

Commissioner rents court to county

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY-The county has leased space in a building partly owned by Commissioner Fred Houghton (R-6), of Rochester, since 1969. For the first time, however, a challenge is being mounted to the ethics of that arrangement.

"We can no longer condone any conflict of interest situation in the county," said Commissioner Lawrence Pernick (D-20), of Southfield. "It's as cut and dry as that."

The county leases space for the third division of the 52nd District Court in a building at 530 Pine in Rochester, which is owned by Houghton and several partners.

The county is now considering leasing

analysis

ing additional space in the same building to house court facilities for the newly created judgeship in the third division. The extra space would double the county's investment with Houghton and associates.

As required by state law, Houghton has announced his interest in the leasing arrangement and abstained from all voting and discussion on the matter.

The county administration has defended the leasing arrangement—and the prospect of expanding the lease—

as the most practical way to house the court facilities in Rochester.

However, some county commissioners oppose expanding the county's dealings with Houghton and associates and are giving the leasing arrangement the kind of scrutiny it apparently hasn't received in the past.

INFORMALLY, Houghton has told the press and county officials he makes roughly \$350 a year on the current lease and stands to make an additional \$300-\$55. If the expanded lease is approved.

Neither at the time the lease was first approved in 1969 nor at the time of its renewal in 1974, have competitive bids been taken by the county to determine if a better site or a better price could be found from someone other than Houghton and his partners.

Although not required to take competitive bids on all money matters, the county usually follows this practice.

involved, state statute requires that the lease be approved by two-thirds of the board of commissioners, after Houghton has abstained from voting.

THE NEW lease is currently before commissioners on the planning and building committee, which will advise the full board of what course of action to take.

Some committee members, such as Pernick and Commissioner Mary Dearborn (R-21), of Birmingham, believe the county should take bids for the extra space rather than award the new lease to Houghton and his partners.

Pernick added it would even be worth the additional \$30,000 a year for the county to stay clear of conflict of interest problems.

No city collection for phone books

Birmingham has announced it will not collect old telephone directories this year.

Because of the low grade of paper used, there is no market for the old telephone directories, according to Chester Hunter, superintendent of the Department of Public Works.

Birmingham residents are asked to place their old directories in their refuse containers for disposal.

Bundles and securely tied newspapers will be collected separately as usual and recycled, he said.



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Poster child joins fund-raising walk

Robbie Edginton, 12, of Waterford, Oakland County's poster child for the March of Dimes, plans to go on this year's 20-mile walk May 4.

So do Ruth McNamee, former mayor of Birmingham, now a state legislator for the area; Jack McCarthy of Channel 7, and several thousand other Oakland County residents, who are getting their friends, relatives and acquaintances to sponsor them, at 10 or more cents a mile.

Walkers will register for "Super-walk '73" at 8 a.m. at Seaholm High School, 2436 W. Lincoln, Birmingham.

Trophies will be awarded to the track team that runs the fastest time, to the group that turns in the most money, to the oldest walker, and to the walker who raises the most money.

Those who cannot walk all the way, there will be transportation back.

Chairmen for the march are Bill Freehan, catcher for the Detroit Tigers, and Paul Naumoff, linebacker for the Detroit Lions, both residents of Bloomfield Hills.

Those wanting to join the walk can pick up sponsor sheets at any junior high or high school in Oakland County or at the March of Dimes Office, 921 W. Huron St., Pontiac.

County plans seniors dance

OAKLAND COUNTY-Senior citizens from throughout the county are being invited to the April senior citizen dance from 7:30 to 11 p.m. Friday at the Waterford-Oaks Activities Center, 2800 Watkins Lake Road, Pontiac. Sponsored by the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission, the dance will feature music by Floyd Snyder's band. Coffee and snacks will be served. An admission is charged.

DANIEL MURPHY's administration defended leasing more space with Houghton's partnership.

According to administration estimates, it would cost \$20,000 more each year if separate court facilities were found for the new third division judge. The building at 530 Pine is considered a prime location in downtown Rochester.

Republican commissioners are also coming to Houghton's defense, charging that Democrats are making a political issue out of what amounts to a sound business deal.

However, Democratic support is needed if the new lease is to be approved.

Since a conflict of interest is in-

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