estate interests.

Planners consider "urban sprawl" — the eating up of farmland and open space faster than population growth — a wasteful evil.

Realtors like broker-developer James Edwards of Ann Arbor accept it. "With urban sprawl, we have to provide space for new

homes," he said. What environmentalists call a "wetland," Edwards called a "useless swamp." He said the problem of "bowling alley" lots "should be decided by the local units, not the state."

Sen. Stille was warmly received in an October speech to the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, a seven-county land-use and transportation planning agency.

"We are rapidly using up our agricultural land," Stille told SEMCOG's general assembly. Stille, who chairs the Senate Local Government Committee, said he would withhold action on Brackenkridge's election reform bills until Brackenkridge's committee acted on the land use planning bills.

Also help up, without discussion or a vote, were three bills allowing local units to purchase development right (PDR) from farmers, thus keeping land in agriculture and out of development.

These bills are sponsored by Sen. Bill Schuette, R-Midland. Senate Bills 678-676 affect counties, municipalities and townships.

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# Senate gets bill that would prohibit adjusting test scores

BY TIM RICHARD  
STAFF WRITER

Colleges, employers and employment agencies would be barred from adjusting test scores for a race under a bill approved by the state House of Representatives.

Sponsor Penny Crissman, R-Rochester, said she is convinced

some schools have adjusted test scores to create "reverse discrimination." But her House Bill 4054 doesn't prevent universities from considering diversity in admissions, she said.

The House gave it 71-30 approval after a barrage of bitter criticism saying it amounted to playing "the race card."

Opponent Rep. Kirk Profit, D-

Ypsilanti, said minimum scores for college admission or jobs are themselves arbitrary. "Cut-off scores necessarily involve arbitrary determinations of satisfactory and unsatisfactory test results that often bear no relationship to the likelihood of success in a particular undertaking or activity," said Profit.

Opponent Rep. Ed Vaughn, D-Detroit, called it "nothing but a racist attempt to stir up racism in Michigan. Gov. George Wallace of Alabama made a career out of racism."

Currently, the 1976 Elliott-

Larsen Civil Rights Act bars refusal to hire or promote on the bases of "religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight or marital status." The same provision also applies to employment agencies and educational institutions' admissions.

Crissman's bill would also forbid them to "adjust a test score, use a different cut-off score, or otherwise alter the results of a test" on the bases of religion, race or gender.

It goes to the Senate, which would have to act by Dec. 31 for the bill to become law.

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