

Suburbs 'clamor' for more say on water board

By Tim Richard
staff writer

"There's an overwhelming clamor out there for a voice on the Detroit Water Board," said state Sen. George Hart, D-DeARBorn, and that seemed to sum it up.

A half-dozen suburban officials Monday asked a Senate Municipalities Committee public hearing in Southfield for a majority voice on the board which recommends their water and sewerage rates.

The lone dissenting voice was that of William Krause, an official of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. Krause contended the Detroit Water Board is showing a new attitude of cooperation with suburban customers.

On this point Hart and committee Chairman Gilbert DiNello, D-East Detroit, had to agree. "Detroit refused to send a representative to our last two meetings. I was surprised this young man was here today," said Hart.

DETROIT SELLS water and/or sewerage treatment services to some 100 southeastern Michigan communities with 45 percent of the state's population.

Its seven-member water board is appointed entirely by Mayor Coleman A. Young, who may remove members at any time. In practice, Young has appointed three suburbanites to the board, although legally he could appoint seven Detroiters.

Because of pollution emanating from the Detroit treatment plant and a resultant federal court suit, Detroit has raised drastically its water and sewerage rates.

Hart is author of Senate Bill 437 which would increase the water board's size but shift control to the suburbs. It

Birthing center calling 'alumni'

A meeting is planned at 7:30 p.m. Friday to organize parents of children born in the Birthing Center of Providence Hospital in Southfield.

The gathering will take place in Lecture Hall E of the hospital's Medical Office Building, 16001 W. Nine Mile.

would assure Detroit four members, suburban Wayne County three, Oakland County three, Macomb County two and other counties one to two, depending on how many residents use Detroit water.

"Sen. Hart's bill was reported unanimously out of my committee a couple of weeks ago," said DiNello.

Hart said he is waiting for an opportunity to bring it to the Senate floor, but he is less optimistic about its fate in the House of Representatives.

LEAD-OFF WITNESS Monday was George Kuhn, Oakland County drain commissioner, who has spent years fighting for a suburban voice on the water board.

Kuhn voiced support for a pair of bills (SB 363 and 329) by DiNello and Sen. Donald Bishop, R-Rochester, which would establish a forum for customer communities to elect a new nine-member Detroit water board.

"The bill requires the city of Detroit to share with the municipalities in the metropolitan area in a defined, cooperative manner, the responsibility for operating the regional water and sewer system," said Kuhn.

"A majority of the water and sewer customers of this system now live outside the city of Detroit, and a majority of the revenues to operate the water and sewer system are paid by customers who live outside the city of Detroit," he said, noting that no Detroit tax money subsidizes the system.

Kuhn is author of a ballot proposal after which the DiNello and Bishop bills were copied. In two years, he and his supporters have picked up 100,000 of the 230,000 petition signatures they need to put it on the ballot.

KRAUSE REPLIED that Detroit has adopted a cooperative attitude with its suburban customers.

"We are willing to correct errors. We are willing to share data," said Krause.

"This year the water rates were approved by a 7-0 vote of the commissioners. The sewer rates have been approved by a 6-1 vote, and that was only because of a specific problem in Macomb County. Those commissioners (members of the water board) were satisfied that what we are doing is fair."

"WE MUST have better representa-

tion and input than we now have," said Joseph B. Mullen, legislative agent for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, who voiced the county's support for SB 329.

"The present water-sewer board has seven members, all of whom are appointed by the mayor of Detroit, and all can be removed by the mayor without cause. It has been the practice to appoint four Detroiters to this board and three from outside Detroit. Since this 4-3 makeup is not mandated, all seven members could conceivably be from Detroit if the mayor so intended.

"In contrast, SB 329 (Bishop's bill) would create a metropolitan water and sewer council with one member each

from every local unit of government in the service area. Among the duties would be to review rates and procedures for water supply and sewage disposal to each community in the service area."

"SB 329 further empowers the council to select a nine-member regional water and sewer commission. Three would be from Detroit and six from the service area outside Detroit," said Mullen.

"AVON TOWNSHIP very strenuously objects to the (current) method of appointing representation of the Detroit Water and Sewer System," said a letter from Carroll T. Womack, direc-

tor of the north Oakland township's public service department.

"Avon Township water and sewer department has received some of the highest rate hikes ever given. In one particular year, late 1980, water rates were increased 118 percent.

"Avon Township requests that it have suburban representation on the Detroit Water and Sewer Board, directly representing our community," said Womack's letter, read to the committee by Robert Fredericks, deputy county drain commissioner.

Frederick Gemmill, representing the city of Warren, said that Macomb County community supports Hart's bill to expand the Detroit water board but

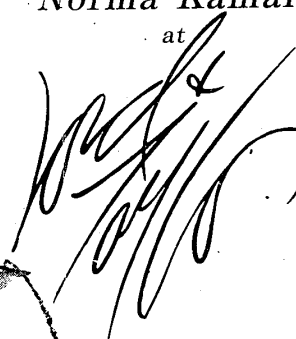
not the DiNello-Bishop package with its complex system of representation.

