

Hold line on Oakland tax rate — panel

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Reversing itself, an Oakland County committee will recommend the county keep its property tax rate at 4.64 mills instead of cutting it to 4.5 mills.

The full board will hold a public hearing when it meets at 9:30 Thursday morning in the commissioners' auditorium in Pontiac.

This committee, to a person, just voted to increase salaries in one department 40 percent. It would be irresponsible to grant an increase and

then talk about cutting taxes," said commissioner Anne Hobart, R-White Lake, a member of the finance committee.

"If you collect it, you spend it," replied commissioner James E. Lanni, R-Royal Oak, who preferred the reduced rate the panel proposed a week earlier.

THE FINANCE committee split 6-3 across party lines last week as it proposed a rate of \$4.64 per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation (SEV). Sept. 30, it voted for a rate of \$4.50. The difference — 14 cents per \$1,000 SEV — would amount to a \$7

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— Norman R. Barnard
chief probate judge

savings on a house assessed at \$50,000 with a market value of \$100,000.

Favoring the higher rate — which the county has levied during most of the 1980s — were Republicans Hobart, chairman G. William Caddell of Walled Lake, Richard Kuhn of Waterford and Richard Wilcox of Ortonville; and Democrats Larry Pernick of Southfield and Hubert Price of Pontiac.

Opposed were Republicans Lanni and Marilyn Gosling of Bloomfield Hills and Democrat James Doyon of Madison Heights.

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, a Republican, held out for the higher rate, arguing that 1-percent cuts across the board already are being made.

"We're in no position to lower the

rate," Murphy said in an interview. "I told the department heads to make 1-percent cuts. We're already peeling stuff out of it (the 1989 budget)."

"This county has one of the lowest rates in the state. The whole thing is cram full of politics. Isn't it nice to talk about cutting rates in even (election) years?" said Murphy, who with the 27 commissioners faces voters Nov. 8.

DOYON ARGUED for 40 minutes that "this tax rate has been perpetuated at 4.6391 since 1980."

"The revenue increase through new construction and SEV increases is \$10 million, a 13-percent increase. We're not talking tax cut. We are talking revenue increases."

The Murphy administration consistently overestimated expenses

and underestimated revenues, Doyon said.

"We're going to have magically appearing surpluses," said Doyon, a lame-duck commissioner who isn't seeking re-election after 14 years on the board.

"It's political," Doyon said.

"A cheap political trick," Hobart countered. "Talk about voodoo economics!"

RUSS MARTIN, assistant budget director for Murphy, said the rejected 0.14-mill rate cut would cost the county nearly \$3 million in revenue, reducing the pot from \$98.6 million to \$95.7 million. He said the revenue is needed because:

- The Sheriff's Department was voted an increase in jail staffing from 68 to 109.

- Health care costs, expected to go up 15 percent this year, rose 30 percent and are expected to leap another 15 percent in fiscal '89.

- A health prevention program is being mandated under terms of an increase in the cigarette tax.

- Five positions were added to the narcotics enforcement team (NET).

The committee that day also voted to upgrade the jobs of circuit judges' law clerks to "research attorneys,"

at an estimated full-year cost of nearly \$150,000.

THE 1-PERCENT cut asked by Murphy met stiff resistance from courts and the Sheriff's Department, though most of the offices controlled by the executive listed possible cuts without complaint.

"We have agonized," said Sheriff John Nichols, who said his department would have to cut the south end prisoner transportation program, two of the four arson investigators, the traffic safety coordinator and the polygraph examiner.

"Almost all of the (circuit) court's functions are mandated by the constitution," Chief Judge Robert C. Anderson replied.

"The 52nd District Court finds itself extremely limited in its ability to reduce the budget when its services are all mandated and have been thoroughly scrutinized for any excess," Chief Judge Dennis C. Drury wrote.

"All factors considered," Chief Probate Judge Norman R. Barnard said, "we cannot recommend a 1-percent reduction in our 1989 appropriation. In all likelihood, we will require additional personnel and operating monies to fulfill our newly mandated responsibilities."

Party will benefit Children's Village

A benefit party for Oakland County's Children's Village will draw an estimated 250 people to Deer Lake Racquet Club in Clarkston Thursday, Nov. 3.

Sponsored by Waterford Jaycees, it will raise an estimated \$10,000 for Children's Village, a county facility providing guidance and rehabilitative programs for youngsters.

A \$125 ticket includes dinner for two and a chance to win prizes, in-

cluding limousine service, auto reconditioning and a jeweled necklace.

Proceeds will aid second-phase construction of an athletic field on the Children's Village grounds in Pontiac and toward its Christmas

fund, according to County Executive Dan Murphy.

Greg Alessi, at 858-1135, is in charge of ticket sales, gift donations and ads in the brochure.

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