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**MOTOR CITY JOURNAL:
Archdiocese is launching
campaign against sprawl**

October 19, 2001

BY BILL MCGRAW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The antisprawl movement has a new friend -- one with lots of people, money, political savvy and prayers.

The 1.5-million-member Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit is launching a long-term campaign to educate the public and lobby officials about the growing inequity among southeast Michigan cities.

Archdiocesan officials, priests, nuns, lay people and antisprawl experts spent two days this week at Sacred Heart Seminary, laying plans for a statewide political movement to promote more balanced growth.

"This could be a watershed year. It could lead to a tremendous victory in our lives," said Bill O'Brien, a conference leader.

"We are going to kick some butt," proclaimed Ann Serra, the archdiocese's point person on the issue, as she discussed plans for lobbying and building political coalitions.

Participants described sprawl as a moral issue. They see Detroit and many of its nearby suburbs facing growing poverty, abandonment and dwindling services, plus racial and social isolation. Meanwhile, distant subdivisions are gobbling up acres of land and the number of

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newcomers is overwhelming roads, sewers, lakes and rivers.

And all this is happening in an era when southeast Michigan has had little overall population growth.

"This is a region growing against itself," Minnesota state Sen. Myron Orfield, a nationally known expert on sprawl, told the conference.

Catholics are by far the largest denomination in metro Detroit, making up one-third of the population. Cardinal Adam Maida has used the archdiocese's political clout and financial resources in such recent public issues as banning assisted suicide and approving school vouchers. In statewide votes, the church's position won on suicide and lost on vouchers.

"The church getting involved in sprawl could be a breakthrough," said Heaster Wheeler, executive director of the Detroit Branch National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who attended part of the conference.

While public-opinion polls and a growing number of ballot proposals indicate sprawl has become a concern to many Americans, it is a complicated issue and one whose moral significance seems more difficult to define than, say, assisted suicide or abortion.

Many Catholics have chosen to buy homes in subdivisions on freshly paved cornfields. Coincidentally, one of Maida's golfing buddies is Bill Pulte, the founder of the Bloomfield Hills-based firm that is the nation's biggest home builder.

Maida has spoken about the imbalance between the growing edges of metro Detroit and the shrinking city, and he gave his blessing to this week's conference. But he is viewed as unlikely to make sprawl a personal crusade.

"I don't see the cardinal going after developers or after people who live on the fringe and say,

"Somehow you've sinned," " said Dan Piepszowski, the archdiocese's director of Christian services.

The church certainly has felt the downside of sprawl.

Catholics have made up a large part of the white flight that has halved Detroit's population since 1950. Today, nine of 10 Catholics in southeast Michigan live in the suburbs.

In the late 1980s, the archdiocese closed 35 churches within the city limits. Today, Maida raises funds to keep open the remaining Catholic schools for Detroit's mostly non-Catholic population.

The church's presence in outer suburbia is growing.

In Rochester Hills, the cardinal recently dedicated Holy Family Regional School's South Campus, the first phase of a five-site, 11-parish renovation and expansion in Oakland County. There are plans to build St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Church on 23 Mile in fast-growing Macomb Township.

The archdiocese's immediate antisprawl agenda includes pressing local and state officials to move on plans for a regional transit authority, educating parishioners at its 312 churches and joining with leaders of other denominations, locally and across the state, to speak out on the issue.

Of course, a number of Catholics and non-Catholics don't see sprawl as important. Some say they believe limiting growth is un-American and a restraint on freedom.

"Well, sprawl also gives Macomb County residents the freedom to have polluted water in Lake St. Clair," Orfield said. "People should be free, but with backed-up freeways, bad sewers and overcrowded schools, they are not free."

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RICK FITZGERALD

Ypsilanti needs to get rid of its 1-way streets

One-way streets are great for moving lots of traffic through an area quickly. That's exactly why it is so important for Ypsilanti to get rid of some of the city's mono-directional thoroughfares. Most of the attention has been focused on West Cross Street. Just last week, city officials and community members met with consultants to talk about revitalizing the Cross Street area near the Eastern Michigan University campus. One of the keys to that effort is returning that portion of Cross Street to two-way traffic. There's just no way for the businesses in that area to thrive with three lanes of traffic whizzing by and no on-street parking. But Cross Street is not the only one-way street that needs reconsideration. There's no need for three lanes of one-way traffic on Huron and Hamilton streets. All those streets do it make it easy for people to blow right through Ypsilanti with barely the need to slow down on their way to or from the expressway. And then there's the confusion caused by the one-way sections of Adams and Pearl streets in the downtown area. Adams is one way for just one block, alongside the Ypsilanti District Library. Pearl, one block north of Michigan Avenue, has one-way traffic, for no apparent reason, from Huron west to Hamilton.

