Dems favor drain-DPW merger

By TIM RICHARD

Oakland County Democrats don't know whether they can legally do it. But they know they're certainly going to try.

The Democratic majority on the county board of commissioners voted last week to place on the Nov. 2 ballot an advisory question asking voters whether they want to merge the office of the drain commissioner with the department of public works (DPW).

What would be created is a single, elected public works commissioner.

REPUBLICANS argued the proposition wasn't fair.

This doesn't put all the alternatives before the electorate," said Commissioner Patrick Nowak (R-Farmington). "This is only a half-truth or a half-question. One alternative is missing—whether to place the DPW under the county executive."

Nowak contended that because Oakland voters in 1974 voted to establish the "unified county government" system under an elected county executive, this was a mandate for merging as many separate offices as possible under the executive—not under a separate public works commissioner.

No one said it aloud, but there was another political factor at work. The present county executive is a Republican, Daniel T. Murphy. The newest merger plan is only one in a long string of Democratic-led efforts to prevent Murphy from gaining more authority.

THERE WAS also a question of whether a county board may even put an advisory proposal on the ballot. The board's civil counsel, Robert Allen, was leaning in the direction that no such authority existed.

"The attorney general has ruled on this three times. Twice he said the board of commissioners lacks authority to put advisory questions on the ballot. The third time he didn't know," said Allen.

He added that a bill which passed the state house of representatives would grant county boards the express power to offer the voters advisory questions. But that bill is stalled in the State Senate.

Sept. 16 is the deadline for the county clerk to certify wording of ballot proposals. The clerk will likely act on the advice of counsel Allen, who has yet to put the finishing touches on his own legal opinion.

A MOTION to table (and thus kill) the proposal was beaten 10-12 on almost a straight party line vote.

Supporting tabling were Republicans Nowak, Fred Houghten of Avon Township, Paul Kasper of Bloomfield Hills, Lillian Moffitt of Bloomfield Township, Dennis Murphy of Novi and Robert Page of Birmingham.

Voting against tabling were Democrats Mary Dearborn of Birmingham, Alexander Perunoff of Southfield and Lawrence Pernick of Southfield, joined by Republican Henry Hoot of Troy. Hoot usually votes for proposals supported by Republican Drain Commissioner George Kuhn, who favors the merger and would probably run for public works commissioner if the office were created.

"IT'S ALWAYS proper to ask the electorate's opinion," said Hoot, arguing for the ballot proposal. "We can leave the details to a later time."

In a shot at counsel Allen, Hoot added, "Perhaps we've been too generous in allowing civil counsel to respond to requests for opinions."

Nowak countered: "Placing referendum after referendum on the ballot is akin to placing our agenda on the ballot. The board should decide this matter."

Nowak recalled that in public hearings last year, people spoke almost unanimously against the merger idea; that Murphy had vetoed the plan when the Democratic majority passed it; and the board had failed to override the veto; and Murphy had won a court case over the matter.

Already scheduled for the Nov. 2 ballot is an advisory question on abolishing the three-member board of road commissioners, giving its administrative functions to the county executive and its policy-making functions to the county board of commissioners. That question got on the ballot with bipartisan support, though poor quality of the road commission being one of the few issues Republicans and Democrats agree on in Oakland County.

Road work gets underway

Bids for 19 road improvement projects in Oakland County will be read and received by the county board of road commissioners at 1:30 p.m. Sept. 20.

Total cost of the projects scheduled for completion this year is estimated at $473,000.

Plans were to be made available to contractors on Sept. 8 according to Road Commissioner William Richards.

RICHARDS LISTED one intersection improvement, one special assessment project to pave subdivision streets and 17 projects for bituminous resurfacing of road segments.

- Intersection of Thirteen Mile and Inkster roads to be flared in Southfield and Farmington Hills.
- Paving of certain streets in Powder Horn Estates subdivision, West Bloomfield Township.

Resurfacing of:

- Opdyke from Square Lake Road in Bloomfield Township to Adams Road in Pontiac Township.
- Orchard Road from Mile to south of Middle Road in Highland Township.
- Saskatoon from Watkins to Pelton in Waterford and Independence townships.
- Hatchery Road from Crescent Lake to Airport Road in Waterford Township.
- Crescent Lake Road from Tubbs to Hatchery and from Mile to Pontiac Lake Road in Waterford Township.
- Opdyke from University Drive to Pontiac Trail Pontiac Township.
- East Pontiac Road from University Drive to Squirrel Road, Pontiac Township.
- Commerce Road from Union Lake Road to Newton, Commerce Township.
- Comby Lake Road west of Union Lake Road, Commerce Township.
- Commerce Road west of Burns, Milford Township.
- Burson Road from the Milford limits to Burns south, Milford Township.
- Pontiac Trail from Eight to Nine Mile roads and south of Eleven Mile both in Lyon Township.
- Maple from Haggerty to Drake, West Bloomfield Township.
- Twelve Mile from Orchard Lake to west of Northwestern Highway, Farmington Hills and Southfield.
- Ten Mile west of Telegraph, Southfield.
- Maple from John R to Dequindre, Troy.

Garden club sets meeting

The Troy Garden Club will meet Sept. 15 at 12:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church, 4325 Livernois. Club members will view a demonstration on Japanese flower arranging.

Membership dues for the year will be $5 with a $1 guest fee. Babysitting will be available for a minimum fee.

Refreshments will be served at the meeting. Contact Becky Meiers, president, for additional information at 879-2183.

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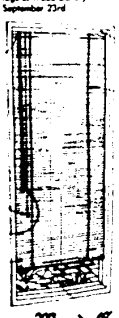

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