

Drain commissioner says

No county funds used in suit

By TOM LONERGAN

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners wants to know how much Drain Commissioner George Kuhn has spent on a lawsuit challenging the county executive.

Kuhn's answer: Nothing. "I wish they'd find out what (County Executive Daniel) Murphy spent," Kuhn said Friday in a telephone interview.

Kuhn was joined in challenging the constitutionality of the county executive post by several politicians who have been at odds with Murphy — members of the road commission, Commissioner Henry Hoot, R-Bloomfield Township, and Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson.

THE BOARD of commissioners last Thursday took two actions related to recent questioning of Kuhn's practices.



GEORGE W. KUHN
Shenanigans or substance?

One was to ask Kuhn and the county road commission for an accounting of their lawsuit challenging Murphy's powers. The other was to request all county departments to report on any additional compensation any county employee is getting that was not authorized by the board or provided by law.

The additional salary question came after recent inquiries of Kuhn's payment of \$3,000 to his chief deputy, Robert Fredericks of Troy. The payment allegedly came from the Southeastern Oakland County Sewage Disposal System fund.

Kuhn, a Republican elected as drain commissioner in 1972 and 1976, maintains the questions aimed at his practices are "political shenanigans" initiated by fellow Republican Murphy, "because he wants to run the whole government."

Last year, Kuhn, Patterson, the road commission and Hoot went to court challenging the county executive's powers — particularly his veto power.

Circuit Court Judge Robert Tempin recently ruled in the county executive's favor on all counts, and the case is being appealed.

Patterson subsequently dropped out of the case. The board of road commissioners last week also voted to drop the case.

But the board of commissioners wants to know who paid the legal costs.

KUHN SAID he hasn't spent any department money or any of his personal money on the suit.

Commissioners voted 19-4, with Hoot abstaining, to ask the road commission, Kuhn and County Executive Murphy for an accounting of their law suit spending. Adding Murphy to the action was proposed from the floor by Commissioner James Doyon, D-Madison Heights.

(Murphy's office told this newspaper Friday that Murphy spent between \$11,000 and \$12,000, all of which had been approved by the board of commissioners.)

Commissioner Alexander Perinoff, D-Southfield, called the lawsuit spending request a "disgrace." He said the board could have received the information through a "Dear George" letter. The board was creating "an air of public distrust," Perinoff said.

But board Vice Chairwoman Lillian Moffitt, R-Bloomfield, said she has received only partial information from Kuhn and the road commission.

"The information was not readily available," Mrs. Moffitt said, adding it only became available once the board considered asking for it.

Commissioner Robert Gorsline, R-Milford, said no one was accusing Kuhn of acting improperly.

"We simply would like to know," he said regarding the lawsuit spending.

THE ROAD commission two weeks ago sent the board an accounting of its spending, according to spokesman Dennis Pajot. "From our understanding of what they want, I think (that report) would be sufficient."

The road commission spent \$22,815 on the suit "from non-tax sources," Pajot said.

The road commission voted 2-1 to withdraw from the suit, with Vice Chairman John Gnaou dissenting. Gnaou said the matter was too important to be shoved aside because of "our local politics."

IN ANOTHER Kuhn-related action, the board of commissioners voted 19-2 to request all elected and appointed officials to tell the personnel committee within 30 days about any county compensation they or their employees are receiving in addition to that authorized by the board.

Chief Deputy Drain Commissioner Robert Fredericks has been receiving an extra \$250 a month and Kuhn \$100 a month, which Kuhn says is for administering the southeastern county sewage disposal system. Kuhn said the extra compensation for the drain commissioner has been policy since 1948.

Kuhn's annual salary is \$35,000, he said, and Fredericks' is \$31,000.

In a statement released several days ago, Kuhn said state law allows him to authorize the supplemental payments and that Oakland County Civil Counsel Robert Allen has said the payments are proper.

Kuhn maintains he has saved the county more than \$1 million through his administering of the southeastern sewage disposal system since 1973.

There has not been a full-time administrator of the sewage disposal system since 1975, he said. At that time, Fredericks was paid \$150 a month as co-administrator, which was increased \$100 in 1978. The on-site administrator, who died in 1975, had been paid \$20,000.

Kuhn added that in 1973 and 1974, Fredericks received no supplemental income for sewage disposal system duties. Kuhn said he eliminated \$500 a month in extra compensation in 1973 which had been paid Fredericks' successor.

He's been unfairly accused of improper conduct, said Kuhn, a former state senator.

"The challenge appears to be more inspired by petty politics than actual substance," he said.



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