Fortunately, city officials generally agree that the community would be better served with these streets returning to two-way traffic. Unfortunately, the state Department of Transportation has to be convinced before most of these streets can be changed. All the state really cares about is the safe and efficient flow of traffic. For the most part, MDOT officials are asphalt geeks. They live and die by the road construction season. They must be in heaven this summer. But what happens once you step up on the curb is not their concern. City officials, however, have to worry about both the roads and the community that surrounds the roads. What good is it to have a smooth stretch of asphalt passing through an area where the businesses have failed or through a neighborhood where no one wants to live in the homes facing three lanes of traffic? Thankfully, they are doing more than wringing their hands about it. Even after the state said no to the request to return Cross Street to two-way traffic, the city hired a consultant and met with neighbors in a renewed effort to make the state road geeks see the error of their ways. The same consultant will develop a proposal to return Pearl and Adams to two-way traffic. City officials also say they have not given up on the possibility of doing something to Hamilton and Huron streets between Michigan Avenue and I-94. Although funding to reduce those main traffic arteries from three lanes to two was turned down once, a second effort is still a possibility. I use those roads several times a week as I wander back and forth between Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. Even during what you would call rush hour, three lanes is overkill. Ypsilanti is on a roll with roads right now. The median on Michigan Avenue has changed the feel of this major roadway through downtown. Work on the massive city road repaving project started Friday morning. The bridge on East Michigan Avenue is being rebuilt. Let's hope city officials can make a clean sweep of the roads by convincing state highway officials that a vital, thriving community is every bit as important as the safe and efficient flow of traffic.



Session to look at Cross Street

Future options for Ypsilanti corridor to be discussed

By MARIANNE RZEPKA
MARIANNE RZEPKA

West Cross Street has seen better days. A local project is aiming at restoring those times.

Ypsilanti city administrators, along with officials from Eastern Michigan University and the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti Urban Area Traffic Study Committee, will have a day-long session Wednesday to look at the present condition and future options for the area that stretches from the EMU campus east to the Huron River.

"We'll be looking at strengths and opportunities," said Vern Gustafsson, who is project manager for Hamilton Associates, a consultant for the study of the area.

The public is invited to come by from 8-8 p.m. to discuss the issue. The session will be in Room 241 of Welch Hall at EMU. Welch is located at West Cross and Summit streets. Parking is available in the Normal Street lot on Washtenaw Avenue.

"We're going to treat it as an open house," said Gustafsson. The public can drop by at any time to look at maps and other information, then make suggestions for improving the area, he said.

Earlier in the day, consultants on the project will meet with representatives from the city and EMU, along with business owners, landlords and others with an interest in the West Cross Street area. Suggestions from those sessions will be incorporated into the public session in the evening.

The street used to be a thriving business area that catered to many EMU students. But with more students



living off campus, business began to wither.

Last year, the city asked the state to look at turning West Cross - currently a one-way street in that area - back to two-way traffic. However, the state recommended against it, and the city decided to hire consultants to do a more thorough look at the entire area, focusing on transportation, as well as improving economic vitality, the appearance of the street and local housing.

Comments from Wednesday's day-long session will be presented to the Cross Street Area Improvement Study Committee next week, said Gustafsson.

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CROSS STREET: Wednesday meeting planned for talks

In September, representatives from Hamilton Associations and from Midwestern Consulting will present suggestions on restoring the street, probably at another all-day session open to the public, he said.

Comments then will be incorporated into a final report to be presented in mid-November, said Gustafsson.

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THURSDAY, JULY 19, 2001 THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

LOCAL

Parking, crime rise as issues for Cross Street

■ Information meeting offers laundry list of items that need to be addressed there.

By MARIANNE RZEPKA
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Crime, traffic, condemned housing and parking are all problems residents and business owners along West Cross Street want solved.

They were vocal during a Wednesday afternoon session — part of a study funded by the city and Eastern Michigan University to improve housing and businesses in the area.

A morning meeting brought together city administrators while the public was invited during the evening to make suggestions to consultants Hamilton Associates, a Detroit development firm, and Midwest Consulting of Ann Arbor.

Bob Barnes, who owns several rental houses in the area, said a big part of the problem is caused by landlords who don't take care of their property.

"I'm a landlord, I should be on their side," he said. But he pointed out one empty house that has become "a flop house." The city is taking legal action against landlord David Kircher for not fixing several of his houses that have been condemned.

Lack of parking is another serious problem, participants said. Sometimes students waiting to park in a lot near Pease Auditorium line up down West Cross Street waiting for available spaces and blocking traffic. EMU officials are considering building a parking structure

but the problem is how traffic will enter and exit, said Larry Ward, the university's facilities manager.

The Rev. Edmond Ertzbischoff, pastor of St. John the Baptist Church, said he's had fewer cars parked in the church lot now that the Cross Street Station bar is closed but people going into a nearby liquor store, as well as local residents, often park there.

Other issues addressed include more lighting, crosswalks and signs, as well as cleaning up sidewalks and adding trees and flowers. Participants said they wanted more police walking beats in the area, better areas for deliveries to stores and speed limits enforced.

The study follows an attempt last year by the city to get state approval to change West Cross Street from a one-way street to two-way. The state recommended against it but the city hired consultants to take a more thorough look at the area. The Cross Street district also includes Washtenaw Avenue, which is one-way eastbound, as well as North Huron and west to Oakwood Avenue.

The results from Wednesday's sessions will go to the Cross Street Area Improvement Study Committee next week. Preliminary recommendations could come in September, possibly in another day-long session.

A complete traffic study will be done after EMU classes resume in September and a final report should be completed late this fall.

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