

# County Dems suggest fund for urban blight

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

Oakland County should establish a fund to enable communities to borrow money for redevelopment and to save off urban blight, according to the chairman of the Democratic caucus of the Board of Commissioners.

The county should also consolidate the Road Commission, the Drain Commission and Department of Public Works to eliminate duplication and address Oakland's worsening traffic congestion, Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, was to say in an address today before the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

Pernick's recommendations were expected to be part of the Democratic "State of the County" message — designed to outline Democratic priorities for county government.

The Democratic message comes exactly one month after County Executive Daniel T. Murphy, a Republican, presented his annual State of the County address.

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers asked for advanced copies of both addresses to serve as the basis of news stories. Democrats complied with the request, Murphy declined.

PERNICK, WHO has been a commissioner since 1969, is the senior Democrat on the board.

He said presenting the Democratic perspective on the role of county government is one of the ways his party, outnumbered 20 to 7, can play a constructive role in government.

"We've been doing this (giving a Democratic point of view) on and off for years," said Pernick. "We don't expect the course of government to drastically change because of our message."

"But we do see some of our good ideas taking root and eventually coming to fruition," he said.

Commissioner Roy Rowold, a Republican and chairman of the board of commissioners, said he, as party spokesperson, is not likely to respond to the Democratic message. "I prob-

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Lawrence Pernick  
D-Southfield



ably won't even respond after I've had time to review it," he said.

Pernick's 12-page state of the county address covered a wide range of topics, including:

- Trash, or solid waste. The county must continue long-range

planning for a county-owned landfill, he said.

This could be the most controversial part of the Democrats' message because it again raises the possibility of Oakland owning at least one landfill as part of its \$470 million solid waste program.

Original plans — devised over nearly two decades — called for up to \$200 million for a landfill. But that was abandoned in the face of strenuous protests from communities considered as possible locations for the landfill.

Plans currently call for recycling, incineration and landfilling on a contract basis at private landfills that exist, but must be expanded.

Pernick said Oakland should continue to explore existing plans for a county-owned landfill.

- Roads. Democrats advocate combining the road commission, drain commission and the department of public works to eliminate duplication and to promote efficiency — even though such a consolidation would require enabling state legislation.

PERNICK AND fellow Democrats have been critical of the road commission, particularly because of what they consider to be a lack of accountability on road and highway construction and maintenance.

Even so, the Democrats' message calls for the board to provide more county funds. "The county's (annual) contribution for roads should increase (from \$1 million) to \$2 million or even \$3 million," Pernick said.

- A county redevelopment fund, called the "Build for Tomorrow" fund.

The county would use its bonding power to raise and unspecified amount of money to lend communities — especially Ferndale, Oak Park and other southern cities — to help fight urban blight.

A similar system is used to finance water and sewer construction, said Pernick.

- Taxes.

Pernick said the average Oakland homeowner may be paying \$300 or more per year in "hidden" property taxes.

That hidden tax could be reduced, he said, if the county reduces millage rates proportionally when property taxes increase more than the rate of inflation.

## Angry judge takes herself off civil case

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

Claiming she can no longer be totally impartial because of "an unwarranted attack" on her integrity, Oakland Circuit Judge Jessica R. Cooper Wednesday voluntarily removed herself from a case involving the law firm of an attorney she is suing.

But not before denying a demand that she disqualify herself and chastising the plaintiff and his lawyer for attempting to "embarrass and harass" the court by calling her romantic involvement to the attention of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission.

The chastized lawyer was not allowed to speak in court. He later told reporters, however, Cooper's conduct — Wednesday in court as well as her previous handling of the case — were a "egregious" violation of law and court rules.

"She violates ethical canons" by not disclosing her involvement with the lawyer and his firm, and then denies our motion that she disqualify herself, said Ronald J. Prebenda.

"Then she makes herself out to be the good guy by voluntarily stepping aside," Prebenda said in a telephone interview. "She should have done that in the first place."

AT ISSUE is Cooper's handling of the suit filed by Karl G. Blomquist, an engineer, who last year claimed Lincoln Automotive Systems Inc., of Troy, wrongly dismissed him after another engineer gave sensitive information developed by General Motors to an engineer working for the Ford Motor Co. Both the plaintiff and his attorney are from the Farmington area.

Cooper dismissed the case, but without disclosing she was dating Stuart Sinai, a member of the firm of Schluskel, Lifton, Simon, Rands, Galvin & Jackler of Southfield that is defending the auto components company.

Blomquist is appealing Cooper's dismissal. But last December he complained to the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission, which has disciplinary jurisdiction over state judges.

Blomquist also complained Cooper did not disclose she retained the firm in 1988 to represent her in a securities matter.

Blomquist said Cooper should have disclosed her involvement with Sinai, a member of the defendant's law firm, so another judge could be assigned to the case.

Not disclosing that involvement impaired his chances of getting an impartial hearing, Blomquist complained.

COOPER WAS obviously angry when she addressed the suit in her crowded courtroom.

She said there is no law or canon

**'She violates ethical canons by not disclosing her involvement, then makes herself out to be the good guy by voluntarily stepping aside. She should have done that in the first place.'**

— Ronald J. Prebenda  
Farmington Hills attorney



**The plaintiff and his lawyer attempted to "embarrass and harass" the court by calling her romantic involvement to the attention of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission.**

— Jessica R. Cooper  
Oakland circuit judge

of ethics against a judge dating an attorney.

Nor is there, she said, any opinion or requirement that a judge disqualify an entire law firm because he or she dated a member of that firm.

Cooper did not deny dating Sinai, 48. But "... this judge states she is not married; I do not cohabitate with him; I am not engaged to him and does not have any financial relationship with any member" of Sinai's law firm, Cooper said.

Cooper previously declined to talk with reporters about the complaint against her before the tenure commission. But copies of her opinion — which referred to Blomquist's complaint — were made available to the press immediately following her comments in court.

While Cooper was angry, Prebenda was almost livid.

He stormed out of the courtroom and, as reporters approached, said he was too busy to respond, but could be reached later at his office.

"Judge Cooper is wrong and she knows it," he said. Any judge is obligated to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

**SHE IS LOOKING** at this from a very narrow perspective, Prebenda said, "from the narrow perspective of a judge."

She should look at it from the perspective of my client, he continued. "He goes to court seeking a fair hearing. And the judge has a relationship with the firm defending the company he is suing."

Prebenda said while Cooper was dating Sinai, she attended parties and professional functions also attended by members of his firm.

Thus while having a romantic link with Sinai, the judge had the opportunity to develop a social relationship with his coworkers in the law firm, Prebenda said.

On one occasion, Cooper was the sole judge at a seminar for Sinai's law firm, Prebenda said.

The motion to disqualify came before Cooper because the law firm claimed the judge made a clerical error in assessing his client \$1,000 in court costs, Prebenda said.

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