

# Commissioners want state to thin their ranks

## 9-member, full-time board eyed

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Only five days before the general election, members of Oakland County's board of commissioners said they would like to see their ranks reduced.

The board last week, in a rare bipartisan effort, approved a resolution asking the state legislature to replace the current 27-member part-time board with a nine-member full-time board.

The vote was 14-13. Six Democrats joined eight Republicans in passing the resolution.



ROBERT PAGE  
hasn't heard the last

## County plans big hike in road construction

A 56 per cent increase in road construction is possible in Oakland County because of the forthcoming increase in the state's gasoline and weight taxes. The irony is that the Oakland County Road Commission had opposed the tax bill because it would allocate some funds to public transit.

Road Commission Chairman John R. Gnu Jr. said the 1979 budget calls for \$18.3 million in proposed construction, up from this year's level of \$11.8 million.

The construction program will be subject to a public hearing at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 15 at the same time as the public hearing on the overall budget.

Place will be the Bloomfield Township Hall, 4200 Telegraph (south of Long Lake Road).

"AFTER PRIORITY expenses for maintenance and other programs," said Gnu, we anticipate \$6.2 million of the state-collected gas and weight taxes will be available for construction purposes.

"That is almost double the amount of state gas and weight taxes programmed for 1978 construction.

"In effect, construction will receive about three-quarters of the increase in gas and weight tax revenue coming to the road commission from the tax increase."

He said the proposed construction program calls for 11.8 miles of paving two-lane gravel roads, 6.1 miles of widening existing pavements to four or five lanes, 20.4 miles of resurfacing existing paved roads, 24 intersection improvements, general safety and pavement marking projects and about the same level of subdivision street improvements as programmed for 1978.

"Also increased in the 1979 construction

program as compared to 1978 is the amount of funding from federal programs, at \$3.3 million compared to \$3.5 million. Most of that increase is, however, merely carrying over from 1978 to 1979 the \$2.1 million allocated last year for widening of Orchard Lake Rd. which could not be completed in 1978 but is expected to be undertaken in 1979," said Gnu.

Funds anticipated from local governments for construction are up for 1979, at \$4 million compared to \$2 million. About half of the increase is due to inclusion of \$500,000 allocated by the Oakland Board of County Commissioners in 1978 and \$446,000 allocated by local units of government for a tripartite construction program already underway. The road commission's \$300,000 share will be paid in 1979.

Gnu noted that \$564,000 being contributed by a developer is wholly new for 1979.

He said remainder of the program involves \$2.1 million that will be contributed to projects but not paid to the road commission. This includes \$1.8 million of subdivision street improvement special assessments and city's shares of projects they will be conducting with contributions from the road commission.

"Road commissioners William M. Richards, Fred D. Houghton and myself believe the state has put together a good construction program, considering the funding limitations. But we also believe the public should have a chance to review and comment on the proposal before we officially adopt it."

"As a result of last year's public input, three projects were added to the 1978 construction program and several others were placed in consideration for this year and future years."

The new-size board could not be set up, commissioners said, until 1982 when district boundaries are redrawn to bring them in line with the 1980 census.

Observer & Eccentric-area commissioners voting for the reduction were: Paul Kasper (R-Bloomfield Hills), Robert McConnell (R-Farmington Hills), John McDonald (R-Farmington), Lillian Moffitt (R-Bloomfield Township) and Joseph Montante (R-Orchard Lake).

Commissioners voting against the resolution included: Ralph Moxley (R-Birmingham), Dennis Murphy (R-Ann Arbor), Robert Page (R-Birmingham), Alexander Perinoff (D-Southfield), Lawrence Pernick (D-Southfield), John Peterson (R-Rochester) and Henry Hoot (R-Troy).

THE DEBATE was fast and hot as commissioner after commissioner stepped up the microphones and declared his or her allegiance.

Commissioners supporting a reduced board cited these reasons:

•The 27-member board has proven itself to be too large and unwieldy to efficiently deal with increasingly intricate and complex county government.

•A full-time board would be more effective in dealing with the county executive.

•If there were nine strong-willed county commissioners, they would have more to say about how the county is run.

•The cost of the board could be

reduced.

Those arguing against a smaller board cited these reasons:

•The cost of a smaller, full-time board is "potentially immense." The said full-time commissioners would demand more office space, bigger staffs and a county-owned car.

•County residents would get proportionally less effective representation. Instead of representing about 35,000 persons, each commissioner would represent more than 100,000 persons.

•The commissioners should be part-time "oversers" of the county's activities. "If the part-time University of Michigan Board of Regents can successfully oversee a \$500 million operation, there is no reason to believe a part-time body cannot do the same effective job in Oakland County," read one committee report.

•Diversity has been one of the board's great strengths. The 27 part-

time commissioners, they said, bring input from a wide variety of businesses and professions. With one foot in their respective occupations and one foot in government, they have a better perspective.

FOLLOWING THE announcement of the vote total, at least one commissioner had harsh words for his counterparts who voted for the shrunken board.

"Of those that voted for it," Birmingham's Page said, "most would like to make it (the job of commissioner), a full-time career for themselves." Page, however, refused to name names.

He added, though, that County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and his administration were backing the proposal.

"The administration wants a smaller board," he said. "That way it'll be easier for the administration to get its way," he said.

Despite his harsh words, Page said it would still be unlikely for the resolution to ever be enacted.

"You haven't heard the last of this resolution," Page said, vowing to have the matter reconsidered in the future.

Page and opponents of the plan would have to change only one commissioner's mind. That task would not seem insurmountable as several commissioners who had previously supported the plan voted against it last week.

One factor that could sway commissioners in future weeks would be the status of a reconstituted board. Some commissioners had assumed that the nine-member board would be a full-time commission.

Commissioner Richard Wilcox (R-Orionville), who introduced the proposal more than a month ago, however, said last week that he never meant for the smaller board to be full-time.

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