

# Parking Ban Upsets 2 Cities

BY RON ISHOY  
Free Press Staff Writer

There soon will be no more parking in the median strips of Fort in Lincoln Park and Woodward in Ferndale.

After decades of procrastination, the Department of State Highways and Transportation appears to be serious about getting cars out of the middle of its highways.

And, though the state probably will pay for building other smaller parking lots to ease in the inconvenience, merchants and officials in both communities generally are not pleased with the state's sudden interest in the streets that make up major portions of their commercial districts.

**EAST STREET** involved is called a trunk line. It is illegal, an old state law says, to cross over medians of trunk lines except at state-specified areas. Parking on such medians is illegal, many attorneys general have ruled.

All of the parking must come out, starting in Lincoln Park with the several hundred parking places in the 10-block stretch of Fort from Morris to White.

**"We're trying to work out a program where we're not going to cause any hardships,"** says Don Orne, the highway department's traffic and safety engineer. In Lincoln Park, that program is to find new parking space, for which the state says it will pay.

Several alternatives are under consideration. Some people want to build smaller parking lots at various spots along Fort. Others want one large parking area to serve as a central area for the commuters who leave their cars in Lincoln Park and take the bus to downtown Detroit.

Besides such parking being illegal, Orne says, the state wants to improve the traffic flow to decrease accidents. Included will be new turn lanes, similar to the turnarounds on Telegraph, and new traffic signals. The strip, which is asphalt, will be landscaped.

**BUT THE** merchants don't want any of that. They want the parking left as is.

**"We're angry and we're disgusted,"** says Dr. Louis Woll, an optometrist who owns the Union Optical Co.

**"But we're tired of fighting. I'm tired of meetings. Meetings seem to mean nothing. There's absolutely no harm to anybody here. Everyone's satisfied except the state."**

Several merchants around his office are ready to remodel their operations, says Woll. But they're waiting to see what happens to the parking.

**"If there's no convenient place to park, there'll be no customers,"** he says.

His company already has acquired property in nearby Riverview if he has to vacate the building in which he has been located for 25 years.

**"While there's parking, I'll stay for a while and see,"** says Woll. **"But the moment that it goes, it's no good. I'll have to leave."**

Lincoln Park Mayor Melvin Gish says area legislators have tried several times to get an exemption from the Legislature to allow parking along Fort.

**"But some legislator in Escanaba could care less if we park in the center of the street or not,"** he says.

**THE PROBLEM** in Ferndale is not as immediate or as critical as in Lincoln Park, since Nine Mile, perpendicular to Woodward, is the actual center of downtown.

In 1948, Ferndale and the state agreed to remove the half-mile of parking along Woodward between Cambourne and Ardmore. The idea, according to City Manager Ron DeMaagd, was to phase out the parking by 1951. But nothing was done.

**"I would suspect that eventually parking would be removed and relocated,"** says DeMaagd. **"But I don't know how soon that will be."** About 200 spaces will be removed.

**ROBERT Combe**, executive vice-president of the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce, says he feels that the effect of losing the median parking along Woodward will be minimal, since the parking will be replaced in some form.

Among the alternatives is a parking garage financed with public and private funds, as well as satellite lots.

But Fred Sweet, manager of Radio City Theater, believes that the space loss will be felt.

**"I'm sure it will effect the business in the area,"** he said. **"Many of our patrons park in the area out there."**

Ferndale officials are looking for property on which to build other parking lots and they are looking for the state to pickup the tab.

There have been no promise of funds since preliminary talks began earlier this year, DeMaagd says.

But, he says, **"It would seem like they're setting a precedent with (giving money to) Lincoln Park."**

The heart of Ferndale is along Nine Mile, he says. So, while the parking situation on Woodward is crucial, DeMaagd says, it would not destroy the city.

But Dr. Woll thinks removing the median parking on Fort will have serious consequences for Lincoln Park.

**"It'll never be the death of Lincoln Park,"** says Woll, **"but it'll kill the downtown area. And that's sad."**

Detroit Free Press April 25 1977

# Medians are no middling question in Ferndale

BY GEORGEA KOVANIS

Free Press Staff Writer

An old-fashioned gazebo surrounded by eight lanes of roaring traffic?

