

'Super sewer' appeal blocked by Wayne board

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Western Wayne County Commissioners suffered a setback last week in their efforts to have county lawyers fight a state decision against the long-planned super sewer.

The full county board of commissioners refused to refer the controversy to county lawyers. Despite the setback, it is possible that Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and Wayne County Executive William Lucas will go to court to reverse a July 1 Department of Natural Resources decision. The DNR, which controls federal funding for sewer and wastewater treatment projects, refused to authorize the federal funds for the full 60-mile project.

The system, which has been planned for 20 years, calls for the giant sewer interceptor sewer drains to run through western Oakland County and western Wayne County to serve 16 communities in both counties. The system would have its own treatment plant.

In turning down funds, the DNR cited unresolved questions raised about the system by the city of Detroit.

Detroit Mayor Coleman Young has fought the system claiming it would unnecessarily have competing systems and that the new system would draw customers from the Detroit water and sewer system and businesses, industries and people away from Detroit.

Wayne County commissioners from Detroit lined up solidly Thursday against a motion by Commissioner Mary Dumas, R-Livonia, to have the county's corporation counsel "investigate the legal rights . . . and whether legal steps should be taken" to rescue the project.

"THE ODD part of this is," said Commission Chairman William Suzore, D-Wyandotte, "the very people attempting to sabotage the project are the ones whose constituents would most benefit."

"When Detroit unemployed got hungry this winter, they can thank the commissioners and their mayor who have contributed to this project's downfall," Suzore said.

Officials in Oakland County were disturbed by the DNR decision. Commerce Township supervisor Robert Long said, "I don't know where we'll go from here. It was our only viable alternative." Commerce is presently has a septic sewage system. Leaders in other Oakland communities hoping to improve their sewage systems said the DNR decision could force them to take costlier uncoordinated actions.

Meanwhile, western Wayne suburban officials are investigating shorter alternatives to the proposed \$289 million system, which is known officially as the Huron Valley Wastewater System. Plans called for the system to be on a north-south line roughly parallel to Haggerty Road.

The city of Detroit contends the northern Wayne County communities are obligated to use the Rouge Valley interceptor, which feeds wastewater into the Detroit sewage treatment plant.

DUMAS TOOK a harder line. The suburban western Wayne County commissioner said such an arrangement would result in heavy pollution of the Middle Rouge River, which runs through the middle of the county's Hines Park.

"The DNR admits — EPA says — Detroit admits

that the Rouge interceptor lacks the capacity to handle those wastes," she told the Wayne Commission.

It would allow the combined (storm and wastewater) sewage to overflow (during heavy rain) into the Rouge River, thereby creating a tremendous health hazard to the people of Wayne County who live on or near the Rouge or who make use of the county parks," she said.

Dumas said rejection of the project "will cause irreparable harm to future growth" in the suburbs, cost 5 million new construction jobs and throw away the \$4 million spent by suburban governments in advancing super sewer plans to Lansing and Washington.

Her resolution lost 6-6 as several of the 15 commissioners shuffled in and out of the room during the three-hour meeting.

"THIS IS premature," said Commissioner Samuel Turner, D-Detroit, of the effort to refer it to county lawyers.

"Before they (suburban officials) have had a chance to work up an agreement, we are right in here to authorize a lawsuit. I thought the concept advanced at the meeting (of suburbs) was an approach," Turner said.

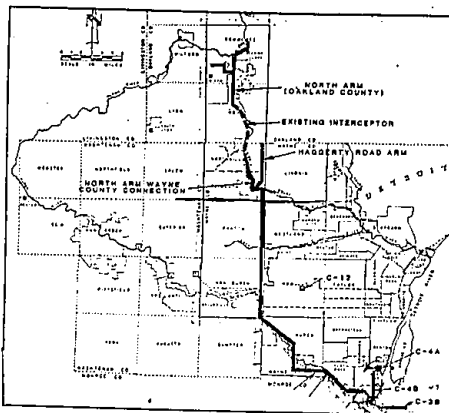
"I don't want a lawsuit," countered Jurkiewicz, co-sponsor of the Dumas resolution. "We are just taking a protectionist attitude toward our rights. We did all the things a board should do" to win approval of the project. These jurisdictional things (Detroit's questions) came into play only at the last moment," he said.

Dumas said the compromise being studied was "supposedly new, but is not new. It was studied and abandoned by the (former) Wayne County Board of Public Works and DNR years ago. The EPA and DNR said no way are you going to dump raw sewage into Wayne County."

OAKLAND County Executive Murphy and Deputy Executive Patrick Nowak were away from their offices Friday afternoon when contacted for an update on Oakland's plans to sue DNR for the super sewer money.

Wayne County Executive Lucas, at a Livonia Chamber of Commerce breakfast Friday, said he would wait a report from suburban officials before deciding his next move.

The committee of suburban officials is headed by Brownstown Township Supervisor Curt Boller. Lucas' 1982 campaign manager and the executive's choice to head the Wayne County Road Commission.



"Super sewer," as desired by Oakland and Wayne county suburbs, would have been a 60-mile interceptor feeding into a major sewage treatment plant in Brownstown Township.

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