

# County board considers abolishing road unit

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—Angry citizens may not have the county road commission to kick around much longer.

That long standing policy of blaming the road commission whenever an automobile strikes a giant rut, or a gravel road isn't graded properly or a snowbound street isn't cleared fast enough may change.

Instead of cursing the road commission, residents may be directing their wrath at the county board of commissioners or the county executive, either of whom may assume direct responsibility for the care of county roads.

THE COUNTY board of commissioners is considering a proposal that would ask the state legislature to permit abolishing the road commission.

Instead of an autonomous body responsible for road care, representatives directly elected by the people would assume the often thankless task.

The idea of doing away with the road commission appears to have wide support. Even William Richards, one of the three county road commissioners, supports the notion. However, there will be some squabbling over who exactly should assume road commission duties.

The Democratic caucus of the county board of commissioners, which introduced the proposal last week, wants the county board to take control. Republican County Executive Daniel Murphy, who has long advocated ending the road commission as a separate county entity, will seek to place road functions under his control.

THE MATTER will be discussed Thursday (March 13) by county commissioners on the planning and building committee. Murphy, Richards, and Fred L. Harris, chairman of the road commission, are expected to attend.

Neither Harris nor John Grubba, Jr., the third road road commissioner, have given their opinions on the proposal. Harris said he would do that at the committee meeting.

However, Richards, former chairman of the road unit, said of the proposal: "I think it would be terrific."

The road commission is almost entirely funded through state gas tax revenues, which road commissioners and almost all county officials agree

are inadequate to meet county road needs.

THIS YEAR revenue from gas tax decreased 25 percent and many road commission programs were cut back or out. Further decreases in gas tax revenue are anticipated for next year.

Richards said that placing road functions under an elected official's control could increase the willingness to use general county funds toward road projects.

"County commissioners have spoken loud and clear for years that they could do a better job than the road commissioners," Richards said. "I think the legislature should give them the chance to prove this."

"I think county commissioners could do a better job. Public pressure would convince them to appropriate more funds for roads."

RICHARDS SAID the present funding situation doesn't give the road commission much of a chance to correct the worsening road situation in the county.

According to Sen. Hart

## Economic recovery nation's first task

By WYLIE GERDES

The country should favor economic recovery over energy conservation when it makes decisions on oil policy, U.S. Senator Philip Hart told Oakland County Democrats Sunday.

Hart spoke to about 500 county Democrats at the 18th annual Phil Hart fund-raising dinner, held this year in Southfield.

Hart said energy proposals should be evaluated carefully for their impact on basic questions facing the nation.

President Gerald Ford's plans for independence from imported oil by 1980 is "baloney," Hart said.

"WE NEED to stop kidding ourselves about independence in the 1980s. There is no way that is likely to happen and I have a strong hunch it wouldn't be good if it did."

Ford's goal of saving one million barrels of oil a day is just a figure which "was a nice easy one for folks to remember. It was based on no economic impact projections. It was just a number."

The problems associated with energy proposals are complex, he added. For example, a reduction in the amount of gasoline produced also could mean a reduction in the amount of fuel oil and other products available.

"Can we build refineries with a different product mix by 1979? If the price for reduced gasoline consumption is a shortage of oil for industry and the economy, then I say no."

Balancing energy and economic problems "raises serious questions for a society based on a system in which the promise of self-improvement and upward mobility has depended on an ever-expanding financial pie, and an ever-expanding source of energy."

OTHER FACTORS to be considered in deciding energy policy include: how much consumers can afford to pay for heat, electricity and automotive fuel; how much unemployment

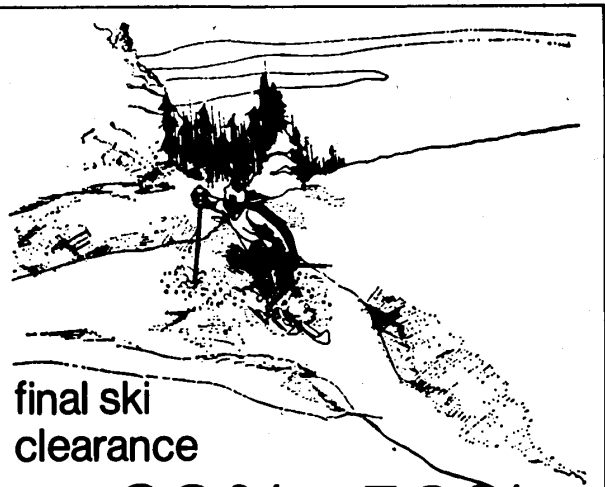
rect the worsening road situation in the county.

The same conclusion was reached earlier this year by the report issued by the Citizens Research Council (CRC), a nonprofit organization specializing in recommendations to governmental units.

Summoned by the road commission to study its operation, the CRC report concluded the road commission was poorly run, badly organized and in need of change. Many of its 135 recommendations have been implemented by the road commission.

Robert E. Pickup, CRC executive director, said the study didn't consider the desirability in Oakland of disbanding the road commission and putting someone else in control of roads.

However, in a separate study of Wayne County operations, Pickup said CRC made the generalization that abolition of road commissions was desirable. Placing road functions under an elected official or body increased accountability, Pickup said.



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