How about a statue honoring the Spirit of Ferndale? Or tracks for a trolley to trundle up Woodward to the Detroit Zoo? Or that old reliable — grass?

Those are just a few of the ideas being tossed about as Ferndale residents and officials ponder the fate of the town's trademark Woodward Avenue parking medians, which by next summer will no longer exist.

"This is an opportunity that shouldn't be missed, to create something of unique and lasting importance," Judith Reed, chairwoman of the city's Beautification Commission and spokeswoman for the Woodward Avenue Median Redesign Committee, said Monday.

"We're looking at the area as being . . . a doorway between Detroit and the suburbs," said Christianne McMillan, a redesign committee member.

Earlier this year, Ferndale agreed to remove parking from the medians, which are owned by the state Department of Transportation and stand between northbound and southbound lanes of Woodward along five blocks between Saratoga and Cambourne. Renovation is to begin by next summer.

The redesign committee has asked

residents to make suggestions and is considering holding a contest for ideas.

"We don't want it to look like every other boulevard median in Michigan," said Reed. "We want something of lasting value and something unique. . . . We want people to drive down Woodward and know they're in Ferndale."

Choices are limited, especially since the medians are surrounded by a major highway traveled by 87,000 cars every day.

"There are problems to inviting people into the median. It isn't a real placid place to have your lunch," Reed said.

The idea of installing a gazebo and holding concerts has pretty much been discounted, Reed said. "Even the peo-

ple who have suggested it have recognized that the median might not be a place for a gazebo," she said.

Others proposed a bike path. A pedestrian bridge uniting east and west sides of Ferndale. A clock tower.

A sculpture faction seems to be forming.

"We like the idea of the Spirit of Detroit statue," Reed said. "We would like something that expresses the spirit of Ferndale."

Someone jokingly suggested Ferndale take a cue from Detroit's giant fist and commission a sculpture of a different body part.

Though that's unlikely, no idea has been rejected, Reed said. It's "an exercise in creative use of urban space," she said.

Detroit Free Press July 17, 1990

PLEASE: SUPPORT THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# Ferndale downtown renewal hits brake

City replays the trouble Dearborn experienced when it reduced parking to beautify retail area.

By George Cantor  
The Detroit News

Two years ago, Jeremy Haberman decided to get in ahead of the rush at the next big center of activity for the suburban youth market, downtown Ferndale.

His Magic Bag Theater, on Woodward Avenue just north of Nine Mile Road, has done nicely with its mix of jazz, blues, movies and alternative rock attractions. But the anticipated rush has tripped over its own feet.

Ferndale has not turned into the next Royal Oak. Empty storefronts speckle many city locations along West Nine Mile. There is a distinct absence of the sidewalk activity that is the main appeal of the suburb a half mile to the north. Housing prices are doing well, crashing through price barriers that would have been unimaginable a decade ago.

"But there is a real problem with walk-up traffic in this town," the 25-year-old Haberman says. "You either come here with a pre-set destination in mind or you don't come. That's what we've got to get past."

The major problem seems to be the same thing that bedevils every downtown. Where do you park the cars?

Ferndale thought it had this problem licked in 1991, just about when its upsurge began. Playing by the book, the city converted its Woodward Avenue median strip from an unsightly parking lot into a tree-lined grassy park. Red brick pavement was placed in the crosswalks, and the parking lots were moved, instead, to off-street areas behind the businesses on Nine Mile.

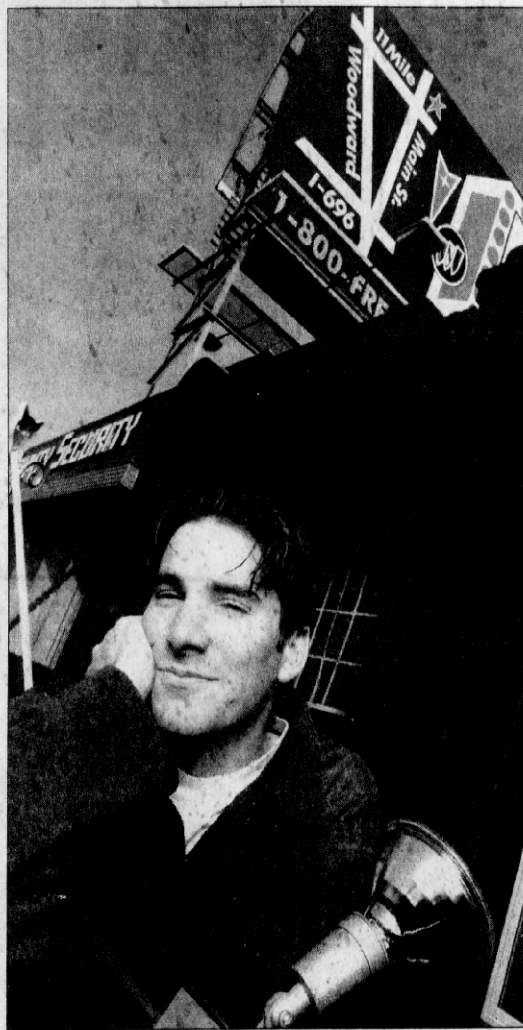
Esthetically, it is an improvement. Economically, it is not so hot.

