

Is county redistricting issue headed for court?

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Discussions on redrawing the boundaries for Oakland's county commission districts have stalemated, and a legal challenge is probably forthcoming, according to a spokesman for the Democratic Party.

If a suit is filed, it would mark the first time county redistricting ended up in court, according to the parties involved. "The other times we compromised," said Oakland treasurer C. Hugh Dohany, who has been part of the redistricting process since 1970.

"I would say the odds against us

reaching a compromise are 3-to-1 against," said Donald Tucker, chairman of the Oakland Democratic Party. "I believe we'll file suit, Friday or Monday. We have no common ground for further discussion."

Tucker and James M. Alexander, chairman of the Oakland County Republicans, have talked periodically since Aug. 30, when the Oakland County Reapportionment Commission filed a redistricting plan with the Secretary of State's office. Tucker, Alexander and Dohany are members, along with County Clerk Lynn D. Allen and prosecutor Richard Thompson.

"WE'VE TALKED AMICABLY," said Alexander. "And at this point, we have no agreement. But we may continue those talks yet this week ... anything's possible."

Redistricting — or redrawing political boundaries — on the local, state and congressional levels is required every 10 years following the national census to reflect population changes and shifts.

The point of the Tucker-Alexander discussions has been a compromise to avert a lawsuit by Democrats who contend Republicans gerrymandered the county commission district along party lines. Republicans controlled the five-member reapportionment

commission, 4 to 1.

Alexander said the Republican plan was drafted in accordance with federal guidelines. "I'm very confident it would stand up in court. But if we can avoid a lawsuit, I'm willing to listen."

Alexander's plan calls for the elimination of two county commission districts — lowering the total from 27 to 25 — and would require several incumbents in both parties to run against each other.

Under it, for example, Bloomfield Hills Republicans Nancy McConnell and Marilyn E. Gosling would be in the same district. So would Democrats Ruel E. McPherson of Hazel

Park and Rudy Serra of Ferndale.

The plan would also put Troy Democrat Teresa Krause in the same district with Clawson's Charles E. Palmer, a Republican.

"The problem with the plan is that it's too Republican, too partisan," said Tucker, a lawyer who lives in Birmingham and practices law out of an office in Southfield.

DEMOCRATS COMPLAIN their candidates get about 45 percent of the popular vote in county commission districts, yet they are outnumbered on the board of commissioners 19 to 8.

Republicans argue the imbalance

on the board is more a reflection of weak candidates than gerrymandering. They further argue future boards may be even more Republican oriented because of demographics.

Oakland has gained 71,799 residents over the last decade, according to census figures, increasing the population to 1,083,592. But the increase has not been even.

Communities in the southern part of the county — where Democrats are stronger — have lost population. Population in the traditionally Republican northern communities, in sharp contrast, has increased.

Drug-free dorm works at Oakland

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number of students who have chosen to have rooms free of alcohol and drugs. Last year the number was 879, but the number of total students is down about 200, so the percentage is about the same, says Jim Vick, executive director of university marketing and student affairs.

Under Eastern's newest program, freshmen fill one floor each in two coed residence halls, Hoyt and Pittman. "If they break their contract, we kick them off the floor," Vick says.

"If demands for substance-free housing increase, more floors will be converted," Fitzgerald said. "We're very customer driven."

Originally, some 120 freshmen requested the new contract. "Once we explained what that really meant," the number dropped to 90, Fitzgerald said.

Students can also request alcohol-free housing where smoking is permitted, or smoke-free housing where alcohol is permitted. "We don't necessarily tie the two together," Fitzgerald said.

Staff writer Judith Doner Berne contributed to this report.

How to aid aging parents

The Oakland University Continuum Center and the Oak Park Senior Center Outreach Program are sponsoring a workshop titled, "Helping Aging Parents Cope."

Participants will explore family systems as they look at parents' expectations and adult children's realities. They will learn how to expand parents' support systems and gain up-to-date information on community resources to lighten the load and increase older adult independence.

The workshop will be from 6:30-9:30 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 3, at the Oak Park Department of Parks and Recreation, 14300 Oak Park Boulevard. The fee is \$19.

Additional information is available at 370-3033.

OCC board meets tonight

The Board of Trustees of Oakland Community College will hold two meetings Thursday at the George A. Bee Administrative Center, 2480 Opdyke Road, Bloomfield Hills.

The first, a closed session, is 7 p.m. at which the board will discuss possible property acquisition and litigation. The other meeting, which is open to the public, will be at 7:30 p.m.

How to help on a board

Whether it's for a private corporation or the school district, there are special skills involved in being an effective board member.

"How To Be An Effective Board Member" will be presented 7:10 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 2, at the Bloomfield Township Library, a program of the Oakland University Continuum Center.

Participants will examine the unwritten and unspoken expectations made of board members, liability and the difference between profit and non-profit boards.

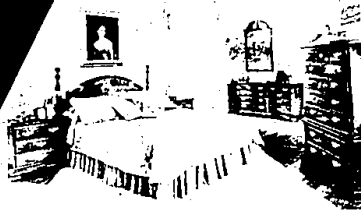
Techniques will be given to make effective use of time and resources as a board member, including the advantages of knowing when to become involved and keep quiet.

Fee is \$49. MasterCard/VISA accepted. Registrations will be taken through Tuesday, Oct. 1; call 370-3033.

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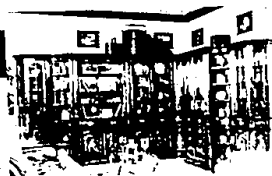
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