

COUNTY NEWS

County board considers slight tax rate reduction

BY JENNIFER FLAGINTO AND LAURIE HUMPHREY
STAFF WRITERS

Oakland County Commissioners are debating three positions which could affect every homeowner in Oakland County.

At issue is the fate of the millage reduction fund. Should the commission leave it alone, deplete it or just decrease it for the 1997 budget year? They have until August to make that decision.

Jeff Kingzett, D-Pontiac, believes the commission should offer Oakland County property owners a one-10th of a mill reduction for 1997, and for the next several years. That would provide homeowners with their decrease, yet theoretically keep the millage reduction fund viable for years to come.

Others feel it is safer to offer a one-10th of a mill tax rebate for

1997, making no commitments for the future.

This is the second time a one-year decrease has been discussed. It was first proposed by Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson last year, but was rejected by the Board of Commissioners.

"Some feel more comfortable giving the tax rebate," said Sue Ann Douglas, chair of the Board of Commissioners Finance and Personnel Committee. "It's a one-time, one-10th of a mill. That way it's not affecting the millage rate long term."

That is exactly the problem Kingzett has with the tax rebate option, the millage rate could jump after one year of relief.

Kingzett, who represents the seventh county commission district, points out another negative for the tax rebate option.

"Basically, it puts off a deci-

sion," he said, referring to only the "do nothing" option or the continued tax relief as the only two real choices.

According to Kingzett, a strategic planning committee was created to investigate the 10-year reduction task.

The one-10th mill decrease for 1997 was proposed last fall as part of the budget for 1997, Kingzett said. The Commission created a millage reduction fund in which a total of \$4.5 million has been set aside.

"We set aside savings so we can use it for a tax reduction at a later time," he said.

The current general fund operations millage rate is 4.49.

Although the proposed tax decrease would only amount to a \$6 savings for a home with a market value of \$100,000, Kingzett said the decrease was part of a plan to lower property taxes county-wide, which would give Oakland County the distinction of having the lowest county property tax rate among metropolitan communities.

Douglas, who represents the eighth county commission district, said the Board of Commissioners would be happy to bring about that type of recognition for Oakland County, but stressed the need to look long term.

"We haven't felt the impact of Proposal A yet, and there will be one," she said. "We have to look down the road."

She cited a need for new jails and community health responsibilities that the county has accrued. These two issues represent a conservative look into the obligations assessed to the county over the years, she indicated.

Yet Kingzett cannot find support for those concerned commissioners.

"I think (the concern) is some what unfounded," Kingzett said. "What we've got is a rare opportunity to cut taxes without cutting services at all."

Kingzett said even with a one-10th reduction over the next several years, county taxpayers can still expect to pay increased taxes next year due to an increase in property value.

"Even if we cut one-10th, we would bring in more money than we've ever brought in before," Kingzett said.

With a \$24 million surplus in 1996, Kingzett said, "My approach is to share the wealth. We can afford to give taxpayers a break."

"I don't really understand why people are starting to back away from this now," he concluded.

Candidate expense reports due on Friday

County candidates still have a day or so, but the deadline for filing preprimary financial reports is Friday.

With only a handful of candidates filing early, county election officials are expecting a flurry of activity today and Friday as Democrats and Republicans scurry to comply with the law.

As of Wednesday morning, five county commission candidates had filed reports detailing contributions and expenses from January through July 21.

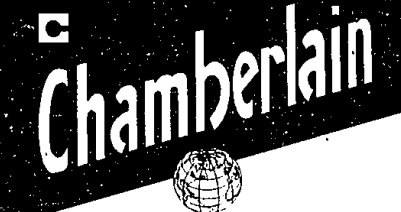
They are:
• Donna R. Huntoon of Clarkston, Republican incumbent in 2nd District, listed contributions of \$2,977 and expenditures of

\$2,823.
• Fran Amos of Waterford, Republican incumbent in the 5th District, listed contributions of \$495 with no expenditure.

• Gilda Z. Jacobs of Huntington Woods, the Democratic incumbent in the 23rd District, listed contributions of \$9,769 and expenditures of \$5,124.

• George W. Suarez of Madison Heights, a Democratic challenger in the 24th District, listed contributions of \$3,966 and expenditures of \$3,221.

• Ruel E. McPherson of Harper Park, the Democratic incumbent in the 26th District, listed contributions of \$2,379 and expenditures of \$711.



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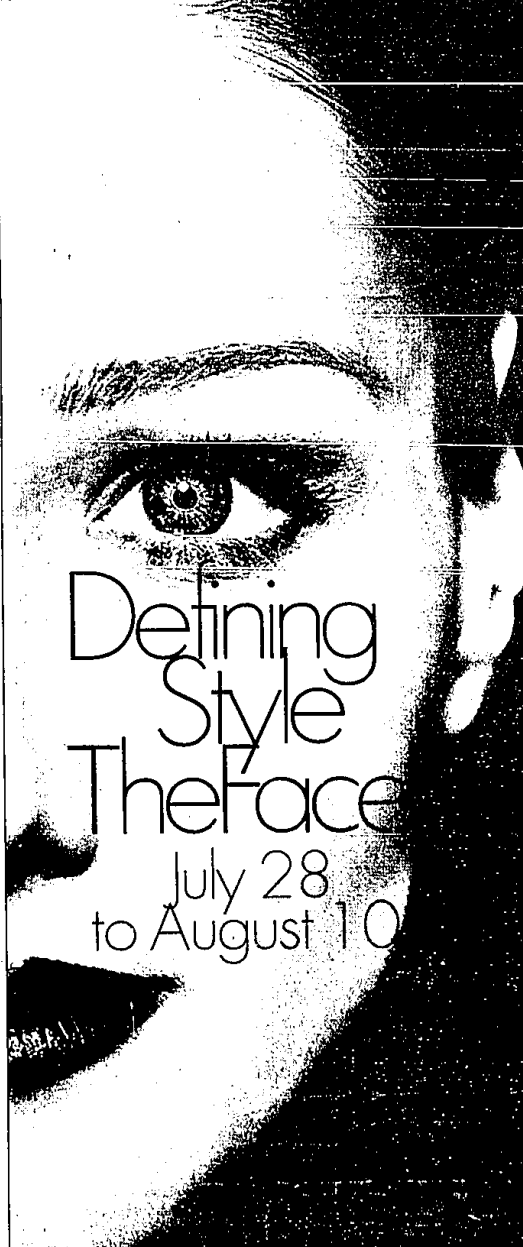
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