

Murphy denies any plan in mind to bail out Pontiac Silverdome

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Oakland County is not rushing to aid the City of Pontiac as it copes with a rising tide of red ink.

Pontiac's budgetary dam burst last month when it was discovered that the Silverdome — the home of the Detroit Lions, Pistons and Express — had a \$3.7 million deficit. The deficit is attributable to a \$4.2 million payment as this year's installment relating a \$15.9 million municipal bond issue.

The Silverdome is financed through Pontiac's general fund.

Stories that Oakland County would lend a helping hand surfaced over the weekend. County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, however, denied that the county has any such plans.

THE RUMORS started, he said, after he had answered a hypothetical question at a meeting of the 100 Club, a Pontiac civic organization, last weekend.

Asked if the county would now become involved in the operation of the 80,000-seat stadium, Murphy said the county board of commissioners would consider any properly-made request from the City of Pontiac. That request would have to be made by the Pontiac City Council.

"My statements have been turned into a number of things, none of them accurate," Murphy said. "As of yet, we haven't received any official communication from the City of Pontiac."

The county executive also downplayed the possibility of county involvement in the Silverdome.

"We'd give it a legitimate hearing, but I don't know if it's feasible. We're not even sure it's legally possible," he said.

"It would take a lot of study. It would take a long time to go over the books. I'm not sure we'd even want to go into the business after all the study."

PONTIAC CITY MANAGER Phillip O. Mastin could not be reached for comment, but a lengthy statement released May 12 reveals no indications for any joint Pontiac-Oakland venture or a takeover of the facility by the county.

"The city and the Pontiac Stadium Authority knew that the Silverdome was not going to break even for a number of years. Deficits were forecasted, expected and planned for," Mastin said.

"The magnitude of the deficits were a surprise," he added. "And the inability of the city's financial system to identify them in a timely manner was a major disappointment."

THE DEFICITS discovery touched off an immediate belt-tightening effort and talk of a new increase in Pontiac property taxes. The austerity moves,

dubbed "drastic economy measures," have frozen all personnel hirings, employe travel and non-essential spending.

Despite the unexpected shower of a "community success," Mastin called the Silverdome a "community success."

"The Silverdome," he said, "is a viable economic venture and a standing monument to the will, foresight and courage of Pontiac residents."

He added that to taxpayers "it means a continued investment of tax money to support a sound economic concept."

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