

## Lansing mulls plan to give county chief control over parks

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

The Oakland County Parks and Recreation Department appears headed for some changes.

Pending action by the state legislature may bring seven county parks under County Executive Daniel T. Murphy's umbrella before the year is out.

The intent is to further unify the county's operations under the county executive. Presently, the county parks and recreation commission, the road commission and the drain commission are all autonomous bodies. The new package of amendments to the law that allowed the establishment of a county executive position was overwhelmingly approved by the state house and is under study in a state senate committee.

The road and drain commissions are unaffected by the new amendments.

MURPHY ADMINISTRATION officials pledge few changes in the parks department's structure and management once the merger is made final.

According to Patrick Nowak, Murphy's expert in inter-governmental relations:

"The parks system would continue to be financed by a 1/4-mill property tax levy.

"The 11-member parks and recreation commission will be abolished in favor of a special citizens advisory board, whose members will be appointed by the county executive.

"The parks system will join the executive administration as a full-fledged department.

PARKS AND recreation officials, however, expressed concern over

the change in status.

"As a department, will we be able to move as fast as we could on our own?" Manager Eric Reichel asked.

"We really don't know how much red tape will be involved. There'll probably be recommendations from the county executive and they'll have to go to the (board of commissioners) planning and building committee and then to the finance committee.

"It's just a long process," he said.

PARKS COMMISSION Chairman Lewis Wint, predicted voters would turn down future millage renewals.

"If the populous knows that parks and rec. is just another level of county government, it might be more apt to say 'Let the money come out of the general fund,'" Wint said.

He also bridled at the Murphy administration's contentions that a citizen's advisory board would be more responsive to the demands of the public.

"I'm very accessible. On weekends I go to the parks. I go to the events. I talk to the people," said Wint, who would find his commission pulled out from under him.

"I really feel we're closer to the people using the parks than the county executive," he said.

NOWAK, HOWEVER, predicted, "There'll be far more citizen input than there is under the current system, where there's a consortium of various elected officials with a few citizens thrown in."

He added that the recommendations of the advisory board would be given "strong and serious consideration," even though the board would have no legal authority.

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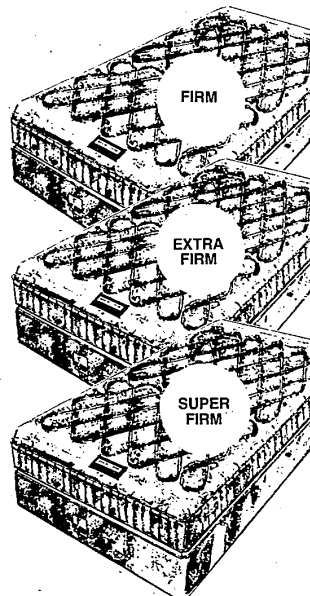
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