

Director blames 'regulations' for water board woes

By TOM LONERGAN

If George Kuhn and Charles Beckham ever met over lunch to talk about the Detroit sewer and water system, it's possible they'd walk away with more than indignation.

Kuhn is the Oakland County Drain Commissioner who's leading a petition drive challenging Detroit's control of the system. Beckham is the new director of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD).

Despite their adversary roles, a meeting might produce agreement on some issues.

In a recent interview, Beckham, DWSD director since January, criticized the suburban-based petition drive, which would drastically alter the composition of the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners.

However, he agreed in part with suburban critics that DWSD has spent too much on "self-perpetuating" consultants.

"Further, some state and federal regulations have caused us to spend a helluva lot more than needed," Beckham added.

BECKHAM, 32, was one of four Detroit commissioners on the seven-member water board before Mayor Coleman Young chose him as director in late November to replace John Kanter. Deputy director of the department in 1977, Beckham is the fourth DWSD director since Young was elected in 1973.

The Detroit department has nearly 100 community water customers in southeastern Michigan. More than 70 metropolitan communities are DWSD sewer customers.

Beckham questioned "the legality and motives" of the suburban effort to replace the Detroit board with a nine-member Regional Water and Sewer Commission.

"He maintains suburban communities have 'input to (DWSD) management' through three suburban representatives on the current Detroit water board.

"They by choice do not use that avenue," he said.

The seven water board commissioners serve at the pleasure of Mayor Young.

KUHN'S PETITION campaign proposes that a nine-member regional water board, with three Detroit representatives, be appointed by a "metropolitan council," which would have one Detroit representative and one from each gov-



CHARLES BECKHAM
Too many contracts

ernment that is a water and sewer customer.

The metropolitan council would review water and sewer rates, approve system expansion and appoint the regional water board, which would operate the system.

The issue, said Beckham, is "control more than information and the right to know."

State Rep. George Cushingberry, D-Detroit, has asked for a state attorney

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general's opinion on the petition drive, which seeks to place the Detroit vs. regional water board question on either this November's or the November 1982 general election ballot. The Secretary of State's office approved the petition wording, a requirement before petitions can be circulated.

BECKHAM SUPPORTS U.S. District Judge John Feikens' proposal for a "watchdog committee" regarding future DWSD rates, but he added that Feikens' charge for such a committee has been "grossly misinterpreted."

Feikens oversees the city's sewage treatment plant operation as well as rate disputes with suburban customers.

Suburban officials such as Kuhn hope a watchdog committee would give them more access to DWSD budget information. Beckham says such a committee should not only watch DWSD, but also suburban communities, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the state Department of Natural Resources.

"If the EPA decides there are regulations we have to stick to, who checks the EPA?" Beckham said.

"The judge was concerned about that intervention committee to watch everyone involved."

Feikens has also been critical of the

dozen or so consultant contracts DWSD has made. So is Kuhn. And so is Beckham.

He said the hiring of consulting firms, while necessary because DWSD lacked adequate staff, was "not coordinated well."

THE ARMY Corps of Engineers won't complete an investigation of the damaged interceptor until the end of June, said Beckham. A report may be issued in six months.

While Army engineers haven't determined what caused the interceptor's concrete ceiling and lining to crumble, they supported DWSD's preliminary actions before Judge Feikens earlier this month.

Suburban officials were sharply critical of DWSD's hiring of Michigan Sewer Construction Co. of Southfield as a sub-contractor for the repairs, because the company built the crumbling interceptor. The repair construction manager is Wallbridge-Aldinger of Detroit.

Beckham said the Army Corps' investigation at this time won't include looking into the July 1978 collapse of a giant interceptor tunnel in Fraser, about two miles east of the current problem. That collapse disrupted service to 100,000 residents, and raw sewage was pumped into Lake St. Clair.

DWSD spent nearly \$15 million to fix the Fraser collapse. All but \$2.5 million of the bill will be paid by Macomb County residents through increased sewer rates.

No peace offerings in subway standoff

By TOM LONERGAN

Area legislators on a special House committee don't see an immediate compromise to the political battle in Lansing over the proposed subway-rapid rail line up Woodward Ave.

"There's really been no basic change to what the situation was a week ago," said State Rep. Jack Kirksey, R-Livonia, an opponent.

Kirksey and State Rep. Thomas Brown, D-Westland, are part of an 11-member panel formed by Gov. William Milliken and House Speaker Bobby Crim to propose a compromise on initial state funding of the subway-surface rail line.

"I DON'T think we've improved any," said Brown, referring to the legislative stalemate that led to the committee's formation. Brown, who supports state funding of a subway preliminary engineering study, is the committee chairman.

Subway opponents are expected to push for a House vote Wednesday on releasing \$950,000 in state funds for the study.

The Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) proposes that the Woodward light rail line run underground from downtown Detroit to McNichols (Six Mile) Road and on surface to 10 Mile Road in Royal Oak.

Subway opponents, such as Kirksey, are willing to compromise for less subway, but the Livonia legislator said last week SEMTA and Detroit representatives have made no commitment to compromise.

And Kirksey says he resents the labeling of subway opponents as anti-Detroit and anti-black.

"I'm totally disappointed that any question of the SEMTA plan is immediately interpreted by pro-subway people as being anti-Detroit or anti-black," Kirksey said.

"THE POLITICAL battleground is being drawn over the distribution of funds."

Suburban subway opponents, most vocal in Oakland County, have long contended that a disproportionate share of funds for SEMTA's regional transportation plan are being spent in

Detroit.

Kirksey acknowledges that an anti-Detroit sentiment exists in the legislature but added, "If there are any negative feelings, the resentment is always this business that Detroit has to have special treatment."

While Kirksey said a compromise is possible among the advisory committee, which has more pro- than anti-subway members, he doubts Milliken, Detroit Mayor Coleman Young and Crim "can create enough influence on a difference of 20 votes."

According to Kirksey, that is how short subway proponents are from the 56 House votes needed to pass the measure.

Brown agrees that the votes "are not there now," but would make no predictions on how the House would vote.

"IT'S ALWAYS been a political issue," the Westland Democrat said.

"We've never passed any transportation bill in the State of Michigan with any votes to spare."

The committee may meet Tuesday with representatives from the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA), the agency which would approve federal funding of the \$1.5 billion SEMTA transportation plan.

Subway and surface rail construction represents \$388 million of the plan, which would also increase large and small bus service and commuter rail service in the suburbs.

SEMTA officials have said a \$900 million federal commitment to regional rapid transit is in jeopardy if the House kills the SEMTA plan. The federal government would fund 30 percent of the mass transportation plan, including \$16 million of the \$20 million needed for the subway study.

"Only the preliminary engineering can spell out whether that (subway) is right or not," said Brown. "I didn't say I had a vote for approving construction of a subway."

But Kirksey said many legislators "see the preliminary engineering as the commitment that creates the subway." Among alternatives the group may propose is reducing the subway length to the W. Grand Blvd.

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