

# County to decide stadium road battle

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—This week the county board of commissioners is expected to settle the two-month-old question of whether it should help pay to widen Opdyke Road in front of the Pontiac football stadium.

The request that the county supply \$250,000 toward the project will clear the county finance committee Monday and be ready for final approval or rejection by the full board Thursday.

Even supporters of the request voiced only guarded optimism of passage. Commissioner Richard Wilcox (R-1), of Orionville, who is also a member of the Pontiac Stadium Building Authority, pegged the chances of passage at "50-50" at best.

Informal samplings of commissioners' attitudes, however, make passage appear more doubtful. In March, commissioners on the planning and building committee narrowly urged the full board to reject the proposal.

Last week one of the more influential commissioners, Paul Kasper (R-23), of Bloomfield Hills, announced he had decided against approving any county funds for the stadium-related project.

Of the 12 commissioners from communities served by Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, seven oppose the request, three favor it and one appears undecided. The twelfth commissioner, Pat Nowak (R-25), of Farmington Hills, favors loaning money toward the project but not giving it.

MANY COMMISSIONERS have received feedback from their constituents opposing spending public funds for what they consider a private enterprise venture. The stadium has been a controversial project since its inception and part of the controversy has been the suspicion that the public would be asked to pay for a number of indirect expenses such as upgrading roads surrounding the stadium.

If the board rejects the request, it is likely the road widening project will be scrapped. The county road commission, which has pledged \$500,000, has announced it will not go ahead with

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the project unless other governmental sources pay for half the project. It is unlikely that the City of Pontiac will contribute more. It has informally pledged \$250,000. The widening of Opdyke would only give minimal relief to what most expect will be a horrendous traffic jam near the stadium. It has been estimated that it could take as long as



five hours to clear the parking lot of the 15,000 automobiles and 400 buses that are expected. The Opdyke widening is the only road improvement planned before the stadium opens its gates in August for the first Detroit Lions exhibition football game.

AT LAST WEEK'S full board meeting, several county commissioners wanted the request killed rather than sent to the finance committee for additional study. However, that effort was defeated even though two of the commissioners who wanted more study agreed they intended to vote against the proposal when it comes to a final vote.

One of the reasons given for more study was the prospect that the county may be asked to pay less for its share of the project. The county road commission has opened contractors' bids for the Opdyke project, although the contract hasn't been awarded as yet. If the low bidder is accepted, the project, once estimated at \$1 million, could be completed for \$800,000.

But even if it could, PSBA funds are all but spent. "It's awfully elementary," says Harold Cosma, PSBA chairman. "We don't have the authority (to build roads) and we don't have the money."

IT IS undetermined how the anticipated \$110,000 savings would be distributed.

The three parties involved—the road commission, the county board and the City of Pontiac—could each reduce its share. The road commission could still give \$500,000 and the other two parties split the savings. Or the county might benefit entirely from the savings and reduce its contribution by \$110,000.

The prospect that the county might be asked to spend \$150,000 (or even \$100,000) instead of the quarter of a million dollars could change some commissioners' minds.

Friday Pontiac city officials attempted to change commissioners' minds with a luncheon and a tour of the stadium site.

TWO OTHER potential funding sources—Pontiac Township and the Pontiac Stadium Authority—have refused throughout the discussion on widening Opdyke to supply any funds.

Spokesmen for the Pontiac Stadium Building Authority (PSBA) have testified they can't legally help with the project. A public corporation that operates on a tax-free basis, the PSBA is authorized to spend its funds only on the stadium itself and the parking lot.

But even if it could, PSBA funds are all but spent. "It's awfully elementary," says Harold Cosma, PSBA chairman. "We don't have the authority (to build roads) and we don't have the money."

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OAKLAND COUNTY—The Friday afternoon luncheon designed by Pontiac officials to influence county commissioners to support a stadium-related road project, failed to attract at least one commissioner.

Dana Wilson (D-9), of Hazel Park, spent that time joining two state legislators filing suit to stop state general fund payments from going to the Pontiac football stadium or any other public-owned sports stadium in the state.

The suit, filed in the Michigan Court of Appeals in Detroit, objects to the state subsidy for stadiums that has given the Pontiac stadium \$1.6 million over the past two years.

While the suit seeks an immediate end to such payments, Wilson's partners in the suit—State Sen. John Hertel (D-3), of Harper Woods, and his brother, State Rep. Dennis Hertel, of Detroit—are urging state legislation to amend Public Act 13, which grants state funds to stadiums on an annual basis.

That law gives stadium owners amounts equaling two per cent of the amount of bonds issued for the project. Under that formula, the Pontiac stadium receives \$800,000 each year.

Also joining in the suit is Lorraine Grilles, a race horse breeder.

Wilson and company are defending the right of race track owners to receive general fund subsidies since race tracks, like the state lottery, contribute large amounts to the general fund.

It isn't fair, they argue, that sports stadiums should also receive subsidies since stadiums don't contribute to the general fund.

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