

Voters to decide county road commission's fate

Oakland County voters will decide in November whether there will be the first county in the state to abolish its three-member road commission.

They may also decide whether to levy more property taxes for a long-term road construction program, although it is unlikely the ballot proposal will be for the full two mills asked by the road commission.

Acting with little advance warning and no debate at all, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Thursday voted 3-3 to ask voters whether they wish to abolish the road commission.

"THE FUN WILL come when I ask the county board to support it," chuckled Commissioner Patrick Nowak, R-Farmington Hills.

It is pretty hard for a legislator to deny the public the opportunity to vote on something, Nowak said.

Lake has partly leader County Executive Daniel T. Murphy. Nowak would like to see the county's "crisis handling" roads through an almost autonomous unit of government. Murphy has proposed that with abolition of the road commission, that department's administrative duties should fall to his office and the police making

property tax increase for road construction.

The county board flatly rejected the first proposal and two committees have yet to begin study of the second part.

Miss DEARBORN, a member of both the buildings and grounds and the finance committees which will study the tax idea, said neither has begun work on it.

"If we're ever going to have roads in Oakland County, we've got to put some money into them," she said. "Maybe one mill will be sufficient to get some work done. The whole idea was set aside during the parks' millage campaign," which voters approved May 18.

Patrick K. Daly, D-Pontiac, chairman of the planning and building committee, questioned whether voters would approve the kind of millage the road commission is asking.

Commissioner Dearborn said in an interview she would like to see all three Oakland County units that deal in public works operated as a single agency.

These include the road unit, the drain commission office and the department of public works.

AT TOWN'S ROAD and highway commission had been considered a great reform and a boon to automobile transportation since the turn of the century.

As road unit budgets grew to rival the budgets of general government, a movement was begun to eliminate their autonomous status.

Under the Michigan Constitution of 1964, the position of an elected state highway commissioner was replaced by a four-member board appointed by the governor.

But county road commissions are appointed for staggered terms by the county board. Most of the road unit's money comes from a share of state gasoline and weight taxes. Then, argue the abolitionists, the road commission answers neither to the people nor to elected officials.

Whereas roads and road maintenance are visible concerns to the residents of the County of Oakland and these residents deserve more accountability from their elected officials and—

Whereas accountability of road projects and road maintenance is difficult under the present system of six-year road commission appointments and—

Whereas the voters of the County of Oakland have previously indicated their desire for unified county government

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Oakland County Friend of the Court John Houghton will soon meet some other friends of the court—namely a group of area citizens who call themselves court watchers.

Houghton will speak to the group, which is currently concentrating on observing Oakland County's circuit court sessions, at 1:30 p.m. Tuesday at the county court house in Pontiac. He will explain his office and then be invited to express his views on court reform.

Along with observing court sessions, the court watchers have had meetings with James Thorburn, chief circuit court judge; Fred Meister, circuit court administrator and his deputy, Gary Ladd; Leonard Gilman, a lawyer from the prosecutor's office; and J. Robert Sterling of the Oakland Bar Association.

YVONNE ATKINSON, the project's coordinator, says, "We are beginning to unravel the lines of court procedure and are trying to understand the different points of view about some of the major issues in our justice system."

"One of our aims," she continues, "is to publish information that will help the litigant or defendant who feels her or his case is unjustly delayed. Without knowledge of the system, the litigant or defendant feels helpless, frequently blames the wrong person, and becomes quite cynical or bitter about the justice system."

"We would like to be able to advise people of some of the resources available to them when delay seems unreasonable."

CURRENTLY INVOLVED in the project are 41 people coming from 18 different Oakland County communities, from the city of Detroit, and from St. Clair County.

Because we tape our training sessions, we are able to invite new volunteers to join our project at any time," Ms. Atkinson says.

At the county courthouse in Pontiac on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning, new volunteers can listen to the tapes of previous training sessions and start court watching immediately or at their convenience.

This summer we are perfecting our report forms in preparation for the influx of volunteers we expect in the fall. Then, if all goes well, we will organize court watching at the district court level in 1977," Ms. Atkinson adds.

Anyone interested in joining the court watchers project may call 666-9277 or 666-3625.

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David Hatch, Shelburne, Mass.
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Marilyn Summers, Atlanta, Georgia
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Glenn Twitchell, Leguinitas, Calif.
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Schools to offer Brown contract

The Oakland Schools Board of Education is to meet on Tuesday on a four-year contract for Kenneth W. Brown, a superintendent of the intermediate school district.

Brown has been deputy superintendent since 1969. He has been described by an Oakland School spokesman as a good, competent, faithful man.

The meeting Tuesday will be at 4 p.m. in the board offices at 2100 Pontiac Lake Road, Pontiac, opposite the Oakland County Service Center complex on Telegraph.

Brown's contract was included in the agenda following an executive session last Wednesday. That was the date when the board accepted a letter from former Supt. William Emerson announcing that he was quitting his job with Oakland Schools effective June 30.

Emerson's contract had another two years to run. He had been superintendent since 1969.

Correction

In a July 8 Observer & Eccentric story on William Emerson's departure from his job as Oakland Schools superintendent, a picture of James Elaman was inadvertently used instead of Emerson's. Elaman is a Birmingham attorney.