

What SEMCOG role in water quality body?

By TIM RICHARD

The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) is struggling with its biggest operating decision in the decade it has been in existence. The question is not whether, but how, to establish an "Area Water Quality Body" as part of a federal goal to have all bodies of water clean and swimmable by 1985.

There are signs the debate may soon find Detroit and some conservative suburbs on one side and the regional-minded suburbs on the other.

JERRY RAYMOND of Livonia, Larry Pernick of Southfield and David Shepherd of Oak Park took the regional view last Friday when the question came to SEMCOG's executive committee.

They contended SEMCOG should appoint the Water Quality Body's governing board, or at least most of it, and the WQB should be a kind of appeals board to air and resolve disputes between local governments on water quality questions.

Conrad Mallett of Detroit and James Lanni of Royal Oak sought a lesser role for SEMCOG, with Lanni vainly suggesting there be no WQB at all.

Although it's a theoretical possibility, no one in SEMCOG is suggesting that the voluntary planning agency or whatever water Quality Body it creates actually get in the business of building sewers or drains or inspection systems. Under all plans SEMCOG is considering, all pollution control measures would be left to local and county agencies and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

UNDER FEDERAL guidelines in Sec. 208 of the 1972 water quality act, SEMCOG was selected as the regional planning agency to come up with a water quality management structure.

"There is no requirement in Sec. 208 to establish such a board," said Shepherd, SEMCOG chairperson and mayor of Oak Park. "But we have a responsibility to come up with a management system."

Raymond, SEMCOG parliamentarian and Livonia councilman, argued for a strong SEMCOG role in the Water Quality Body. "I know of no other group that directly represents so many people as SEMCOG," he



LARRY PERNICK
Don't duck responsibility



CONRAD MALLET
"Be a planning agency"

said, adding: "Review (of all pollution control efforts) and appeals belong with the SEMCOG general assembly."

Raymond pleaded with the executive committee not to repeat "our asininity" of allowing the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority board control to slip from SEMCOG's hands. The original act setting up SENTA put majority appointment power in SEMCOG's hands, but the state last year stripped SEMCOG of that function and turned it over to the mayor of Detroit and county boards.

MALLET DISAGREED with Raymond, and his disagreement is significant. For besides being a former SEMCOG chairperson and a current elected Wayne County commissioner from Detroit, Mallett is Mayor Young's director of the Detroit Department of Transportation. Thus, he was speaking with Young's voice.

"We said we wanted to be a planning agency," said Mallett, arguing for a management system where SEMCOG would have little or no appointive authority.

"Words like 'monitor' and 'implement' change the nature of SEMCOG," Mallett said.

Raymond replied: "I object to relinquishing 1) the power of appointment and 2) the appeals power. I'm not talking about implementation."

"If there is an allegation of deviation from the plan by a local body, that's for us to determine. I do not suggest we operate and carry out the plan. But do not relinquish the authority to appoint."

Larry Pernick, an Oakland County

commissioner and experienced voice on the SEMCOG executive committee, said the elected officials who run SEMCOG are expected to make decisions, "but we don't want to be held accountable for those decisions. We cannot go on creating new bodies. I am not convinced that one more independent body that will be divorced from the people affected is the way to go."

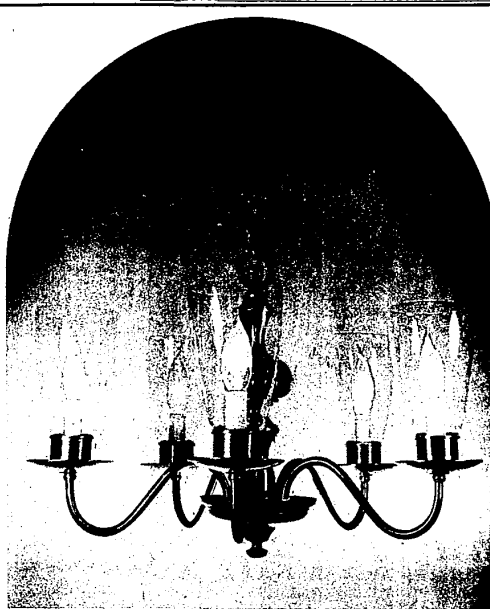
That put Pernick in the camp of those who want the Water Quality Body closely tied to SEMCOG.

THE EXECUTIVE committee finally narrowed its preferred management options to three middle-of-the-road plans, asked staff to develop those, and advanced the plan to the SEMCOG general assembly, where all final decisions are made by all member governments.

The preferred systems are:
• Plan C—SEMCOG would make some WQB appointments, sharing authority with counties, municipalities and the governor; SEMCOG would handle all appeals.

• Plan D—SEMCOG would make only a few appointments, with local governments making the others; SEMCOG would again handle all appeals.

• Plan E—SEMCOG would have even fewer appointments, and the state Water Resources Commission would handle appeals.
Plan F gave SEMCOG no appointment power and left appeals to the state. Plan A gave SEMCOG all appointment power and B half the appointment power, but A would set up the water quality body as a SEMCOG committee, while B would give it some operating autonomy.



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