

# Panel to determine equitability

A panel of three specialists may decide after Jan. 1 if the city of Detroit's new sewer and water rates for metropolitan customers are equitable. That's the date the new rates are scheduled to go into effect.

U.S. District Judge John Feikens will rule Thursday on whether the new rates, up 38 percent for most western Wayne and Oakland County homeowners, can take effect as scheduled next month.

The rates are being challenged by Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties as well as a number of businesses.

FEIKENS PLANS to have a three-man "masters panel" hear the rate challenges if an agreement can't be reached by Dec. 20 among attorneys representing all parties.

The panel reviewed the rate structure in 1978 and found it to be fair, although the rates produced excessive revenues in 1977-78.

Although the panel could hear the challenges as early as Dec. 21, Feikens said it would make "no instant decision" before Jan. 1.

The judge, who has presided over the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) suit against the Detroit sewer

age treatment plant, met with lawyers in the case last week.

The plant serves more than 3 million people in 76 communities in the area. Suburban communities and businesses have consistently challenged sewer and water rate increases ordered to bring sewage treatment in compliance with

federal clean water standards.

THE NEW RATES, which will be applied through June 30, 1981, are expected to garner about \$184 million in revenue for the Detroit water and sewerage system.

Some industrial customers of the De-

troit system face sewage rate increases ranging from 158 percent to more than 400 percent.

Firms which have challenged the rates include Ford Motor Co., Stroh Brewery, a group of food processing companies and metropolitan area laundries.

## Helpers sought for bird count

Are you interested in feeding and observing winter birds? Would you like to help document what is happening to Michigan's winter bird populations?

The Michigan Audubon Society (MAS) is recruiting observers for its Third Annual Winter Bird Feeder Survey. Participants count the number of bird species and individuals that visit their feeders on one day during each of the winter months, November through April. Results are tabulated and analyzed by the MAS Research Committee to determine the trends in species occurrence and to see if winter bird feeding does increase the number of individuals that remain in Michigan during the winter.

To participate in the Third Annual

Winter Bird Feeder Survey, send a self-addressed, 30-cent stamped envelope to: Winter Bird Feeder Survey, Michigan Audubon Society, 7000 N. West-

nedge, Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007. A small booklet on feeding and attracting birds is available from MAS for \$1.50 at the address above.

## Gardening via Ma Bell

"Handy hints on call" is a phone message service that provides quick and timely information primarily on horticulture, but including other subjects.

It operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with new topics on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Call 858-2519.

• December 10 - Fertilizing Houseplants.

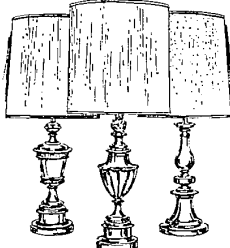
• December 12 - Tips on saving time and money for holiday baking.

• December 14 - Selecting a Christmas tree.

• December 17 - Holiday recipes.

• December 19 - Living Christmas trees.

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