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Local reps back strong new open meetings bill

A bill requiring open meetings of local governmental bodies is before the Michigan Senate after winning 7-4 passage in the house last week.

"We think it's in good shape. I don't know what the senate will do to it," said Rep. Thomas Brown (D-Westland), who chaired the house towns and counties committee that wrote the reform legislation.

The bill's history can be told by its long title: Senate Bill 820, House Substitute No. 3. The original SB 820 was so riddled with amendments allowing closed meetings that

its original sponsors withdrew their support.

THE HOUSE had almost as heavy a battle.

"From the public hearings, I never thought we'd get the kind of result we did," said Brown. Local officials—school board members, in particular—opposed many types of personnel, legal and real estate matters needed to be discussed behind closed doors.

A community college board chairman from Dowagiac even insisted the legislature had no right to require college boards to conduct public meetings and castigated Brown for allowing other legislators to testify at public hearings.

"The debate ran 7½ hours," Brown said of the house action last week. "Rep. David Hollister (D-Lansing) and I had pretty good access to the mike and beat down a lot of amendments."

Altogether, some 50 or more amendments were offered, Brown said.

All Observer & Eccentric area representatives supported the bill on final passage. Opposition came from only one representative: area Democrat and five rural and small city Republicans.

ONE CONTROVERSIAL amendment would have exempted committees and subcommittees from the open meetings bill.

Brown said it was defeated but that house members would accept a senate amendment to allow subcommittees to meet privately.

"We would allow a three-member subcommittee to interview applicants, for example, for a superintendent of schools job. It would take an awful lot of time for a full seven-member board to interview 12

or 14 applicants in public," Brown said.

Land purchases may be discussed in closed session until the time an option is taken. Collective bargaining strategy may also be discussed in closed session if two-thirds of the governing body approves.

If passed by the senate and signed by Gov. William Milliken, the law would take effect next Jan. 1.

For the first offense, a public official who deliberately violates the act may be fined up to \$1,000. For a second offense, the official will be automatically removed from office and be ineligible for appointment to the post during the balance of the term.

THE OPEN meetings bill had been supported most actively by—Gerritsen Cause, through Jan. Elman of Bloomfield Township. Other supporters included the Michigan Press Association and the League of Women Voters.

Rep. Hollister had sought a broad "sunshine law" similar to Florida's with virtually no exceptions, but Hollister's bill had no chance for passage.

The bill will apply to the legislative or governing body of any city, village, township, charter township, county board, school board, community college board, college or university board and such special authorities as the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority, Huron-Clinton Metropolitan (part) Authority and public hospital authorities.

It would also apply to such important subordinate units as planning commissions, county road commissions, building authorities and plat boards.

But it would not apply to such groups as textbook committees, building feasibility study committees, curriculum committees or advisory councils on economic expansion.

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Tuition is \$26.

David Dodge, instructor in Orchard Ridge's audiovisual department, will teach the class. He will be assisted by Barbara Kabezeil, library technical assistant para-professional.

Further information on the workshop may be obtained from Mr. Kabezeil at 676-9988.

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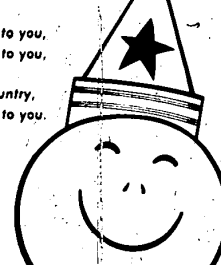
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