

Next Murphy goal: home rule charter

By Tim Richard
staff writer

County home rule is on Dan Murphy's agenda for 1989.

"I'm going to work on petitioning for home rule in the next four years," said Murphy, who has been Oakland County's only executive since the office was created in 1974. "It's the only way to go," said Murphy, 64, a Republican who isn't breathing too hard as he seeks re-election to a fifth term.

Oakland voters used a general state law called PA 139 in setting up an elected executive, who draws up the budget and operates all departments not under another elected officer such as the prosecutor or clerk.

Murphy wants to go beyond that, to write a home-rule charter giving Oakland greater power to organize its own affairs. So far, only Wayne County has a home-rule charter.

The Board of Commissioners is 'too big. It should have seven members, max. There would be no committees on the board. The executive would operate by sitting down with the whole board a couple of times a week.'

— Daniel T. Murphy
Oakland County executive



A CAREER county official, Murphy has been clerk/register of deeds and chairman of the board of auditors prior to his election as executive.

A blunt spoken man, Murphy constantly uses the phrases "sit down and talk" and "make it happen" in approaching problems. He comes from the moderate wing of the Grand Old Party, the one that often sees government as a tool of growth rather than as an ogre.

Often he is at odds with Drain Commissioner George W. Kuhn, another Republican. Kuhn, rather than seeing his office absorbed by the executive, would rather consolidate public works and drain functions under himself as an elected public works commissioner.

That Murphy-Kuhn battle has been a standoff. Over the years, Murphy has vetoed several county board resolutions favorable to Kuhn and has made the vetoes stick, though sometimes by narrow margins. In the same time, Murphy has been unable to persuade the state Legislature to let his office absorb

the drain commissioner.

LIKE THE PRESIDENTIAL campaign, which to most voters is a yawner, the county executive race has yet to heat up.

No one has set up a debate between him and Democratic challenger William G. Wolfgram, who shares many of Murphy's views on home rule.

"The road issue, until four or five months ago, was the big one. I was going to meetings every day," said Murphy.

Whether one took a formal poll or just listened at lunch counters, roads and traffic were Oakland's top county issue. In June the county board voted to place on the Nov. 8 ballot the only local option road-funding plan available under state law — a \$25 per vehicle fee for 10 years to raise \$20 million a year.

"Since that \$25 fee came up, I haven't been called at all," Murphy said.

THE FEE is a bad plan, said Murphy, citing his poll:

• The vehicle fee is supported by 19 percent and opposed by 79 percent. (The question was asked with a \$30 figure, but he thinks the results aren't changed appreciably by the \$25 figure.)

• A 2-mill property tax is supported by 21 percent, opposed by 76 percent.

• A two-cents fuel tax, however, is supported by 55 percent, opposed by 45 percent. But that option isn't available. The state Legislature and Gov. James J. Blanchard want to reserve that tax for state government.

By bringing road functions under general county government, Murphy said he would have better tools for controlling growth in sparsely populated areas.

"We need to convince the local units (which control zoning and building permits) that they're part of a team. Then we can make sure the roads are going to be able to handle the traffic. The builders who benefit should help with the roads," he said, endorsing the concept of development impact fees.

MURPHY HAS some specific changes in mind:

• The Road Commission would become part of general county government, the executive operating it, the county board handling the budget. Then the public would know who's in charge.

• Ditto with the drain commissioner. "The county should have all

works agencies — sewers, roads, public works — under a single core. I think the drain commissioner should be folded into the DPW, not an elected DPW director."

• The Board of Commissioners would be reduced from the current 27 members. "It's too big. It should

have seven members, max. Big counties — bigger than ours — operate with less than seven members.

"There would be no committees on the board. The executive would operate by sitting down with the whole board a couple of times a week. The board probably would be full time."

Road budget approved

The Oakland County Road Commission budget is \$60.4 million for the fiscal year that started Oct. 1.

The three-member board last week approved it in substantially the form submitted by managing director John L. Grubba.

It includes \$44.8 million for operating and \$15.5 million for road improvements, including both contrac-

tor and rights of way payments.

"We reviewed written and oral suggestions made at our Aug. 15 public hearing," said OCCR Chairman Fred Houghton of Rochester Hills.

"The final budget," said Grubba, "reflects some internal reorganization and the classic carry-over of both revenues and their companion

expenditures for partially complete projects and funds to pay vendors for work they have completed but for which they have not yet been paid."

The organizational change moves the risk management function from the planning section to the office of the managing director. It will come under Brent O. Bair, recently named deputy managing director.

Toebe to do I-696 upgrading

Walter Toebe Construction Co. of Wisconsin is apparent low bidder for a \$10.8 million upgrading of the I-696 freeway in Southfield, the Michigan Department of Transportation said.

The project covers 2.5 miles from Franklin Road west to Lahser Road;

M-10 (Northwestern Freeway) southbound from Beck Road to I-696; and M-10 from the Rouge River Bridge to eastbound I-696.

Work will include construction of grading and drainage structures, concrete pavement and shoulders,

median barrier, lighting, traffic signals, signing and widening of two bridges.

Completion is scheduled for the end of 1989, MDOT said.

Toebe was lowest of eight bidders.

African hunger talks open to public

The public may watch a live satellite teleconference on hunger in Africa next Monday, Oct. 17, on the Auburn Hills Campus of Oakland Community College.

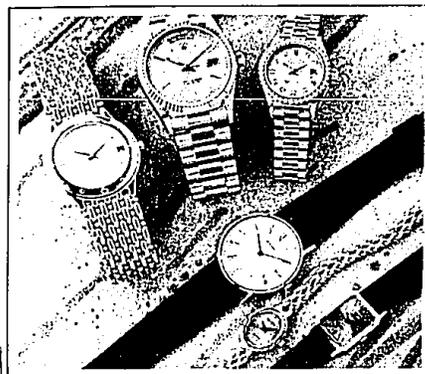
The telecast, "Food Security with

a Focus on Africa," runs from noon until 3 p.m. on the campus, at 2900 Featherstone west of Opyke. For reservations and directions, call OCC at 471-7682.

Speakers will include a United Nations official and the assistant to the

administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

One consulting education credit is available to dietitians, social workers, clergy and home economists participating in the conference.



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