

Young lambasts move to regionalize water system

By TOM LONERGAN

To no one's surprise, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young is hardly enthused with a suburban petition drive and renewed rumblings in Lansing for regional control of the Detroit water and sewer system.

"If it hadn't been for that water system, there wouldn't be any suburbs," Young said at a press conference this week.

"Pontiac and all the rest of the surrounding area exist because of a water system which we freely offered to them. When they get ready to take over Detroit Edison and Michigan Bell, they'll be ready to turn over the water system — to the customers."

YOUNG MADE his comments Monday following a meeting with federal Judge John Feikens regarding the sewer line crisis affecting 300,000 Oakland and Macomb County residents.

Michigan Department of Natural Resources Director Howard Tanner and John McGuire, regional director of the federal Environmental Protection Agency, also attended the closed-door meeting, which was originally called to begin revising court-ordered pollution-control deadlines for the Detroit sewage treatment plant.

Young called the water and sewer regionalization effort "a political move, pure and simple." He accused suburban officials of trying to "take advantage of an emergency."

A petition drive to place the regionalization issue on either this November's or the 1982 general election ballot was started late last year by Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn.

However, the crumbling sewer line in Sterling Heights, discovered Jan. 27, brought renewed calls for regionalization from suburban state legislators. Past legislative efforts to change the structure of the Detroit Water Board have failed.

RESPONDING TO Young's comments, Robert Fredericks, chief deputy drain commissioner for Oakland County, said, "He obviously has a negative point of view."

Kuhn, who is in Norfolk, Va., for two weeks' Navy Reserve training, couldn't be reached for comment.

"All this does," Fredericks said of the regionalization effort, "is rearrange the participation in the water and sewer system."

"It's sharing responsibility and management control of a shared utility system. It's funded that way by the state and federal governments."

The Detroit system has more than 100 community water customers, stretching to Genesee County, and 75 suburban community sewer customers.

THE EPA's McGuire announced that the Army Corps of Engineers would conduct an investigation of the crumbling Macomb-Oakland sewer line once interim repairs are completed.

Private construction crews hired by

the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department have been installing auxiliary pipes in the damaged 12-foot-diameter sewer main near 15 Mile and Schoenherr. A bypass pipeline is also being constructed to carry sewage should a collapse occur.

The federal investigation will start "after the immediate crisis of solving the problem is resolved," McGuire said. The Army Corps of Engineers has been on the site since last week.

In July 1978, a break in a different section of the same line led to the dumping of thousands of gallons of raw sewage in Lake St. Clair.

Young said DWSO officials "have some theories" on what caused the seven-year-old sewer line to crumble but he wouldn't identify them.

"We are responsible," the mayor said. "We feel we must first repair the

emergency damage. We're doing that."

REGARDING the Detroit sewage treatment plant, federal and state officials will write a new consent order listing new pollution control deadlines.

The plant, on the Detroit River southwest of downtown, processes about 700 million gallons of sewage daily. The city missed a Dec. 31 deadline for improving the plant's performance.

"That plant does not have the capacity now for full secondary treatment," said McGuire. "That's an engineering fact of life. No matter who's running it, it wouldn't make it."

Secondary treatment, which includes aeration and chlorination of the sewage, is required by the 1970 federal Clean Water Act.

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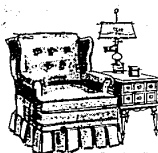
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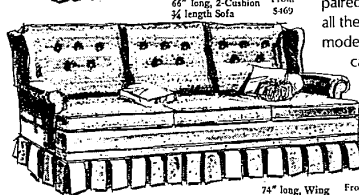
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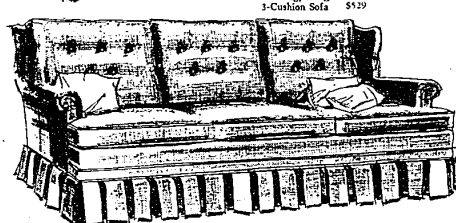
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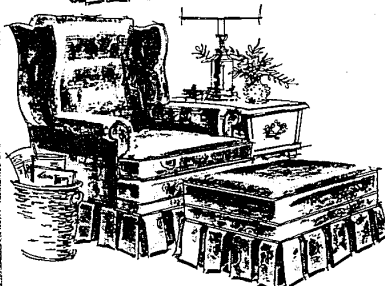
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