

# Kuhn asks to keep drain posts elective

By Tim Richard  
staff writer

A state Senate committee is pondering the request of county drain commissioners — led by Oakland's George Kuhn — to require that their jobs be elective, even in home-rule counties.

"We are determined to hold the line. It's the most underrated office in the state," Kuhn told the Senate Local Government Committee in Lansing last week.

"All the opposition is coming from one man — the Oakland County executive. I'm sorry he's not here to defend himself," said Kuhn, who is often at odds with fellow Republican Daniel T. Murphy, the Oakland County executive.

The committee held a public hearing but didn't act on the bill. By hearing's end, only chairman Harmon Cropsey, R-Deerfield, was still listening to testimony.

UNDER MURPHY'S ideal government, Oakland would write a home-rule charter, consolidating the drain commissioner and road commission under the executive's public works



**George Kuhn, Oakland drain commissioner, opposes allowing home-rule counties to eliminate the post. 'A great number of county commissioners are not supportive of putting a charter commission on the ballot,' he said.**

department. Wayne County has that structure.

That's what Kuhn and other drain commissioners want to head off.

Moreover, Kuhn insists Murphy is a voice in the wilderness on wanting home rule for Oakland.

"A great number of county commissioners are not supportive of putting a charter commission on the ballot," he told the panel.

Cropsey's committee is pondering two tie-barred bills — a non-controversial one to raise the amount a drain commissioner may spend on maintenance, and HB 8007 requiring the election of the drain commissioner or in counties of more than 12,000 and less than 2 million population.

"It's wrong to mandate the election or appointment of a drain commissioner," said L. Jean Willoughby,

Murphy's assistant for legislative matters and a former state representative from Bloomfield Hills.

"The ultimate authority should be with the voters. The charter county act in 1980 said the drain commissioner had to be there, but could be appointive or elective."

SUPPORTING THAT view was one committee member, Sen. Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford.

"My reading of the law is that it's up to the charter commission to decide whether it (drain post) will be elective or appointive," said Nichols. "You (Kuhn and supporters) are mandating the election of the drain commissioner."

"The Michigan Constitution does not require election of the drain commissioner. I would like to see us break the tie bar and defeat the bill."

All other speakers during a two-hour hearing, however, favored the bill.

"An elected official is more responsive to constituents than someone who is appointive," said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Carl Gnodtke, R-Sawyer, himself a former Berrien County drain commissioner.

ROBERT FREDERICKS, Kuhn's deputy, said, "County law has always been general government law," and that the push for county home rule was peculiar only to Wayne County. "There has never been a serious push in other counties."

Two state laws are in conflict, said Fredericks, an attorney. The drain code says counties of more than 12,000 must have a drain commissioner. The charter law says voters may abolish the post.

"When you abolish, it casts a cloud over your financial dealings," for example, in inter-county drains.

Fredericks said Wayne County's ex-drain commissioner, Charles Youngblood, couldn't be defeated in a primary, and so county officials sought to abolish his job.

Michael Gregg of the state Department of Agriculture said there

are 1,000 inter-county drainage districts, and that drain commissioners are members of their boards. "My problem is: Whom do I recognize as representing Wayne County?" Gregg supported Kuhn's bill.

BAY COUNTY'S William Rosebush, representing the Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners, called Wayne County's abolition of the job as "the wrong treatment for the perceived disease." He said voters could have recalled Youngblood. The association supported Kuhn's bill.

Barry County drain commissioner Audrey Burdick also supported Kuhn's position.

Kuhn presented letters of support from several other Oakland officials — Sheriff John Nichols, Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, Clerk-Register Lynn A. and the United County Officers Association.

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cording to Thomas N. Welsh, a board member from Macomb County.

Most likely candidates for camping are Stony Creek, northeast of Rochester, and Kensington, in western Oakland County. Both are in the 4,000-acre category.

Other candidates are smaller

parks such as Hudson Mills near Ann Arbor, Lower Huron near Belleville and Oakwoods near Flat Rock.

Historically, metroparks have been "day use" parks with water orientations. Public campgrounds in Michigan have been operated by the state Department of Natural Re-

sources, Oakland County Parks and the National Forest Service.

The idea of camping in metroparks surfaced last year when it was suggested by several candidates for the post of executive director. It surfaced again at a recent board meeting, Welsh said.

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