

County commission eyes code of ethics

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Two county commissioners say it's time Oakland County developed a "comprehensive code of ethics" for employees as well as elected and appointed officials.

Commissioners Thomas A. Law and Marilyn E. Gosling introduced a resolution at last week's meeting of the board of commissioners calling for a code of ethics formulated by the personnel department, the prosecutor's office and the county's corporation counsel.

The code would be aimed at avoiding conflicts of interest, potential conflicts of interest as well as other questionable behavior, such as profiting from inside information, ac-

ording to the resolution introduced Thursday.

The resolution was referred to committee after prompting mixed reactions.

"I think it (a code of ethics) is a good idea," said board chairman Roy Riewald, R-Rochester. "I think we should look into this."

County Executive Daniel T. Murphy disagreed.

"I don't think it is necessary. Adults shouldn't need to be told what's right and what isn't."

LAW, A REPUBLICAN from West Bloomfield, said he favors a code of ethics because of what he considers to be "recent incidents of bad judgment."

"No ethics code is going to make dishonest people ethical," said Law,

a lawyer. "But there are a lot of very intelligent people around who don't have one ounce of common sense. I believe an ethics code will provide some guidelines."

Employees and officials live in a fishbowl, Law said. "We have to avoid even the appearance of impropriety."

He envisions a simple, but comprehensive code to be presented to an individual when he or she becomes part of county government.

"The code could also be reviewed periodically and signed," Law said. "We don't want anybody saying, 'I didn't know' something was prohibited."

Gosling, a Republican from Bloomfield Hills, said she envisions an ethics code that provides deter-

rence as well as punishment.

"Hopefully just having one will deter any questionable conduct," she said. "But any ethics code would have to include punishment."

Gosling said some internal county departments — including the health department and the prosecutor's office — already have some code of conduct or rules governing behavior.

But when rules of conduct exist, they are fragmented among a myriad of statutes, policies and merit system rules, Gosling said.

A SPECIFIC CODE of ethics would provide employees and elected and appointed officials with "standards of conduct by which to perform their duties."

Gosling and Law said rapid

growth over the last 15 years — when the county budget increased from \$49 million to more than \$285 million — has enlarged the nature of county government and simultaneously created circumstances for which there are no policies or rules.

While they believe most county employees and officials are ethical, in private discussions Gosling and Law said a recent incident suggests the need for a code of ethics.

That was the internal investigation conducted within the health department earlier this year, he said.

"It (the incident) could have been happenstance, but it told me something is drastically wrong."

He was referring to an internal in-

vestigation by health department officials after a series of newspaper articles disclosed that some inspectors were involved in questionable practices.

Two were fired, another demoted and three others disciplined after officials uncovered that they had not disclosed their interests in land development businesses.

Some of the employees are appealing their sanctions before the county's Personnel Appeal Board.

The code of ethics resolution was referred to two committees — Government and Transportation and Personnel for discussion and referral back to the board of commissioners, possibly as early as January.

Killings prompt look at ATM safety

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

If they're in serious trouble, customers at automatic teller machines should be able to reach out and touch someone, according to an Oakland County commissioner.

Marilynn E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills, has introduced a resolution asking the county's Emergency Management Division to look into the possibility of installing a 9-1-1 emergency phone system at ATM locations.

The county's 9-1-1 system enables a person to summon help almost im-

mediately by calling that three-digit number, rather than dialing a specific number for police, fire or ambulance service.

For most parts of the county system, the caller doesn't have to speak because his or her location is automatically flashed to the emergency dispatcher.

"There have been recurrent problems at some ATM locations," Gosling said in her resolution introduced at Thursday's meeting of the board of commissioners. "And use of ATMs carries a potential for criminal activity."

GOSLING SAID her measure was prompted by the Nov. 9 robbery of Glenn Tarr, a 53-year-old businessman who was forced at gun-point to withdraw \$500 from an ATM in Rochester Hills before he was killed.

Gosling, whose district includes Rochester Hills, admitted she didn't know what it would take to put 9-1-1 systems in ATMs. But she asked county officials to investigate and report back within 90 days.

A spokesperson for the National Bank of Detroit, however, wasn't sure the idea is practical.

"We are very concerned about the safety of our customers," said M. Renee Abee, 2nd vice president of public affairs for NBD, the bank that owns the ATM from which Glenn Tarr was forced to withdraw money before being killed.

"We are constantly reviewing security procedures," she said. "But I don't think a 9-1-1 number would have helped Mr. Tarr."

Abee said her bank experimented with an emergency phone system several years ago but discarded the idea after phones "were stolen, broken and otherwise vandalized."

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