

Subdivision, transit bills: new life in '87

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Same time, next year.
That's what the Michigan Constitution tells lawmakers who fall to get a pet bill passed during a two-year session of the state Legislature. Their 1985-86 bills are dead. They can be reintroduced this year.

Two suburban lawmakers who saw major bills pass one house only to flounder in the other are likely to try again. They are Sen. Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, author of a public transportation bill, and Rep. James Kosteva, D-Canton, author of a massive revision of the Subdivision Control Act.

FOR FESSLER, the issue is reorganization of the board of SEMTA, the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority.

His SB 343 was passed by the Senate but never got out of House committee. It would have eliminated the current 15-member SEMTA board and replaced it with the "Big Four" — the mayor of Detroit, the executives of Wayne and Oakland counties and the chairman of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners.

"The Big Four wanted the proposal but did not establish lines of communication to the House," Fessler said after the Legislature adjourned.

"Coleman has control of the Detroit (legislative) delegation," Fessler said, referring to Detroit Mayor Coleman Young. "He assumed the others had control of their delegations."

Kosteva's bill to streamline subdivision procedures passed the House, but was amended to bother two key groups — the home builders and the Michigan Townships Association. It died in the Senate.

DURING THE last half of 1986, the Big Four didn't meet at all, according to Patrick Nowak, deputy Oakland County executive.

Two members of the Big Four will change in 1987. William Lucas vacated the post of Wayne County executive when he ran for governor and will be replaced by Livonia Mayor Edward H. McNamara, a former SEMTA chairman. Macomb commissioners will elect a new chairman.

Fessler and Nowak both predicted interest would pick up in revising the SEMTA reorganization issue "once the dust settles," said Fessler.

The SEMTA board, acting only a month before the Legislature adjourned, asked opposed the Fessler bill. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments supported it in legislative testimony.

FESSLER SAID his objectives in

reorganizing SEMTA haven't changed.

"The board must be smaller to be more efficient." It's currently 15. The Big Four has wanted itself as the SEMTA board, but Fessler prefers to add the director of the Michigan Department of Transportation as a fifth member.

"The board must speak for transit — not for geographical areas. It must get away from petty and provincial politics," Fessler would prefer to elect regional transportation commissioners who would have no other duty than to think about public transportation.

"Mass transit" — political shorthand for a subway — must be out. The SEMTA board should concentrate on providing bus transportation for the elderly, handicapped and poor. SEMTA need not necessarily own the rolling stock but could contract with private bus and cab companies for service.

There must be a solid method of local funding, said Fessler, repealing the age-old charge that metropolitan Detroit is the only large region in the country where public transportation has no assured source of local tax money.

KOSTEVA, A FRESHMAN lawmaker, was township planning director before going to Lansing and thus had much technical expertise in land use.

Kosteva's House Bill 5152 was passed by the House in July after a year of committee work and long debate, but it bogged down in the Sen-

ate Local Government Committee chaired by Sen. Harmon Cropsy, R-Detroit.

"A task force worked on it for three years," said Kosteva, citing efforts of the Michigan Association of Realtors, Michigan Association of Home Builders, an environmental group, registered land surveyors, county officers, Michigan Municipal League and Michigan Townships Association.

"The bill streamlined the process for a subdivision," he said. County drain, road and health officials must approve subdividing of land, as well as local officials.

BUT THE BILL was amended on the House floor, and two key groups turned against it.

The home builders were unhappy that it allowed communities to require dedication of park and open space, and the townships association was concerned about eliminating township review of access road standards.

"Sen. Cropsy was interested in seeing the coalition which had backed it re-formed," said Kosteva, who already is at work on that project.

Besides streamlining subdivision procedures, the new bill — to be

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known as the Land Divisions Act — will clarify requirements for specific improvements in a subdivision and protect consumers buying and selling unplatted acreage, he said.

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