

Dem panel takes a dig at road board operations

By TOM LONERGAN

The Oakland County Road Commission "is basically an efficient unit of government," according to county Democrats, but "leaves much to be desired from the people's point of view."

In a 10-page report released earlier this month, a committee appointed by the County Board of Commissioners Democratic Caucus rapped the meeting attendance of the three-man, all-Republican Board of County Road Commissioners.

The Democratic watchdogs also questioned the road commission's bidding policies and said resident complaints play second fiddle to road commission staff interests.

TWO ROAD commission officials, who said they have not received a copy of the two-week old report, called some of its charges "nonsense" and said the report was "strictly politically motivated."

The report was written by Donald Eby of West Bloomfield, president of Bloomfield Office Supply and Service. Eby was one of three men tapped by

county board Democrats last June to monitor the road commission.

Others on the Stanley Friedman of Bloomfield Township, a real estate broker, and William Parker of Oxford, a retired teacher and Michigan Education Association official. Friedman, who chaired the committee, has resigned because he couldn't spare the time for it, Eby said.

Prior to this year, the road board had been a bi-partisan body, with both Democratic and Republican members. Several months after the Republican-controlled county board approved an all-Republican road panel, the Democrats formed their monitoring committee.

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WHILE THE committee alleged nothing "illegal or improper" against the road commission, Eby questioned why the board of road commissioners operates.

He said he has seen the road board "skid" through a 35-item agenda in about 10 minutes.

"It's interesting how quick they can go through these things. No time have I seen any unit of government go through

30 to 35 agenda items so fast. It's like they're psychic."

"It leads me to ask: are the commissioners — in reality — violating the (state Open Meetings) Act?"

THAT ACCUSATION was rebutted by road board chairman Fred Houghten, Rochester:

"If they're saying that we make decisions ahead of time, that's completely erroneous."

Houghten said the board of road commissioners has not violated the Open Meetings Act, which prevents a quorum of a government committee (two commissioners in the road board's case) from discussing a business meeting agenda item in secret.

He said items on a road commission weekly meeting agenda are often "items that have all been approved in the budget."

"They're not anything to discuss," Houghten added.

THE DEMOCRATS didn't mention the open-meetings issue in their written report, but raised the question at a county Democratic Party caucus meeting earlier this month and in recent comments to a reporter.

"It's not really detailed," Bunny Goldman, Oakland County Democratic Party coordinator, said of the report. "They aren't new revelations, but they are concerns."

Democrats plan to continue the mon-

itoring committee and add a member. Ms. Goldman said the road commission hasn't sent a copy of the report, but added that county board Democrats want to meet with Houghten and Road Commission Managing Director John Grubba.

"I'd be perfectly willing to send them a report if they wanted one," Ms. Goldman said.

GRUBBA LABELED as "nonsense" the report's contention that only half of the road commission's meetings between mid-January and mid-November had a quorum of members present.

The report lists the road commission's three commissioners for that period and shows all three commissioners were present for 10 of 38 meetings.

However, a quorum is only two members, Grubba said.

Grubba added: "Maybe they better learn to add." The road commission has cancelled meetings due to lack of a quorum "once or twice a year," said Houghten.

"I don't think they (the Democrats) have had anybody at our meetings in about two months."

Eby said he has been to "70 percent" of the road commission meetings since the Democrats formed the committee last month. "Parker and Parker have been to fewer meetings, he said. The last commission meeting attended by a committee member was Nov. 26, Eby added.

REGARDING BIDS, the report says few vehicle and equipment dealers and office supply dealers "are aware of road commission needs."

Eby, who owns an office supply business, said, "Now that I've become aware of it, I have my company bidding on these needs."

But prior to his submitting bids, Eby said only two office supply dealers in Oakland County were awarded purchase orders.

"This seems rather strange," he wrote, "in view of the fact that there are only 70 office supply dealers in Oakland County."

Grubba said, "I don't have any comment on what he thinks is strange. 'We have no closed bidding list. Any one can submit their name to the purchasing department and get on the list.'

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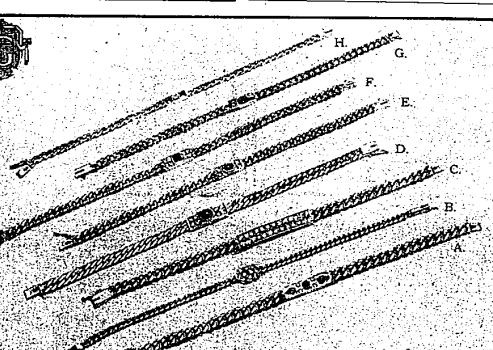
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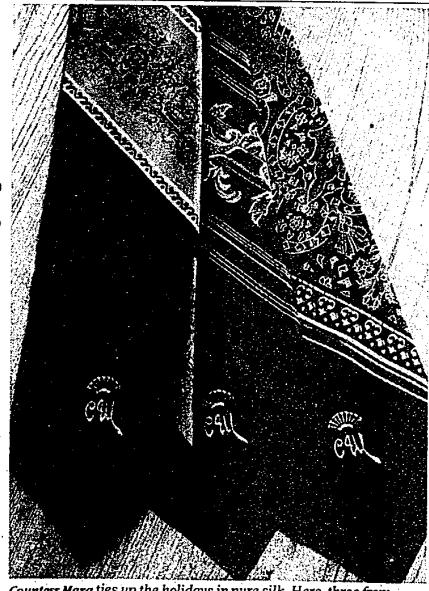
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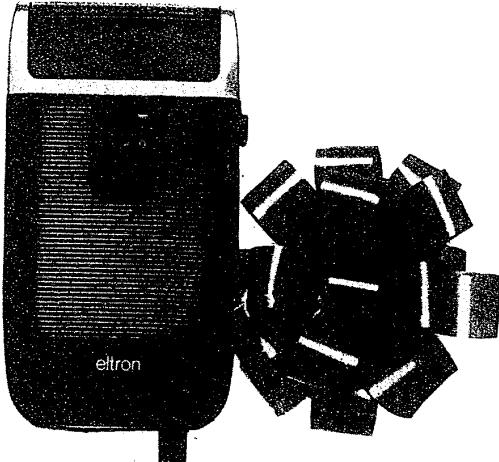
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