

Law prof sees few subpoenas in Lucas contracts investigation

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Richard Strichartz, a law school professor from Bloomfield Township, is setting up a new shop in the Veterans Memorial Building on the Detroit riverfront.

The 52-year-old veteran of teaching and local government in the Wayne County Commission's fact-finder in its probe of County Executive William Lucas' handling of contracts to renovate the Old County Building in Detroit.

"The Legislature is chary of granting subpoena powers to state agencies. I don't anticipate issuing many subpoenas," Strichartz said as he answered the top question of the day. "I would hope that (subpoenas) would not be necessary."

THE VA Building was chosen for the office, said Commission Chairman John Hertel, because Strichartz wanted to be physically separated from the

Commission, whose offices are on the seventh floor of the City-County Building, across the corridor from the Executive offices.

Unlike congressional investigators conducted in committee hearings before TV cameras, Strichartz will work largely alone, poring over records and conducting interviews.

The Special Committee on Governmental Integrity, which recommended Strichartz's hiring, will stay out of the picture in order to reduce politicking, said Hertel. He chairs both the County Commission and the special committee, which includes Milton Mack, D-Wayne, and Arthur Carter, D-Detroit.

THE COMMISSION, which two weeks ago split deeply over the question of arming an investigator with its own legislative subpoena power, gave Strichartz's hiring 13-0 approval last Thursday.

Commissioner Kay Beard, D-Inkster, who with the suburban bloc had been

admittedly "jealous of giving our subpoena power," praised Strichartz. A Wayne State University law professor, Strichartz said he would work "weekends and evenings" for 90 days to review Lucas' contract letting procedures, find out what happened with the Old County Building case, and determine whether the procedures had been followed.

The case, because it involves Lucas' chief of staff, Dennis Nyström, threatens to undermine Lucas' expected campaign for the Republican nomination for governor next year.

County officials planned to lease the 83-year-old Old County Building to a private firm called OCBR, whose principals include some Lucas friends and fundraisers. OCBR had planned to let a construction contract for renovations to an Oakland County firm called Uley-James, in which Nyström has a one-sixth interest.

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Lucas probe fact finder



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No open interviews to pick fact-finder

Chairman John Hertel's special committee to hire a fact-finder to probe conflict-of-interest charges in the Wayne County Executive's office managed to select its man without conducting public interviews.

Strichartz (see related story on this page) and the full County Commission.

The state Open Meetings Act requires that "all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting."

STRICHARTZ SAID his work would involve "a good deal of interviewing," but added, "I'm not a private eye. I'm a fact-finder."

He said it would be much the same process he uses in fact-finding for school labor disputes.

He will charge a fee of \$90 an hour, \$35 less than his regular \$125. Other than a secretary and some research help, he will have no staff, he said.

The County Commission capped the cost of the investigation at \$30,000 and asked that it be done in 90 days.

Hertel concurred in Strichartz's idea of conducting the probe. "We've never used the subpoena power here," he said. "We're not eager to slap subpoe-

nas on people. His idea is to use restraining."

A NEW YORK City native, Strichartz served five years in the Navy in World War II, earned an electrical engineering degree in 1946, picked up a master's degree from Columbia University in 1947 and did post-graduate study at Oxford University, England.

While teaching political science at the University of Miami, Fla., he earned his law degree and practiced there until recalled to the Navy in the Korean conflict.

After earning a master of laws degree in trade regulation at New York University, Strichartz taught law there until 1956, when he joined the WSU faculty.

He served as assistant corporation counsel (city attorney) for Detroit in 1961-64 and then as city controller for three years. Following the Detroit riot in 1967, he rejoined city government as director of Mayor Jerome Cavanagh's "Development Team." Later he returned to the WSU faculty.

"There were no collective (committee) interviews so it wouldn't be obvious whom we had rejected," said Hertel, D-Harper Woods. He chairs the Special Committee on Governmental Integrity that recommended Richard

Strichartz (see related story on this page) and the full County Commission.

The state Open Meetings Act requires that "all interviews by a public body for employment or appointment to a public office shall be held in an open meeting."

"We conducted interviews by phone, one-on-one," Hertel said following the County Commission's hiring of Strichartz. When one committee member had finished a conversation, another would place a call.

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