

Oakland wants road reform, too

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

William Lucas, Democratic nominee for Wayne County executive, said he will be joined by several former Democratic county executive contenders in Lansing Sept. 14 to testify before the House Towns and Counties Committee on why the County Road Commission should be stripped of its autonomy.

Lucas' Wayne County-only effort, however, bothers the Oakland County executive, Daniel T. Murphy. Ever since his post was created in 1975, Murphy has sought the same thing.

Lucas said last week, "I went up to Lansing (last week) with the intention of seeing a handful of legislators discussing this issue and instead saw a whole group supporting it. Their response was positive and a move in the right direction."

SINCE THE 1930s, county road commissions have operated almost autonomously in Michigan. Three members of a governing board are appointed by the

county board of commissioners but rarely answer to the elected board.

County road commissions get their revenue from state gasoline and weight taxes. Wayne County's politically powerful road commission also operates two airports and a park system.

Wayne's Road Commission has its own personnel policies, too — the cause of much political friction. For years it has been charged with nepotism, cronyism and circumventing the civil service process.

The Wayne County charter, scheduled to take effect next year, allows the new county executive to hire and fire the three-member board at will but continues the Road Commission's operating autonomy.

This year, a new source of controversy arose when the Road Commission signed a six-year union contract with the managing director and 72 other managerial persons. Critics say the contract, upheld in the courts so far, will frustrate any executive attempts at reorganization.

LUCAS, THE county sheriff, said he convinced state Rep. Jeff Padden, D-Wyandotte, to draft a bill eliminating the Road Commission's budgetary autonomy.

The bill, however, amends only the 1980 charter county act, under which Wayne County is organized. It doesn't amend an earlier act under which Oakland and Bay counties adopted the executive plan.

Lucas said Livonia Mayor Ed McNamara and Detroit City Councilman Mel Ravitz will accompany him to a meeting of the committee chaired by Rep. Tom Brown, D-Westland.

"The testimony will be included in a motion before the entire House after their return from adjournment after the election," Lucas explained.

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN Brown said he favored Lucas' request.

"The county reorganization act gave the county executive (to be elected Nov. 2) the power to appoint the Road Commission members with the advice and consent of the elected county com-

missioners," Brown said.

"But in 1982 I feel that actions by some administrative employees, appointed officials and members of the county Road Commission have placed great doubt as to advisability of granting such privileges to the road commission," Brown said referring to its recent union organization with a six-year contract.

"Now I believe the total autonomy for the road commission goes against the very concept embodied in creating a county executive form of government," he added.

IN 1975, just after he was elected first county executive in Michigan, Oakland County's Murphy advocated that the Road Commission should not be a separate body apart from the county executive's jurisdiction, according to Deputy County Executive Patrick Nowak.

Murphy had publicly said that when a Wayne County executive, who would most likely be a Democrat, was elected, the two should join forces to end and make their case in Lansing.

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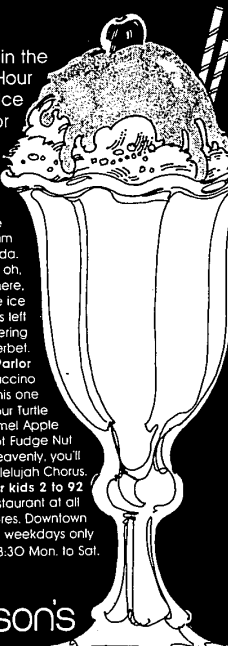
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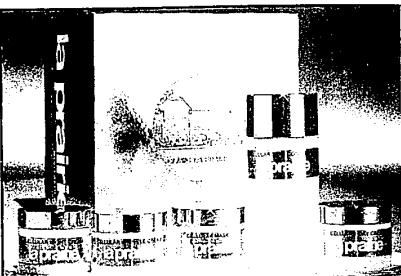


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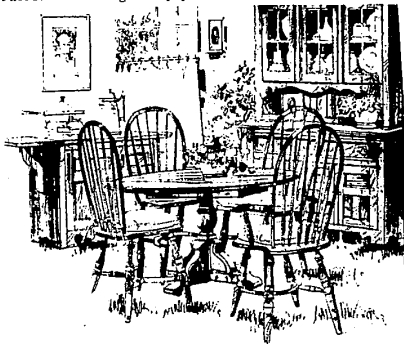
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