

County board eyes charter revision

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County government — like other cumbersome institutions — may be in for change.

A resolution is scheduled to be introduced at today's Board of Commissioners meeting calling for a series of changes designed to streamline county government.

The resolution — to be introduced by Republican Naney McConnell, Bloomfield Hills, and Democrat Lawrence Perlick, Southfield — calls for a change in state law to enable Oakland to restructure its government.

In short, it calls for considering a new county charter.

"It would be the very first step in a long series of changes," said Perlick, who was elected in 1988. "But it's a change that is overdue."

OAKLAND

Assuming the state law was changed, other steps would include election of a commission to draft a proposed new charter that voters would accept or reject, possibly in 1994.

McConnell is optimistic. "We've talked about a new charter, but nothing's ever been done. But the time may be ripe."

McConnell said county restructuring has already guaranteed some change, such as a reduction in the number of county commission districts from 27 to 25.

With change already in the wind, McConnell believes commissioners may be ready for serious change — namely a new charter.

Essentially, McConnell and Perlick envision a charter that would

give Oakland the same power and flexibility currently enjoyed by Wayne County.

Public Act 293 of 1988 enables counties with a minimum of 1.5 million residents to have more self rule. Since Wayne County is the only one in Michigan with that many people, Act 293 only applies to Wayne.

McConnell and Perlick believe it would not be extremely difficult to persuade the Legislature to lower the minimum number of residents to one million, thus making Oakland eligible for a new charter and new structure.

A new charter would offer many possible changes. The new county commission, for example, could be nonpartisan, with significantly more, or fewer, commissioners.

"Most of the issues we deal with are nonpartisan anyway," said Per-

nick. "But traditionally county commissions see themselves as smaller versions of the state Legislature or Congress. So we're elected on a partisan basis, prompting needless conflict between Republicans and Democrats."

One change McConnell and Perlick would like to see is bringing the Road Commission of Oakland County — currently a semi-autonomous agency — under the control of county government.

Roads are a major concern in virtually every community, said McConnell. Yet the road commission — which has three appointed members — does not answer to the voters.

"Bringing the road commission under county government would improve accountability and assure more efficiency with tax dollars," she said.

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