Sprawling

Urban growth considered priority for state lawmakers

■ Sprawl is everyone's problem, conferees concluded, not just a suburban issue or a farmland

preservation issue, as it is often described. Also involved are central cities, where redevelopment

must be encouraged if sprawl is to be curtailed.

BY MIKE MALOTT
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musiotichomecommans:

Burcaucrate, business suits, bunny huggers and lawmakers on both sides of the political alsie met in Traverse City recently to talk about the issue of urban sprawl and found something surprising...common ground.

The Michigan Legislative and Business Leaders Forum on Growth Management, spensored by the Michigan Chamber of Commerce and Public Sector Consultants, brought together people from all sides of the aprawl issue for the first such state-wide discussion of the topic.

And state lawmakers present said they expect legislation to be proposed this full to address the concerns. In fact, they expect it will be a priority for the coming

session.
Exactly what form such legisJation will take isn't clear, lawhakers unanimously agreed.
They were using the conference
as brainsterming session to come
up with specific ideas for new

... Back to downtowns

What came of the conference

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e the focus of a group

was that incontives, rather than regulation or prohibitions, should be used to direct develop-ment back toward the central cities, away from undeveloped argas.

areas.

Sush a plan would have to make use of "the power of the purse string," essentially coordinating the state budget to put in place the financial incentives to redirect growth back to the cities. Development in "greenfelds" would not be banned, or even restricted, but those building in such areas would have to pay their own way without the monetary assistance now given by the state.

by the state.

Road projects would be reviewed based on whether they encourage sprawl or redevelopment. Gov. John Engler, law-makers agreed, would have to be on board with such a plan, although he did not attend the conference. enference.

It's everyone's problem

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need to get involved in the smart growth equation."

There was also little disagree-ment about the severity of urban spravel in Michigan. Paul Hille-grounds, president of Detroit Renaissance and former speaker of the Michigan House of Repre-sentatives, capsulized the con-cern in his remarks at the close of the conference. Portland, Ore-gon expects to see a 50 percent growth in population in the next 20 years, but only 8 percent of the land in that region is antici-pated to be developed as a result, he said.

Nor is it just an environmental issue. David Walters, co-director of the Charlotte Community Design Studio, labeled it a finan-cial issue.

"The primary purpose is to reduce the property tax burden," he said. "If you are, as I am, in favor of having as much money

favor of having as much money the hands of taxpayers as possi-ble and only as much in the gov-ernment purse as necesary. then we need to make the most efficient use of the existing infreastructure. If we make more officient use of our infreastruc-ture, it will take less money to maintain and improve it and that money can go elsewhere.

that money can go elsewhere. That is why local governments need to got involved in the smart

he said.

Compare that to growth in southeast Michigan, where a 4 percent growth in population

over the last two decades has led to urbanization of 53 percent more land.

Some controversy

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No, the seminar was not a love-in. Some issues quickly produced controversy. For example, State Sen. George McManus (R-Traverse City) only halfheartedly proposed a state-wide ban on zoning ordinances which require residential lot sizes of one-acro or more, knowing it would meet with quick resistance. It did. But the idea pointed out the nearly universal sentiment among conferees that large lot requirements in the suburbs only exactbate sprayl.

Seen by many municipal planners as a way to preserve open space, large lots simply spread development out further and leave greenspace only in private hands.

The Michigan Environmental Council's Julie Stoneman called for the creation of an Office of State Planning, which was met with the response, "Careful, you might get what you nak for."

Still, the idea pointed to the fact many conferees see the lack of coordination in planning among cities and townships are one of the leading contributors to urban sprawl. But local government officials are likely to see any intrusion into planning on the part of the state as a viola-

any intrusion into planning on the part of the state as a viola-

tion of their home rule. Stoneman quickly amended her idea to creation of an Office of State Planning Assistance.

Rop. Jack Minore (D. Flint) broached the same issue when he jokingly said he was glad to see his break-out group was not only once to propose the elimination of township government. Michigan's tradition of leaving planning and development in the hands of local government is a big part of the problem, conference agreed. But that led to a scrious proposal to tie state revenue sharing for cities and townships to participation in cooperative regional planning efforts.

Growth issues named

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Still, the controversies were
relatively minor points. The tone
of conference was set by CanGuardino, president of the Silicon Valley Manufacturing
Group, who gave the opening
speech. As he outlined how his
organization has contributed to
regional planning in California,
he said members had agreed to
"work on the 95 percent we can
agree on and ignore the 5 percent of the issues where we don't
agree and probably never will
agree."
Growth menagement, Guardi-

cent of the issues where we don't agree and probably never will agree."
Growth management, Guardino explained, has to address four meas to be successful: providing adequate affordable housing to accommodate the population of the region; provide the necessary transportation, either by roads or mass transit; provide adequate education to all resident; and protect the environment.
He said the "shut the door" mentality used by many nogrowth advocates when it comes to housing development only means that residents will seek homes elsewhere, actually encouraging sprawl. Likewise, one the main factors why people move to outlying suburbs is to find school districts which provide a better education for their children, he said. Making sure all districts have good educational programs will discourage sprawl, he argued.

John Frece, special assistant for smart growth to Maryland's

governor, explained that state's growth strategy. Local govern-ments are asked to designate "growth districts."

"growth districts."
State resources are applied developments in those growth zones, while the state budget has been coordinated to withhold financial aid from development outside those regions. The strategy is applied to everything from reads to water and sower lines.

Good ideas in short supply

Good ideas in snort supply Rep. Suean Tabor (R-Delta Township) said she is frustrated with the urban sprawl issue. Good proposals have been in short supply and she is eager to propose and pass legislation addressing the issue this fall. Rep. Patricia Godchaux (R-Birmingham) said it's "a no-brainer" that the sprawl issue has to be addressed, but feels valid proposals have not been offered in the past. Typically, prohibitory in nature, she agrees incentives must be used instead. Rep. Valde Garcia (R-St. John) said he's not sure that he's heard those good ideas yet. He proposed hearings across the state to take input from local officials on what they would like to see as incentives for regional, coordinated planning.

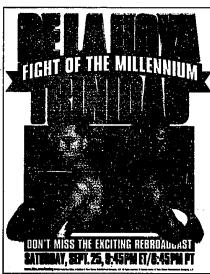
A group of lawmakers came to

incentives for regional, coordinated planning.

A group of lawmakers came to the conferences with a set of "guiding principals" on what they would like to see in the way of legislation. The coalition included Tabor and Reps. Patricia Birkholz (R-Saugatuck), Jon Jellema (R-Grand Haven), William Byl (R-Grand Rapids), Jason Allen (R-Traverse City) and Stephen Ehart (R-Lexington).

on).
Among their principals were that legislation must respect private property rights, link land use policy with infrastructure development such as road improvement and utility construction, provide sufficient housing, preserve and even enhance local control while encouraging intergovernmental cooperation, and encourage redevelopment of so-called "brownfields."

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