

Murphy's powers to increase

Oakland County is moving toward giving the county executive broader authority of such public works as water and sewer systems.

A bipartisan coalition of county commissioners, Oakland's legislative body, last week passed an effort to shift authority over 15 public works projects to Drain Commissioner George Kuhn.

In a related action, freshman Commissioner Robert A. McConnell (R-Farmington Hills) introduced a resolution asking the Michigan Legislature to amend the public works law to allow the county executive to be designated as the "board of public works."

IF THE LANGUAGE sounds legislative, the politics is pretty clear. County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and his supporters are trying to patch a hole in Act 139, under which Oakland became the first county in Michigan to adopt the "unified" executive or manager form.

The hole was found when it was learned that the executive gained control of the department of public works (DPW), but that elimination of the board of public works (BPW) left the county without power to issue public works bonds.

The county board, dominated in 1976 by Democrats, spent a large part of the year trying to shift the DPW to the control of Drain Commissioner Kuhn, a Republican like Murphy but often at odds with the executive. Murphy vetoed each attempt, and minority Republicans always managed to scrape up enough votes to prevent a two-thirds override.

This year, with Republicans holding a 12 to 10 board majority and with several freshman Democrats who don't loathe Murphy going along, Murphy's forces are seeking to strengthen the executive's hand so that he will become more nearly analogous to a mayor or governor.

STEP ONE at the Feb. 3 meeting came when the board agreed to shift 15 uncompleted public works projects to the control of the drain commissioner, but with an important proviso. It authorized the drain commissioner "to execute a contract with the county executive... for the purpose of operating and maintaining the water supply and sewage disposal system."

In McConnell's words, this would "keep the DPW under the county executive, where it belongs."

To this, Commissioner Alexander C. Perinoff (D-Southfield), a vehement critic of Murphy, retorted, "Heghish! Machiavellian! Devious! Act 139 (allowing a county executive) is an abortion, an abomination. We should go back to the way we were."

McConnell said that if Oakland County shifted its public works projects to the drain commissioner, it would look foolish going to the legislature and asking for the right to give bonding powers to the county executive.

The vote on the amendment forcing the drain commissioner to go to the executive for DPW work was 15-10.

Supporting it were local Commissioners Paul Kasper (R-Bloomfield Hills), McConnell, John J. McDonald, (R-Farmington), Lillian Moffitt (R-Bloomfield), Dennis Murphy (R-Novi), Robert Page (R-Birmingham) and John Peterson (R-Rochester).

Opposed were Henry Hoot (R-Troy), Ralph Moxley (R-Birmingham), Perinoff and Larry Perick (D-Southfield).

IT WAS NOT ONLY a victory for Murphy but a defeat for Kuhn, whose own adherents argued hard for giving the drain commissioner complete authority over the unfinished public works projects.

Hoot, for example, said the purpose of shifting the projects was "to ask the drain commissioner to wrap up the few remaining projects. The amendment (McConnell's) guts the resolution."

Robert Fredericks, Kuhn's deputy, said "all the projects are 99 per cent done. There are 15 projects not finished for various reasons—three are in lawsuits; others have loose ends."



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