

Headlee threat gets commissioners' attention

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

A group of Oakland County commissioners are asking for a strategy session to discuss a threatened lawsuit from an anti-tax group opposed to committing almost \$600 million to the proposed solid waste program and two building projects without voter approval.

"This lawsuit business has everyone all shook up," commissioner G. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, said Friday after drafting a letter to Roy Rewold, chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

Rewold was out of town Friday. But Caddell said he expected a response later this week.

"We don't have to hold the meeting immediately," Caddell said. "But

the sooner the better."

The letter asked Rewold to convene a special meeting to discuss a lawsuit threatened by Richard Headlee, chairman of Taxpayers United. In a letter to County Clerk Lynn Allen last month, Headlee said his organization would file suit if county officials go ahead with a \$500 million solid waste program, a \$80 million courthouse addition and a \$10 million computer center.

THE COUNTY has awarded a contract for the computer center, but is reviewing plans for the courthouse and solid waste program.

Caddell, chairman of the board's finance committee, was asked to draft the letter after members of his committee exchanged sharp words Thursday over what Headlee's threat meant to them.

'I think some commissioners are more concerned about getting re-elected than resolving problems facing this county.'

—Commissioner Lawrence Pernick
D-Southfield

Commissioners Marilyn E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, Donald E. Bishop, R-Rochester, and John G. Pappageorge, R-Troy, led a move to table a motion to proceed with a \$15 million contract for the Material Recovery Facility (MRF).

"We have a stampede mentality," said Bishop, referring to the timetable established for implementing the solid waste program. "I think we should hold up" at least until we find out about the threatened lawsuit.

Gosling and Pappageorge agreed, saying they wanted the matter of the lawsuit resolved before going any further.

Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, disagreed and suggested Gosling, Bishop, Pappageorge and commissioner John E.

Olsen, R-Huntington Woods, were backing off the solid waste program because of mounting opposition.

"I think some commissioners are more concerned about getting re-elected than resolving problems facing this county," quipped Pernick, who said the solid waste program has been in the planning stages for two decades.

"YOU (COMMISSIONERS) were part of every step," he said. "But now you're backing off."

Olsen responded in a mocking tone. "I plead guilty," he said. "I want to be re-elected, and I am concerned about the concerns of voters."

Caddell did not agree with Pernick. But he voted with the Democrat and against Republicans Gos-

ling, Bishop, Pappageorge and Olson on tabling the MRF contract.

Roger Smith, head of the county's solid waste unit, said tabling the MRF contract was a "setback, but nothing major." It is one of many contracts commissioners will review to implement any solid waste plan. The MRF program is the least controversial of the entire solid waste plan, he said, adding that residents seem to favor recycling — which the MRF does — but a less enthusiastic about other components.

Disputes and sharp words between commissioners are nothing new at committee meetings, Caddell said.

But Thursday's disagreement underscores the need for commissioners to discuss Headlee's threatened lawsuit. "We've got to decide what we can do."

At other committee meetings, Rewold said he wants to meet with Headlee and discuss avoiding any lawsuit.

HEADLEE, HOWEVER, is in Australia for about two weeks, Rewold said.

William McMaster, owner of a Birmingham public relations firm and a colleague of Headlee, appeared at Thursday's finance meeting.

McMaster reiterated that Headlee and Taxpayers United say it is unconstitutional for county officials to proceed with plans to sell bonds for the three projects without first asking for voter approval.

Rewold and other commissioners said the county's lawyers have researched the issue and say officials have authority to sell the bonds without a referendum.

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