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Who gets the county cars, and when?

How many county cars shall there be? The Oakland County Board of Commissioners decides that when it passes an annual budget.

Who should get to use those county cars for home-to-work driving? That is the rub. When the rubber was over, the board decided 188 to give final vehicle assignment authority to a subcommittee on car policy of the board's finance committee.

"ISN'T THIS an administrative decision?" demanded Commissioner Paul Kasper (R-Bloomfield Hills), who saw the new policy as encroaching on the executive.

"We can eliminate cars—that's legitimate. But when you get into the area of car assignment—the specifics of whether Joe A. and Department B gets a car—that is a purely administrative function," Kasper said.

But Finance Committee Chairman Lawrence Pernick (D-Southfield) said: "If we on the finance committee don't go through this, we have no way of knowing what the transit needs really are."

Use of cars would have to be recommended by the county executive. We on the car policy subcommittee would act in partnership with the executive.

AT ISSUE is the use of 36 cars at an annual cost of \$1,500 each, said Pernick. Pernick said he was not being self-serving in seeking subcommittee control of car policy because "I don't expect to hold this office next year." He was referring to the fact that the county board will have a Republican majority after Jan. 1 and almost certainly a new finance committee chairman.

Commissioner Henry Hox (R-Troy), one of a handful of Republicans who supported the new policy, said the board made a mistake last year in not taking control of car assignments.

We made a small reduction in the fleet

money. But at the end of the year, we had to add money for special prosecutors' in the organized crime task force.

Had a board committee kept tabs on car assignments, said Hox, it would have avoided a deficit in the car account by the end of the year.

Area commissioners supporting board control of car assignments included Mary Mead Dearborn (D-Birmingham), Hox, Fred Houghton (R-Hoover), Pernick and Alexander C. Perloff (D-Southfield).

Opposed were Kasper, John McDonald (R-Hamming Hills), Lillian Moffitt (R-Bloomfield), Joseph Montane (R-Oakland Lake), Dennis Murphy (R-Nova) and Robert Page (R-Birmingham).

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Winter starts Dec. 21, officially

Winter solstice, when the sun reaches its southernmost point, will occur at 12:36 p.m. Dec. 21.

This is the official beginning of winter.

However, the fact that we are closer to the sun tends to make winters in the northern hemisphere a little milder.

cross will be upright against the sky.

Loth adds that Sirius, the Star of the East, pointed to by the Three Wise Men rises in the early evenings around Christmas. The brightest star in the heavens, it is the principal star of Canis Major, the Dog of Orion.

Dec. 21 also will be the shortest day of the year—about nine hours of daylight and 15 hours of darkness.

From then on the days will begin to lengthen and will be heading back to summer, says University of Michigan astronomer Hazel M. Losh.

"The sun and winter solstice are believed to be a real relation to the date of Christmas," the professor says. "Most likely this religious celebration was set to agree with the early pagan festival celebrating the promise of returning from the cold, bleak temperatures to warmer weather."

We are particularly favored with planets this Christmas month," notes the astronomer. "The brightest is Venus, so brilliant you can't miss it. It is visible in the southwestern sky for two to three hours after sunset."

"On Christmas Eve, Venus will be joined by the crescent moon about seven degrees to the north," she says. "As soon as darkness comes on, Jupiter will show up in the northeastern sky and shine the whole night through."

"AT THIS TIME of the year, the earth is actually closer to the sun than during the summer," says Ms. Losh.

But seasons depend on the tilt of the earth's axis rather than the distance from the sun, she explains. "Even in July, we are closer to the sun in winter, the sun's rays hit us more obliquely with less force."

"AN IMPRESSIVE symbol of the Christmas season is the Northern Cross, Cygnus," she says. "It will move across the December sky from the zenith to the northwest, gradually assuming more and more of a vertical position."

By Christmas Eve, the long bar of the

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Circus art contest set

Friday is the deadline for the Circus Art Contest sponsored by the Maize Temple Shrine for the 1977 Shrine Circus.

The contest is open to students in public and parochial schools in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

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The color drawing that most creatively portrays the circus will be chosen as the cover for the 1977 Shrine Circus program book. The circus will be Feb. 4-21 at the Michigan State Fair Grounds.

Students may participate as part of a class project or on their own. There are no entry fees.

Drawings must be in color and done on paper or posterboard no smaller than 8 1/2 by 11 inches and no larger than 18 inches square. The child's name, age and grade, home address and school should be printed on the back of each entry.

First, second and third place prizes will be awarded in each of five grade categories: pre-school and kindergarten, first and second grades, third and fourth grades, fifth and sixth grades and seventh and eighth grades.

In each category, first-place prizes include a bicycle and six Shrine Circus reserved seat tickets. Second-place prizes are a walk-around and four reserved seat tickets to the circus. Third-place prizes are a watch and four reserved seat circus tickets.

Entries should be mailed to Circus Art Contest, Shrine Circus Office, 434 Temple, Detroit 48201. They must be postmarked no later than Dec. 10 and must arrive at the circus office by Dec. 14.

Winners will be notified by mail.

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