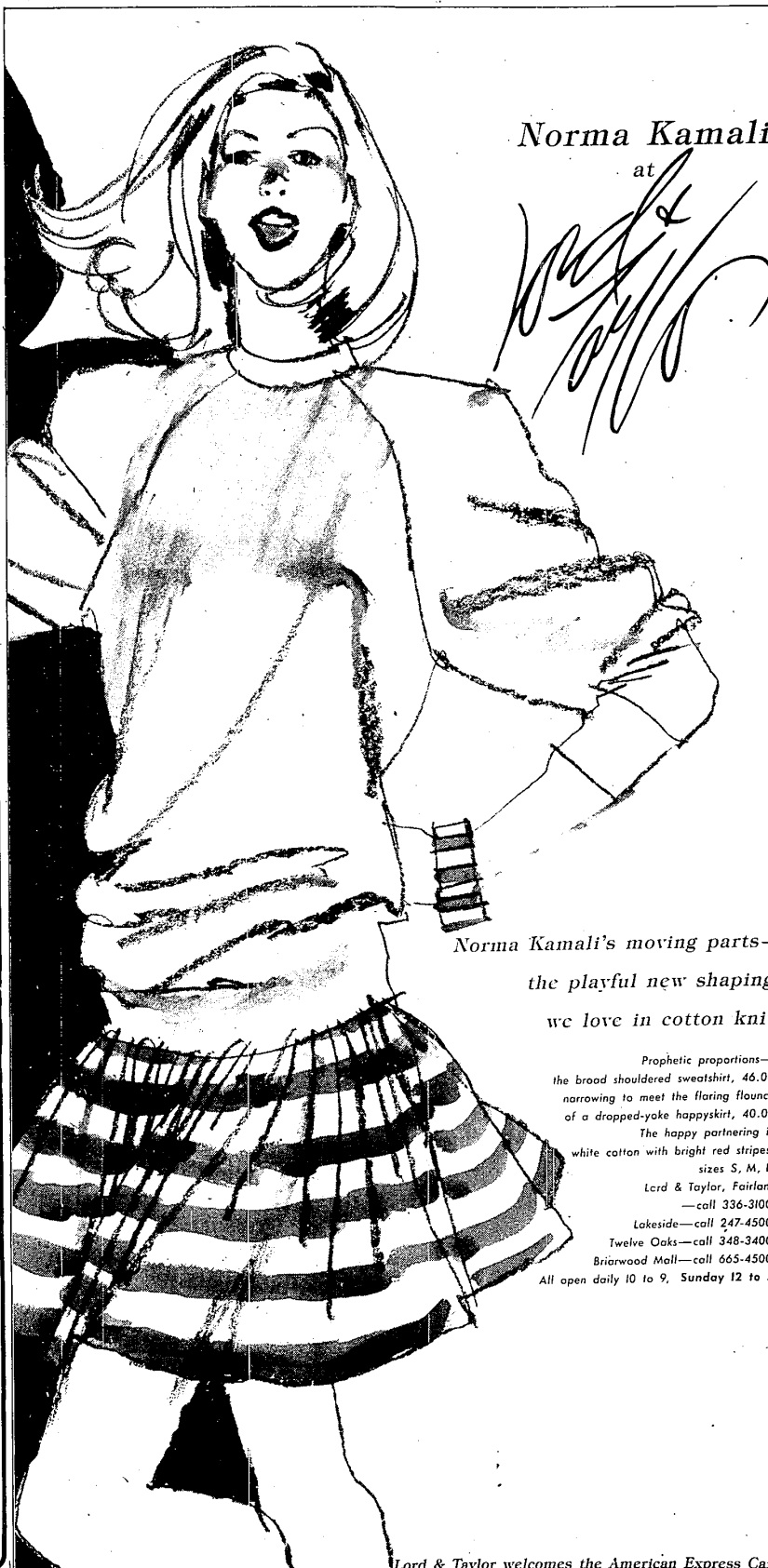
Gemmill added that Warren would be unwilling to give up control of its own sewage treatment plant.

Nelson Fabian, a Berkley councilman, said, "Technically we already have a regional system. But politically we have control by one city."

Jim Reeves, supervisor of Sumpter Township in southwest Wayne County, agreed on the need for customer control. "I don't believe suburban customers feel we have a say-so. We have more customers than the city of Detroit. We use more gallons than the city of Detroit."

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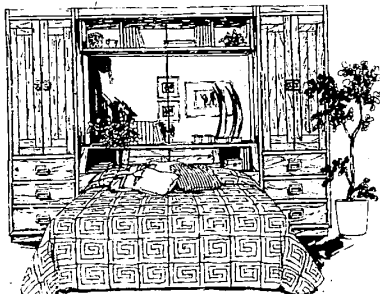
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