

New board is arena for suburban sprawl struggle

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

analysis

The newly formed Area-wide Water Quality Board is emerging as a new battleground where land use policies and suburban and industrial development will be determined.

The board, in the eyes of the federal government and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG), is the watchdog agency for water pollution control programs in the seven-county region.

The 27-member board will be able to extend its influence over just about every area of urban, suburban and rural life in the region.

"SOME 240 governmental units have an impact on water quality—from street sweeping programs to zoning," said the board's newly elected chairman, James Seeterlin, supervisor of

Oakland County's Waterford Township. Seeterlin was elected at the AWQB's first meeting in Southfield last week.

"We'll be looking at everything from septic tanks and farmland runoff to the construction of major shopping centers and urban street pollution caused by grease and oil from motor vehicles," he said.

"In essence, we'll be investigating anything that impacts our water quality."

Seeterlin was elected to the AWQB from the Oakland County local government caucus, as was Lathrup Village Mayor Richard Cogger, Bloomfield Township Treas. Fred Korzon represents the SEMCOG township bloc. Other Oakland County members have yet to be named.

BECAUSE OF ITS broad interests, many of the region's conservative politicians and officials have opposed the board.

"The board will be huge, monolithic," Commissioner Henry Hoot (R-Troy), the most conservative member of Oakland County's board, said in an interview.

"It will develop into a huge regional agency. It'll be bigger than SEMCOG and SEMTA (the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority)," said Hoot, who as a SEMCOG delegate last year opposed organizing the AWQB.

"It'll be getting its nose into everything that has to do with water—(road) salting, parks, zoning," Hoot continued. "It has the potential of reaching in and grabbing every aspect of life. It's scary," he said.

Because the water quality board must approve plans for projects qualifying for future federal aid, conserva-

tives, such as Hoot, are taking an interest in it.

Instead, according to Hoot, Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn and SEMCOG officials, a bloc of conservatives will be formed within the regional quality board. Because the board is only in its infancy, the effect of a conservative bloc cannot be ascertained.

"We need a watchdog (on the board) not somebody who's going to gloss over everything it does and acts as a rubber stamp," said Kuhn.

"Some (local officials) are afraid that we might do something bad," confirmed SEMCOG staff member Ed Hustoles, who headed much of the AWQB planning. "They're going to be on the board. It'll be like they're watching the fox in the chicken coop."

SOME CALL it "creeping regionalism," but to SEMCOG officials it is the only practical way to meet the provisions of the federal Clean Water Act amendments of 1972.

According to the federal legislator and the regional water quality plan which was developed by SEMCOG under a \$5.1 million grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, water pollution is to be checked so that all lakes, ponds, rivers

and streams are to be "swimmable and fishable" by 1983. Moreover, by 1985, water pollution is to be eliminated.

Seeterlin said southeastern Michigan may have a tough time meeting those goals. "The southeast Michigan region has more than 4,000 inland lakes and ponds to maintain and Lake Erie, which has suffered extensive pollution damage. Our job is bigger than most areas of the nation."

SEMCOG officials privately label those goals "Mission Impossible."

"There's no way than can be zero (pollution) discharge (into the region's bodies of water)," said one SEMCOG staff member. "But the federal government hasn't backed off, so neither have we."

INSPIRE OF THE seeming impossibility of meeting the standards and prospects of facing a hostile, anti-regional bloc of delegates, SEMCOG and water quality board officials defend their plan and their standing as the regional watchdog.

"We can't afford a scattered, shotgun approach in this mammoth clean-up campaign because, in the long run, everybody's pollution drains into Lake Erie," Seeterlin said.

SEMCOG officials view the water quality board as a clearing house for information, a mediator in local water quality disputes, a regional forum and ombudsman going to bat for local communities in Lansing and Washington.

Bishop gets 2 vice-chairs

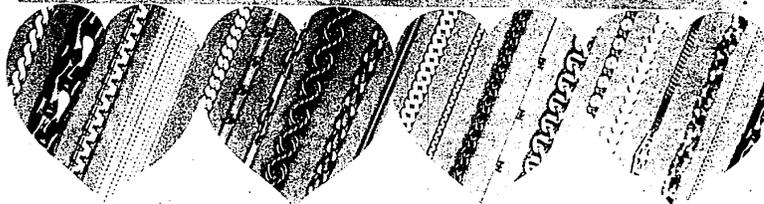
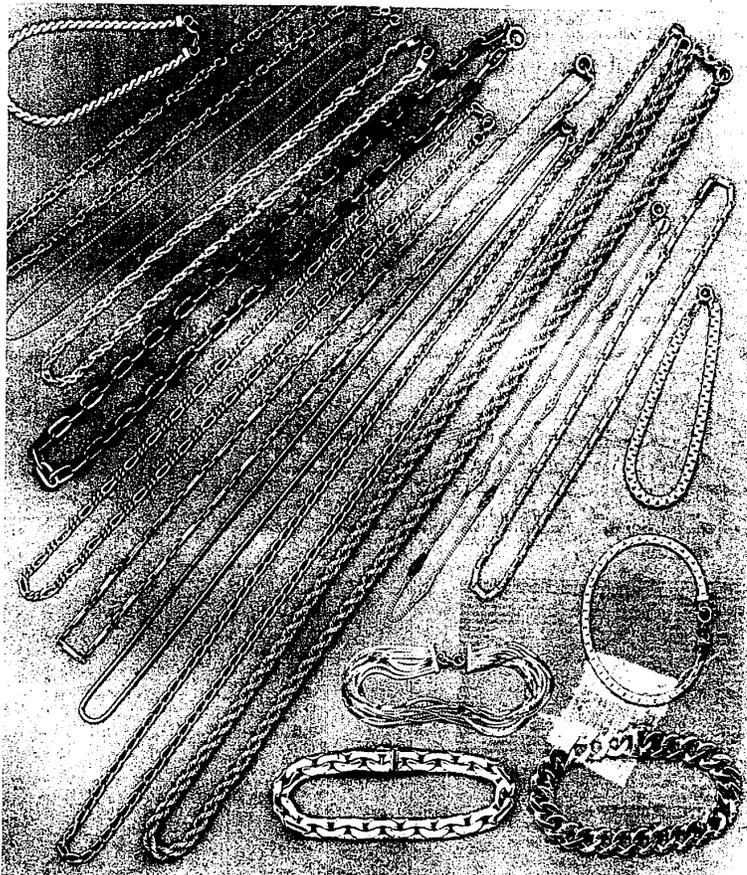
State Sen. Donald Bishop (R-Rochester), who was recently elected minority floor leader by his Republican colleagues, was named Republican vice-chairman of the senate's judiciary and commerce committees.

The position was created under recently-adopted senate rules to provide minority party members greater input in the upper house's standing committees.

Bishop was also named to the senate corporations and economic development committee.

"Actions taken by this committee," Bishop said, "are crucial to the economic climate of our state." He said he would work for legislation that would attract new business and industry and improve the state's job climate.

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