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Detroit council ready to vote on proposed water rate hike

By TIM RICHARD

As a proposal to raise water rates headed for a final vote by the Detroit City Council, suburban state legislators were opening public hearings on three bills aimed at curbing the power of the Detroit water board.

The city government committee of the State House of Representatives today held its first public hearing on three bills introduced by State Rep. John Bennett (D-Redford), long an opponent of Detroit's water sales practices.

The first hearing began at 10 a.m. today in the City-County Building in Detroit; the second is scheduled for 10 a.m. Monday, April 5 in the Livonia Senior Citizens Center (15128 Farmington (south of Five Mile), and a third is tentatively scheduled for April 12 in Troy.

"I THINK THEY'LL have the votes to report the bills out of committee," said Bennett.

Committee chairman is Rep. Michael Griffin (D-Jackson), and vice-chairman is Rep. Dennis Hertel (D-Detroit).

Suburban members include Reps. John Markes (D-Livonia), Jeffrey Padden (D-Wyandotte), W.V. Brotherton (R-Farmington), Ruth McKamee (R-Birmingham), and Roy Smith (R-Spalding), whose district includes Plymouth.

Other members are Thomas Holcomb (D-Lansing) and DeForrest Strang (R-Sturgis).

Despite suburban strength on the committee, Bennett predicted the damndest battle you ever saw on the house floor, where Detroit has 19 representatives.

UNDER CONSIDERATION are three bills.

HB 5463 would require an independent auditor picked by the state auditor general. At present the Detroit water department is reviewed annually by the Detroit finance director and every fifth year by an outside auditor.

HB 5464 would limit the wholesale price of water to suburban customers to the actual cost of delivery.

HB 5465, the key, would reverse the make up of the water board, which under Detroit's charter consists of seven members, all appointed by, and serving at the pleasure of the mayor, with at least four to be residents of Detroit. Bennett's bill would expand the water board to nine members, four Detroiters picked by the mayor and five suburbanites picked by an assembly of local governments.

BENNETT SAID he had been promised answers to several questions from water department Director Charles Scales Jr. and three Detroit councilmen—President Carl Levin, David Eberhard and Jack Kelley.

Bennett asked if the proposed 39 per cent increase were really necessary and what would be done with revenue generated by it.

He also insisted on an answer to why the water board, which historically has charged suburban customers a flat dollars premium, now wants to shift to a percentage system. His reasoning is that a 39 per cent price increase to a suburban customer will mean more in dollar terms than a 39 per cent increase to a Detroit customer.

THAT THE DETROIT council will vote some kind of water price increase soon is certain. The questions are how much and whether the percentage system will be used.

A report outside a audit of the Detroit system's books reportedly showed a justification for a price increase. But Bennett said he still hasn't been sent a copy of the audit—though he has asked for one—and doesn't know whether it justifies a percentage increase.

Meanwhile suburban customers are preparing to fight in court if the 39 per cent increase is approved by the Detroit council.

Recently the Oakland County Board of Commissioners pledged a $2,500 donation to the lawsuit fund.

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If you're looking for a lifestyle which will guarantee perfect health, you probably can forget it, notes a Michigan State University professor of natural science.

Dr. Andrew McClary, who teaches a University College course, "Ways of Health," invites students to examine the meaning of health from the point of view of the biological sciences.

Two biological concepts have dominated man's idea of health, McClary said. One sees illness as coming from a specific cause—an organic upset which results from either the invasion by an infectious agent or a breakdown of some body function.

Examples of this kind are scarlet fever, which is thought to be a virus disease, and rickets, a metabolic disease due to lack of vitamin D.

The other concept sees disease in environmental terms. From this viewpoint, scarlet fever is a crowd disease, turned on when people live in close association, and rickets arises when urban Western man lives in cities and is shut off from sunlight.

Unfortunately, McClary said, the sophisticated science and technology which has brought these kinds of disease under control have also helped to build an environment with new health problems, particularly the stress related cardiovascular diseases and the pollution-related cancers.

Attitudes change about what good health is. Corpulence (fat) was once thought to be desirable and exposure to sun undesirable, but now the reverse is true, McClary said. Actually, as science extends its understanding of life, people can expect further changes in perceptions of health.

Already, he said, man equates good health with a life span far longer than was considered normal only a few decades ago. As we bring organic diseases under control, the term "health" is increasingly related to such non-biological goals as full and happy life.

While those who see disease in terms of specific causes are guarded in optimistic about an environment free of disease, environmentalists are less certain, arguing that indeed any lifestyle inevitably produces its own set of health problems.

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3 Oakland men named advisors

A citizen's committee has been appointed to act in a technical advisory capacity to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners' Finance Committee.

The three men, who will be unpaid for their services, are Bliss Finlay of Bloomfield Township, a partner with the accounting and management consulting firm, Ernst & Ernst; Emery Dearborn of Birmingham, a retired vice-president and general manager of Ford Motor's tractor division; and Sidney J. Newman of Southfield, a partner with the counting and management consulting firm, Leaventhol & Horwath.

The committee appointed by Finance Chairman Lawrence Pernick will analyze concepts, reports, recommendations and operations and either concur or come up with alternatives for the committee to consider.

It seems to me that the board of commissioners has all too little input in the creation of our very substantial budget," Pernick said.

Perhaps this is as it should be, but it certainly can't hurt to ask this committee to give us their views on this particular process.

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