

Health Department: cop and judge?

County board frowns on new power

A proposal to give the Oakland County Health Department authority to fine businesses with "potential health hazards" came under fire from Democratic commissioners.

"This resolution would give the bureaucracy an opportunity to be fact-finders, judges, lawyers and policemen," said Commissioner Dennis M. Aaron, D-Oak Park.

In a 14-9 vote, the board postponed action on the resolution, referring it to the general government committee.

Among Republicans voting against postponement were Marilyn Gosling of Bloomfield Hills, George Berton Jackson of Birmingham, Susan Kuhn of Clawson, Thomas Law of West Bloomfield, Nancy McConnell of Bloomfield Hills and Lillian Moffitt of Bloomfield.

Township.

"We'd be relying on somebody's interpretation of a potential health hazard," Aaron said.

"For example, I'm smoking right now. If that's a potential health hazard, I don't think anybody would assume the health department can come in and arrest me."

Under the proposal, businesses would be subject to fines for several violations - ranging from refusing to repair "leaky ceilings" to failing to store food properly.

"We're not talking about solving problems of PBB or botulism," Aaron said. "We're talking about giving a one-point demerit (up to \$25 fine) for having a pile of weeds in a corner, or a

five-point demerit (up to \$100 fine) for a leaky ceiling."

SOME REPUBLICAN commissioners said fines are a reasonable remedy for dealing with businesses that repeatedly refuse to abide by public health codes.

"This is a half-way measure," said Commissioner Anne M. Hobart, D-Pontiac. "Presently, we can either shut down a business or ignore the problem."

"It's really inappropriate to close down a business for some of these violations," she said.

Hobart said fines would deter businesses from intentionally violating health codes and help protect residents against potential hazards.

She cited a case where Waterford

Township residents living adjacent to a restaurant have repeatedly complained about garbage overflowing from dumpsters. So far, nothing has been done to correct the problem, Hobart said.

IN SUCH cases, the county health department is reluctant to take its case to the prosecutor because complaints are often ignored, Hobart said. It's also too costly to take the case to court, she added.

But Aaron argued that going to court is a more viable alternative than imposing fines.

"If there's a health hazard, they should go to court," Aaron said. "If the prosecutor places it as a low priority, then that decision should speak for itself."

Oakland halves office remodeling

Bowing to bipartisan objections, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners turned down a resolution to spend the full amount - \$93,700 - requested for remodeling the county's north office building.

"This money is coming out of taxpayers' pockets, and we should plan ahead to save costs," said Commissioner Betty Fortino, D-Pontiac. "This is the second time the building has been remodeled. Every time we spend \$100,000 for remodeling, nobody blinks an eye."

In a 17-3 vote, the board approved awarding a \$42,350 contract for some remodeling work to the West Bloomfield-based Mars Building Co. Commissioners Fortino, Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park, and Ralph Nelson, R-Rochester, voted against it.

BUT THE BOARD held off approving other expenses which would have

pushed the final figure to \$93,700. Some of the other remodeling work would have been carried out by county employees.

The other expenses included: \$8,750 to replace 553 yards of carpet at \$15 per yard; \$4,000 for furniture and equipment; \$750 for carpet cleaning; \$8,000 for telephones; \$8,000 for moving expenses; \$4,000 for drapes and cleaning; \$5,000 for "rebalancing" the heating and air conditioning system; \$5,000 for painting; \$1,500 for administrative expenses; and \$8,350 for contingencies.

"I don't know that we have to replace all 553 yards of carpeting," said Commissioner James E. Lamm, R-Royal Oak. "It may be a small item, but we should watch our pennies a little closer."

"I know a lot of businesses that would like to remodel, but don't have enough money to do it. And \$93,700 is a

lot of money to spend for that."

ALTHOUGH THE "other expenditures" were turned down, county staffers are expected to make a second request for the remainder of the work.

The north office building, north of the main courthouse at 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, was remodeled in 1980

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A three-session class entitled "Supervisory Success" will be offered beginning at 6 p.m. Thursday, May 5, at Groves High School, 20500 West 13 Mile, Birmingham.

The class is offered by the Wayne State University College of Lifelong

to house the county prosecutor and his staff.

The former tenant, the probation department, was moved to temporary trailers on the west side of Telegraph across from the service center complex.

The second remodeling project is being done to move the probation department back in.

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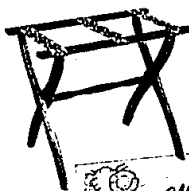
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