

OAKLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE

New petitions expected to be filed in recall

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

The group seeking to oust five Oakland Community College trustees was expected to file a second set of recall petitions with county officials, this one omitting the word "conspired."

"We'll be back," Southfield attorney George R. Mosher said Wednesday, referring to plans to refile recall petitions. "If not today, tomorrow," he added.

One day earlier, the Oakland County Election Commission unanimously agreed that wording on the first recall petition was not clear, and in fact was so vague that a prospective signer would not have enough specific information to make a decision.

Petitions against each of the five trustees — Carol Crew, Pamela Davis, Sandra Ritter, Douglas H. Wakefield and Judith Wiser — claimed they "conspired" to remove Chancellor Patsy Fulton-Calkins in violation of the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

Use of the term "conspired" hints at criminal wrongdoing, said William P. Hampton, who represents the five trustees targeted for recall. But the petition provides no allegations of date, time, place or any other facts to identify the alleged conspiracy, he said.

Hampton, who has represented numerous government officials in recall proceedings, said his objections have nothing to do with the recall itself, but everything to do with the wording of the petition language.

"The commission should not interfere with recall efforts," he said. "Recalls are political decisions. But this commission is obligated to make sure the language on any recall petition is clear."

The election commission agreed.

While Hampton — and his five trustee clients — won the battle, the attorney conceded that the war would likely continue. "From my experience, most recall petitions can be reworked and resubmitted. It's not unusual for that to happen four or five times. 'I expect that to happen here,' he said.

And that's what Mosher and a group calling itself the "Alliance for OCC's Future," intend to do. "We'll delete the word 'conspired,'" Mosher said Wednesday. "And we'll make whatever other changes are required."

Mosher and former OCC trustee Richard A. Blomde are the prime movers of the alliance. Mosher described the alliance as an ad hoc group organized after the five trustees first tried to oust Fulton-Calkins from her \$120,000-a-year post at OCC.

Reaction to that failed coup has been swift and clear, said Mosher. "A lot of people are upset with the trustees because Patsy Fulton-Calkins has done a good job," he said.

If the alliance is successful in getting language on a recall petition approved, it would still have an uphill battle. State law stipulates the signatures of 25 percent of the vote cast for governor in the last general election be obtained in order to get a recall on the ballot.

More than 405,000 Oakland County residents voted for governor in 1992, according to election records. That would mean the alliance attempting to recall the five OCC trustees would be required to obtain about 130,000 signatures.



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WALLED LAKE SCHOOLS

District studies date for tax vote

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The future well-being of the Walled Lake Consolidated School District might hinge on Saturday, Nov. 18. According to school officials, that is the date being discussed for the district's millage renewal election at Thursday's board meeting.

Board treasurer David Flammer emphasized that a defeat of the renewal — to continue the existing operating millage rate of 18 mills for businesses and 4.13 "hold-harmless" mills for residential property — would have a "dramatic effect" on the district. The 10-year millage renewal was studied by Flammer and other board members during an informal Sept. 9 retreat session.

In the November election, voters would not be asked for a millage increase or to approve bonds. Since October 1993, three bond issues elections, each for more than \$100 million, have been held — and defeated — in attempts to build new schools and classrooms; improve existing buildings; and enhance districtwide technology.

About 6 mills are levied directly by the state and are not subject to renewal.

Flammer painted an ugly scenario of what might happen in the district if the millage renewal is not approved.

"Upwards of 200 teachers could be laid off, which would force class sizes up in every area. Programs would be cut. It would not be a pretty picture," Flammer said.

Concurring was trustee Alp Onder. "This is basically to keep the doors open and (schools) running the way they are."

During the retreat meeting, district business administrator Sandra Motz estimated that more than 30 percent of the operating

budget would be cut if the millage is not renewed. The 1995-96 operating budget is approximately \$92.5 million.

Flammer and Onder said the proposed Nov. 18 election date likely will be introduced for discussion and possible approval at the board's next regular meeting, 7:30 p.m. Thursday. The meeting will be held at the Educational Service Center, 850 Ladd Road.

"It's not a definite," said Onder about the Nov. 18 date, "but that's what we're talking about."

Board members apparently favor holding the renewal election on a Saturday, because of the successful turnout at the third bond issue attempt, on Saturday, Feb. 4, Flammer said.

Without renewal, the millage, approved in 1987, would expire on July 1, 1996.

The millage is a supplement to the state funding system, which was changed in 1994. In the old system, districts relied heavily on property taxes. Homeowners now pay about 70 percent less in property taxes than they did in 1993.

Onder said that once an election date is made official, the district will focus on informing residents about what they will be voting on — a millage renewal with no increase in taxes, not a bond issue. The district has experienced a backlash from some voters, largely because it attempted its last two bond issues only a few months apart.

"We're implementing all sorts of programs to get heightened awareness of what this truly is," Onder said.

Trustee Marc Siegler agreed that the district will need to make an all-out effort to inform the public. "I'm curious to see if there will be any resistance to this" because of the bond issue backlash, he said.