

Sell road issue

Fessler sees no groundswell for ballot plan

By Tim Richard
staff writer

A steering committee is being formed this week to seek Oakland County voters' approval of a road revenue proposal on the Aug. 2 ballot.

"I don't see any groundswell of interest," warned state Sen. Richard Fessler, R-Commerce, Fessler, author of the law enabling counties to seek voter approval of road revenue, urged real estate firms, developers, chambers of commerce, local officials and road builders to start immediately on winning voter approval.

"There's a lot of work to do. No one's gonna pay you for it. No one's even gonna thank you for it," Fessler told the gathering of 35 in the county board auditorium in Pontiac.

Fessler called the meeting and was frankly disappointed at the turnout. Of 27 members of the County Board of Commissioners, only David Moffitt, R-Bloomfield Township, showed. Of 22 chambers of commerce he invited, only five sent representatives.

Moffitt said he would introduce a resolution at today's county board meeting supporting the ballot proposal.

The group will meet at 10 a.m. next Tuesday to continue organizing work.

THE ROAD commission requested an Aug. 2 ballot proposal to levy a \$25 fee on every registered motor vehicle in the county for 10 years. (Cars, trucks, commercial vehicles and motorcycles are in; trailers are out.)



Sen. Richard Fessler

If approved, it would raise \$19.6 million gross. The county road commission would get \$10.8 million, and cities and villages would divide the rest.

Brent Blair of the OCRC staff said the three-man panel has resolved to return every dollar to the community of origin and will allow the local boards to decide how the available money is to be spent.

Within a week, Blair said, the OCRC will have cost estimates for each community's priority list of projects.

"The road commission can't lead

it, but they have to be up front," said Fessler. The OCRC is prohibited by law from spending any of its funds on a voter campaign.

IF APPROVED, the Oakland levy would be the first of its kind in Michigan, where for decades all county road money has come from a share of state-collected gasoline and weight taxes.

"How will your cohorts (in the Legislature) take it if this loses?" a Troy chamber representative asked Fessler.

"I had to bash them to get this," Fessler replied. "I don't think they'll be too happy. I don't think they'll do it again (provide further local option laws)."

"If it doesn't work, you're not going to see it on the ballot (in other counties). If it works, you'll see other counties try it."

The key to voter support, Fessler said, is how the road commission's final plan affects each community.

THE BALLOT proposal grew out of research by OCRC managing director John L. Grubba into complaints of traffic congestion due to the county's economic growth.

Adding up every city, village and township's wish list, Grubba in 1986 produced a 10-year, \$740 million program of needs above available revenues.

Fessler, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, and other lawmakers produced a package of 10 bills affecting local and state revenues. But the only local option bill to pass was the \$25 vehicle registration measure now on the Oakland ballot.

Moffitt, the only county board member to attend Monday's gathering, suggested many commissioners are awaiting the May 31 filing deadline to determine whether they have primary opposition. Many don't want to advocate a tax if a primary opponent might be anti-tax.

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