

Feikens asks aloud

Are sewage rates bloated?

By TOM LONERGAN

Chief Federal Judge John Feikens indicated Wednesday he may be taking a closer look at the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department's (DWSD) future revenue needs.

Feikens questioned whether the \$184 million in increases for the next 18 months was a bloated figure. He spoke at a meeting on industry and suburban community challenges to the higher sewer rates, which took effect Jan. 1.

"I bet there's an awful lot of fat in that (\$184 million)," Feikens told lawyers representing the city-owned system, Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties and several industry groups.

"How many of us know if it's really needed?"

"SPEAKING IN elemental terms," Feikens said, "the sewer system has no competition."

"I wonder if the decisions being made on expenditures ought not to be constantly reviewed. I think I've got to get into that, do I not?"

Feikens noted that consultant Joe Moore Jr. has suggested a "watchdog committee" be formed to monitor the plant's progress. Moore was appointed by Detroit Mayor Coleman Young to monitor the Detroit sewage treatment plant's compliance with federal anti-pollution rules.

Feikens suggested Wednesday that such a committee could also look into the DWSD budget.

But Richard McClear, the DWSD's attorney, maintained the rate challenges haven't shown the \$184 million revenue projection is out of line.

"This rate has been looked at by a lot of people skeptical of Detroit and the management of the system," he said.

"Yet the (rate) compromise (leading to a reduction of total system revenue) is less than 1 percent."

"So it doesn't seem to me the projections are so bad after undergoing that kind of scrutiny."

THAT COMPROMISE, which would reduce sewer rates slightly to suburban customers, remains tentative.

Macomb County has refused to agree to the rate compromise, maintaining it should not bear the full cost of a massive sewer line break during summer 1978. The \$12.4 million repair cost should be spread over the entire system, Macomb argues.

Feikens has given Macomb officials

until Monday to reach agreement with the city. If it doesn't, he may decide who should pay for the sewer line break or refer the issue to a three-man "masters panel," comprised of engineering and law professors from the University of Michigan.

While the "tentative compromise" could reduce the wholesale sewage disposal rate to southern Oakland and western Wayne counties by five cents, settlement of the Macomb issue in that county's favor could mean higher rates for all customers of the system.

The sewage treatment plant serves 3.2 million people in more than 70 metropolitan area communities. The new sewer rates are expected to raise homeowner bills \$15 to \$25 annually in southern Oakland and western Wayne counties.

Public hearing set on tax package

The state Senate Finance Committee will hold a public hearing at 10 a.m. Monday, Jan. 7 in Southfield on a pending property tax relief package.

The meeting will be in the Southfield Recreation Center's multipurpose room, 26000 Evergreen.

A tax package introduced by Sen. Gary Corbin, D-Cllo, would increase property tax exemptions while increasing the state sales tax to 5 percent from the present 4 percent.

The Corbin proposal provides a \$3,000 (state equalized value) homestead exemption for owner occupied housing with the state reimbursing local governments for the revenue loss. Renters would also be allowed an equivalent income tax credit, according to Corbin.

would be earmarked for property tax relief.

The proposal could appear on the November 1980 ballot if approved by the legislature.

The plan also allows a sales tax credit for low-income persons which would total \$40 million.

A DIFFERENT tax shift plan pending in the House of Representatives would reduce property taxes by increasing the state income tax. It would not require a popular vote since the state constitution would not be changed.

The 4 percent Michigan sales tax is constitutionally limited.

The Senate Finance Committee, which Corbin chairs, will also meet at 2 p.m. Jan. 7 in the East Detroit City Hall, 23200 Grotto.

THE ONE CENT sales tax increase

Wood-burning stove increases fire hazard

The pot-bellied stove in the parlor is making a come back.

As the prices of fossil fuel heat skyrocket, more people are turning to wood as a source of heat.

Wood stove sales are increasing as rapidly as the price of fuel oil and, unfortunately, the number of wood stove related house fires also is increasing.

The Department of Labor's Bureau of Construction Codes says an improperly installed stove or one that is abused, while providing inexpensive heat, could result in the tragic loss of property and lives.

The major cause of fireplace and wood stove fires is improper construction or installation, while the major cause of chimney fires is improper design and maintenance.

To assist the homeowner, the Bureau

of Construction Codes has issued several guidelines for installation and use of wood stoves.

Most important is placing the stove a safe distance from a combustible wall. The National Fire Protection Association calls for a 36-inch clearance between the stove and any combustible surface to the front, back and sides. Recommended clearances from non-combustible surfaces are closer. A combustible floor beneath the stove must be covered with a 3/4-inch thick asbestos, brick, hollow metal, concrete, stone or tile that extends at least 18 inches beyond the firebox opening.

Another suggestion for safe operation of wood stoves include burning only dry hardwood. Green and soft woods create a creosote buildup which is a cause of many chimney fires.

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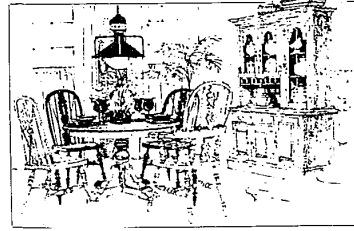
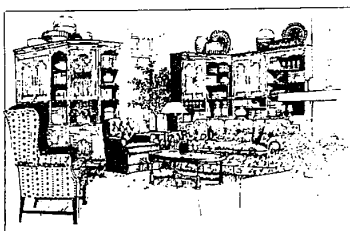
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