

Board starts year with organizational meeting

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

The new year started on a cordial note for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, as Democrats and Republicans put aside partisan differences during its organizational meeting to re-elect leaders and confirm committee appointments.

But within minutes of re-electing Roy Rewold of Rochester and Nancy McConnell of Bloomfield Hills as chairperson and vice chairperson, respectively, the two factions were again at each other's throat.

The disputes were not vicious. But they were spirited, with each party claiming the differences underscored the philosophical differences of each party.

Issues highlighting the partisan debate were:

- Filling the vacancy created by the resignation of Anne M. Hobart of Millford, who resigned as commissioner from the Fourth District (all of White Lake Township and part of Waterford Township) to take a job with the county's solid waste program.

In a dispute that carried over

from last year, Republicans again rejected a Democratic call for a special election to fill the vacancy and appointed Donna R. Huntoon, who is resigning as a trustee in White Lake Township and a member of the Oakland County Jury Commission to accept the position.

Republicans, including Marilyn E. Gosling of Bloomfield Hills, argued that appointing a successor would eliminate the need for an expensive special election — something that seems particularly prudent since residents will nominate and elect a new commissioner later this year.

Furthermore, "Donna Huntoon knows government, knows Oakland County and knows her constituents," said Donn L. Wolf, Farmington Hills, who supported her appointment.

Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, said a special election would be preferable because it would more accurately reflect the will of the residents. "Let the people in the Fourth District select their representative," he said, "not members of the Republican caucus."

Pernick also argued any appointee would be the incumbent in the upcoming election, a designation that would work against any challenger, Republican or Democrat.

• Eliminating the board rule requiring at least one night meeting for commissioners each quarter.

Democrats unsuccessfully argued meeting at night — instead of the usual time of 9:30 a.m. — provided people with day jobs more opportu-

nity to attend the board or at least attend the meeting to see county government in action.

Republicans said the board could still meet at night if a majority of commissioners thought it was advisable. But the night meetings were not attracting bigger crowds, Republicans said, and thus did not justify their reason for being.

"I thought they (night meetings) were a good idea at first," said Donald E. Bishop, Rochester. "But very few people were showing up. We got better attendance during the day than at night."

• Eliminating the Health and Human Services Committee — one of six standing committees through which the board does much of its work. Republicans wanted to streamline government by distributing the workload of that committee — which include matters pertaining to the probate court, Children's Village, Community Mental Health and public health concerns such as AIDS — to the Public Services and General Government committees.

Democrats argued having one less committee would cut down on the amount of deliberation and scrutiny each issue would receive. It would also mean fewer meetings, they said, something they felt was not warranted in view of their annual salary of about \$20,000.

With one less committee, said Dennis M. Aaron, D-Oak Park, the average commissioner would attend about 72 meetings per year, bring

the per-meeting salary would be about \$275 each.

Democrats, outnumbered by Republicans 19 to 6, could do little more than raise what they considered to be philosophical issues. Republicans didn't see it that way.

"It was a talkative meeting," said Bishop. "But there was very little substance and a lot of posturing."

Republicans, for example, pointed out that on at least one occasion, in 1971, Democrats appointed one of their own to a vacancy rather than calling a special election. Where was the principle of letting the voters speak then, Republicans asked.

The sometimes heated discussion had one measurable affect, however: A routine meeting expected to last 60 minutes took more than three hours.

Philosophical differences aside, Democrats and Republicans unanimously supported Rewold and McConnell who will be serving their fourth consecutive one-year terms as chairperson and vice chairperson, respectively.

Rewold was village president in Rochester before it became a city in 1969 and served as a city councilman and mayor. "We've got a lot of hard work ahead of us," he predicted for 1990.

McConnell has been a GOP activist for more than three decades and has served on the Republican State Committee. "This should be the year we wrap up the county's (\$470 million) solid waste program," she said when asked about the coming year.

The following are the new committee assignments:

- Finance Committee: G. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, chairperson; Gosling, vice chairperson; Hubert Price Jr., D-Pontiac, minority vice chairperson; Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham; Bishop; John E. Olson, R-Huntington Woods; Mark W. Chester, R-Troy; John G. Pappageorge, R-Troy; Pernick and James D. Ferrens, D-Pontiac.

- General Government: Richard G. Skarritt, R-Milford, chairperson; Jensen, vice chairperson; Aaron, minority chairperson; Thomas A. Law, R-West Bloomfield; Bishop; Wolf; Huntoon and Ruel E. McPherson, D-Hazel Park.

- Personnel: John P. Calandro, R-Novi, chairperson; Law, vice chairperson; Lillian Jaffe Oaks, D-Southfield, minority vice chairperson; Gosling; Susan G. Kuhn, R-Clawson; David L. Moffitt, R-Farmington Hills; Wolf; Aaron and Price.

- Planning and Building: Larry Crake, R-Pontiac, chairperson; Chester, vice chairperson; Susan Kuhn; McConnell; Ruth Johnson, R-Holly; Michael D. McCulloch, R-Royal Oak; Oaks and A. Madeline Luxon, D-Ferndale.

- Public Services: Richard D. Kuhn Jr., R-Drayton Plains, chairperson; Johnson, vice chairperson; McPherson, minority chairperson; Moffitt; McCulloch; Pappageorge; Huntoon and Luxon.

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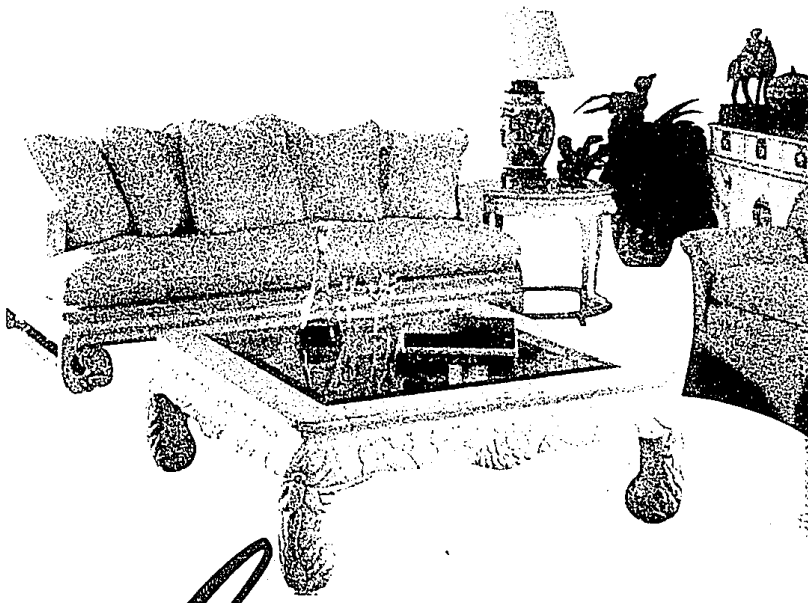
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