Because customers leave their cars in the new lots, businesses are forced to make the back door their main entrance. As a result, pedestrian traffic on the street itself is negligible, and store-to-store circulation is next to none.

Ferndale could have taken a tip from Dearborn, where the same strategy was tried in the 1980s with the same results. Schaefer Road was turned into a grassy mall to help beautify the East Dearborn business district. But the new median wasn't especially beautiful and, just as in Ferndale, it took foot traffic off the street and into the back door.

"When someone comes through our front door now, it isn't especially good news," says Richard Sisler, owner of Ferndale's Sisler Jewelers. "Either they're lost, or they've just tied up their bike outside because they can't afford a car."

"When we moved in here in the early '60s, Nine Mile was like an event. People were always walking outside. We have a nice display window, and we liked to dress it up. But now the front of the biggest store in town looks like a stockade. To make it worse, the city just installed new



Donna Terek / The Detroit News

**Although Jeremy Haberman's Magic Bag Theatre is doing well, downtown Ferndale is struggling to become the next Royal Oak.**

parking meters that only take quarters. I am constantly getting people running in here who need to change their dimes and nickels. All that did was make it more difficult to park."

Sisler, like many other Nine Mile merchants, wants the city to permit one lane of parking on westbound Nine Mile to get some pedestrians out in front.

"It can be done, but it will create

***"You either come here with a pre-set destination in mind or you don't come. That's what we've got to get past."***

JEREMY HABERMAN  
Owner of the Magic Bag Theater

accidents. That's why we took it off Nine Mile to begin with," says Officer Steven Larowe of the Ferndale Traffic Enforcement Division. "People were always opening their car doors into traffic. The street just isn't wide enough for a parking lane."

Several of the record and clothing stores and cafes that were aimed at a youthful market have closed up in the area. Although more keep moving in, about half a dozen vacant stores remain in what should be the city's prime shopping strip.

"I'm not discouraged by any means," Haberman says. "We've got Tom's Oyster Bar coming in down the block from us. That will be a traffic-builder because of its name. We need more places like that."

"But I think the effect of grassing over the Woodward median was to speed up the traffic going through. The cars turning in and out of the parking lots slowed it down before. Now there is nothing to do that. There are also fewer places where a pedestrian can cross Woodward easily. You either go down to the crosswalk at Nine Mile or you take your chances."

There has been a small attempt to replicate something like the sidewalk cafe ambience of Royal Oak and Birmingham. The problem is that both of these North Woodward suburbs have business districts that are off-Woodward. Their business streets carry local traffic, slowed down by several stoplights, and it is possible to set up outdoor dining.

In Ferndale, however, Woodward bears six lanes of traffic, most of it passing through in a rush. Como's, an Italian restaurant at Woodward and Nine Mile, set up an alfresco dining area, but was forced to build a high wall around it to cut down on traffic noise. The problem is the wall cuts off any possible interplay with foot traffic passing by.

In the past, Ferndale's Downtown Development Authority has said its goal was to "create a presence."

That has eluded the city so far. "There still isn't a critical mass of big attractions here," Haberman says. "But I know that because Ferndale is so close to I-696 the people will come. Whenever we have a showing of *Grosse Pointe Blank* here, half the audience comes from Grosse Pointe. That never happened before in Ferndale."

Detroit Free Press Nov 2, 1997

**PLEASE: SUPPORT THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**