

A Brief History of Somerset North

RESOLVED, that Final Approval of the Plat for Somerset North Subdivision, located on the east side of Coolidge, north of Big Beaver, in Section 20, is hereby granted.

If our subdivision has a birthday, it's September 10, 1990, when the Troy City Council granted final plat approval in Resolution 90-772. Somerset North's conception however, was July 17, 1989, when after a public hearing, the Council unanimously approved a consent judgment between Somerset Mall Limited Partnership versus the City of Troy "to allow expansion of the Somerset Mall, development of Somerset Mall North and the residential area to the north, and other land use in the Big Beaver/Coolidge intersection." According to the minutes, "several area residents asked questions about any interconnect between the new subdivision and the mall property as well as parking structures and building height."

As a first step, approval was needed to extend Lakeview Drive from its then terminus at the Standard Federal Bank (now Bank of America) building to Coolidge, a distance of about 1,700 feet. Cunningham Drive was thus created. This was accomplished on September 18, 1989. Under the terms of the consent judgment, a 16 acre parcel of land was to separate the Somerset North Mall from our subdivision for "dedication to the public for open space purposes." This berm, which we residents might call Somerset Hill, was supposed to be higher and extend farther east than it does today to provide visual screening from the mall. Some homeowners complained to the City to no avail. A week later, on September 25, 1989, the proposed street pattern of Somerset North Subdivision was "noted and filed" by the Council.

As an aside, long-time residents might recall the unsuccessful attempts of the City about 10 years ago to put a fire station on our hill, but the land, although owned by the mall, was to remain undeveloped "for park purposes" under the terms of the Consent Judgment, unless rezoning from single family residential (R1-B) occurred. However, the consent of the Troy City Council to the extension of Lakeview Drive in 1989, which goes through the 16 acre tract, was contingent on keeping it zoned R1-B. Fortunately, we succeeded in blocking its construction.

Concurrent with the development of the Somerset North was a subdivision called Somerset Place No. 3, which is located at the northwest corner of Wattles and Northfield Parkway. That subdivision received final plat approval in December 1990. Also in the making in 1990 was Somerset Place East, located on the east side of Northfield Parkway north of Wattles.

On April 30, 1990, the preliminary plat for Somerset North received final approval in Resolution 90-417:

RESOLVED, that Final Approval of the Preliminary Plat for Somerset North Subdivision, located on the east side of Coolidge, north of Big Beaver, in Section 20, be granted after cash, irrevocable bank letter of credit, or certified check has been filed with the Clerk in the amount of \$1,422,882.80 to insure construction of all required improvements within a period of two years from date of final approval of the Preliminary Plat; also after receipt of a cash payment of \$121,684.83 for sidewalk closures, walkway and fence, water main testing and chlorination, street name and traffic signs, landscaping and screen planting of non-access greenbelt easement with berm, topsoil, fertilization, seed and mulch of right-of-way (\$2.50/s.y.) of Coolidge Road, topsoil, fertilization, seed and mulch of right-of-way (\$2.50 s.y.) of

walkways, soil erosion and sedimentation control permits, testing services, engineering review of construction plans, inspection fees and Plan Review Fees; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Mayor and City Clerk are hereby authorized to execute the Subdivision Agreement, a copy of which shall be attached to the original minutes of this meeting.

On October 1, 1990, the City Council approved the installation of a traffic signal at the cost of \$56,326 at the intersection of Coolidge and Lakeview/Cunningham. The first houses in the sub were built in 1991, and the final ones in 1995. I've been told that there were four original builders, the names of which I don't know.

The man behind our subdivision, the mall, and other Troy landmarks was Sam Frankel, who lived to be 94 years old and died April 7, 2008. He and Harry Cunningham (for whom Cunningham Drive, which runs behind the old K-mart headquarters, is named) created the discount-store concept with the birth of K-mart, the successor of S.S. Kresge's "Five and Dime" idea (everything cost either 5 or 10 cents). Sebastian S. Kresge, who grew up in Pennsylvania, built his first "S.S. Kresge" in 1899 in Detroit. Kresge and Cunningham (the company's president in 1959, and chairman in 1967) built the first K-mart in Garden City, Michigan in 1962, which is still open today. Although Kresge died in 1966, Cunningham and Frankel continued to build K-mart stores. To reflect that the dominance of K-mart stores over Kresge stores, the name S.S. Kresge Corporation was changed to Kmart Corporation in 1977.

