

Drain, public works merger stalled

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—There seems to be no rush to combine the county public works office and the drain commissioner's offices into one public works unit under a single head.

Although state law permits such a merger, and most county officials seem to favor joining the two offices in the interest of streamlining county government it appears the two offices will continue functioning separately at least for the time being.

Several weeks ago, when R. J. Alexander, the county public works director, announced that he was retiring, speculation began that county officials might begin work on consolidating the two offices.

However, efforts are now under way to find a replacement for Alexander as public works director and a merger seemed unlikely at least until certain changes are made in the state law.

Consolidation would combine the existing public works office with the drain commissioner's office and

do away with the titles of public works director and drain commissioner. Instead, a single public works commissioner would supervise a combined public works department.

Supporters of consolidation argue that a single unit would do away with certain overlapping functions between the two departments and make one office accountable for all public works activities.

At present, the drain commissioner's office constructs and supervises storm drains while the public works office is in charge of sewers and solid waste disposal.

Consolidation could come if two-thirds of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, or 18 members, approved the plan. Since neither political party controls that number, a bipartisan effort would be needed.

Right now, however, there seems to be bipartisan opposition to the move. Both Republican County Executive Daniel Murphy and Democratic Commissioner Alexander Perinoff, chairman of the county public works board, oppose the state law because it requires that the new position of public works commissioner be elected by county voters rather than appointed by the county board and administration.

Both men say they favor joining the two offices but only under an appointed head.

MURPHY SAID he may seek an amendment to the state law to give the county the option of an appointed public works commissioner. Both he and Perinoff agreed that without such an option there is little support among county commissioners to combine the two offices.

Murphy said he doesn't anticipate seeking the change in the state law at least until the end of the year. The many details of creating his new administration and seeking changes in the county executive law will be given higher priority, he said.

Under an appointed public works commissioner, the new combined department would be under the authority of the county executive and the county board of commissioners. An elected head would supervise an autonomous group accountable to county voters.

Perinoff said he opposes the elected public works commissioner because he feels he could lack the technical know-how for the highly specialized job.

ABOUT THE only voice supporting creating the new elected position, is

George Kuhn, the current drain commissioner.

One of Kuhn's campaign promises in 1972 was that he would work to abolish the office of drain commissioner. And Kuhn said last week that he would be interested in the expanded duties and power of the new public works commissioner post.

However, even Kuhn says he isn't pushing too hard for the county to consolidate the two offices.

"I'm available for the new post," Kuhn said. "But I'm not going to be over zealous. There isn't a soul on the board of commissioners who doesn't know how I feel on this."

Kuhn acknowledged that the decision on whether or when to join the two offices under one head is for the county commissioners to decide on their own initiative.

Attorney sentenced

Detroit attorney, Joseph Freed, 58, of 7200 Brookridge, West Bloomfield Township, was sentenced Thursday (Feb. 8) by U.S. District Court Judge Philip Pratt to three years probation and a \$5,000 fine on the charge of willful failure to pay federal income taxes.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Loren Keenan said that Freed was indicted by a federal grand jury on Oct. 2, 1973, on five counts of willful failure to pay approximately \$20,000 in federal income taxes for the years 1967 through 1971.

The charges are a violation of section 7203 of the internal revenue code. HE PLEADED *nolo contendere* to count No. 4 of the indictment on Nov. 29, 1974. Count No. 4 charged Freed with failure to pay \$6,280 in federal taxes. At the time of sentencing, the remaining four counts of the indictment were dismissed. Keenan said.

Under existing tax law, a person found in violation of a criminal tax provision, in addition to whatever sentence is imposed, is also required to pay the tax determined to be due, as well as interest and civil penalties that may be assessed, according to Keenan.

Freed, a member of the Michigan State Bar since 1942, maintains law offices at 3800 Cadillac Tower

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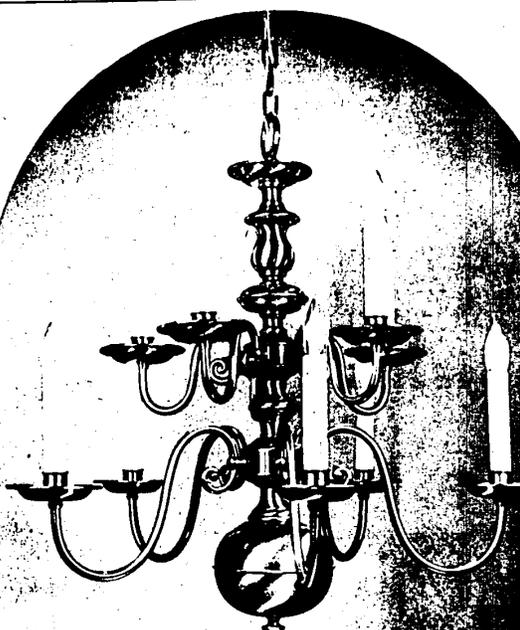
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