Frankel grew up in Detroit, the son of immigrant who owned a small grocery store. He got a law degree in 1935, and started in the food business in 1936. In 1961, he founded Frankel Associates and partnered with Max Fisher. Frankel bought 140 acres of land between Maple and Big Beaver, and built the Somerset Park Apartments, which opened in 1963. Early on, Frankel adopted the name "Somerset" because he liked to visit historic Somerset, England. Golfview Drive is named for the Somerset Golf Club, the private 9 hole course which is part of the apartment complex, and Lakeview Drive is named for the small "lake" around which the golf course is built. Anyway, Frankel then built Oakland Mall in 1965 as head of development operations for Allied Supermarkets, otherwise known as Wrigley. Oakland Mall was originally just a Sears store in 1965, but in 1968, it became a mall with a Hudson's, Wrigley, and an S.S. Kresge. By the way, Northland Mall in Southfield, was the first shopping center in metro Detroit and the world's largest when it opened in 1954, and it was built by the J.L. Hudson Company. At the time Sebastian Kresge died in 1966, the Troy city hall was at Wattles and Livernois (where the Troy Historical Museum is today) and I-75 had just been opened. Frankel recognized that Big Beaver Road could be a major thoroughfare that connected Woodward to Lake St. Clair. In a bold move, he first introduced high-end retail to Troy by convincing Saks Fifth Avenue to build a free-standing store in 1967 on the southeast corner of Big Beaver and Coolidge. With the addition of another anchor tenant, Bonwit Teller, Frankel opened Somerset Mall in 1969.

Frankel considered his biggest coup getting the S.S. Kresge Corporation to build their world headquarters in Troy in 1972, leaving their offices in downtown Detroit. They were offered a couple of other areas: on the riverfront in downtown Detroit, or the Northwestern/Evergreen area in Southfield. Many of the executives lived in the Birmingham/Bloomfield area, so Troy was selected, but Frankel had

to fight with the city to rezone the land. To complement the Kresge headquarters, Frankel built the Somerset Inn in 1973 and the Sheffield Office Park in 1974, which he named after another English city, Sheffield. He also built several office buildings, including Somerset Place I in 1987 (2301 W. Big Beaver) and Somerset Place II in 1991 (2401 W. Big Beaver), as well as the Bank of America office building next to the mall.

Frankel also developed the Somerset Plaza (at Maple and Coolidge). As mentioned above, he also built the three "Somerset subdivisions", as well as the Morel East subdivision at Big Beaver and Dequindre. In 1991, he was named Troy's Distinguished Citizen of the Year.

In September 1989, Frankel Associates formed a joint venture partnership with Forbes/Cohen Properties to re-develop Somerset Mall. In 1991-1992, a second floor was added, and Neiman Marcus replaced the bankrupt Bonwit Teller. The center was renamed the "Somerset Collection" and re-opened on August 1, 1992. Four years later, after a protracted legal battle with the City of Troy, Frankel succeeded in opening his finest work: the Somerset Collection North.

He turned from developer to philanthropist in later years, and donated millions to University of Michigan, his alma mater, and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and the Karmanos Cancer Institute, and to numerous Jewish causes. His sons, Stuart Frankel, Stanley and Bruce are still active in real estate.

Of course, the story of the old K-mart building is still being written, due to K-mart's bankruptcy in January 2002. At one time, the world headquarters had 5,000 employees. A little over a year later, K-mart emerged from bankruptcy, but in November 2004, they bought Sears, Roebuck and Company, and became Sears Holding Company. The merger was completed in March 2005, when it was announced that the 2,000 remaining employees in Troy would move to Illinois. By April 2006, the building was empty.

BlackRock, a global investment management firm, bought the 40 acre parcel for \$41.5 million in 2005. Richardson Development Group announced in April 2007 that they would build a \$300 million complex including a hotel, condos, retail and entertainment called the Pavilions of Troy. The credit crunch of September 2008 nixed the viability of the project, despite the State of Michigan offering \$13.2 million in tax credits to cover demolition costs. In September 2009, Grand Sakwa, the developers of the Midtown Square, signed a purchase agreement for \$15 million, but they were turned off by Troy's insistence that the development have a large residential component. So a few months later, in January 2010, Forbes Frankel Troy Ventures, LLC, the owners of the Somerset Collection, bought the property for an estimated \$14 million. Until the economy turns around, it is unlikely the building will be demolished, and the Frankels aren't eager to create competition for their tenants at the Somerset Collection. Stay tuned!