

Seniors want new county exec to acknowledge them

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

There's a good reason why the 24 members of Oakland County's Senior Citizens Advisory Council are eager to be given a mission, mandate, or even just a pat on the back from County Executive L. Brooks Patterson.

"We don't have all the time in the world," said member Leroy Wheatley, a Birmingham resident.

Formed by former county executive Dan Murphy in 1987, the council is supposed to collect, collate and germinate ideas regarding how county government policies might account for and/or help Oakland's 118,000 seniors.

However, some council members are nearly convinced that Patterson opposes their work.

"We've got a new county executive, and he doesn't like us," said first vice chairman Leo Mahany at the group's monthly meeting Monday.

"Maybe this council should be reporting to the county commissioner and not the executive," Wheatley said.

Chairwoman Rosemary Clark, a

Bloomfield Township resident, is more tactful. "We haven't had a strong mandate from (Patterson) yet, but we feel very confident that he will endorse (the council). We're just not top priority, and that's understandable."

Not enough time

Patterson said Tuesday that he in fact does support the work of the council. "Anytime we can get input from an affected group it will help us keep in sync with the people we're trying to serve," he said.

So why hasn't Patterson told the council members he supports them? "I just haven't had time, frankly."

Patterson said he intends to ask the county board of commissioners to update the senior advisory council and see that the six empty seats are filled. (Two of those empty seats are in the districts of commissioners Lawrence Pernick, D-Southfield, and Kevin Millner, R-Keego Harbor.)

Commissioner Marilyn Goaling, R-Bloomfield Hills, a senior citizen herself, called the senior council "a vigorous group of peo-

ple whose talents are not being used. They haven't quite known what they were there for. They've been kind of in limbo."

Said Clark "I'd like more peo- ple on the back than we're being getting."

Second vice chairman Lou Kondur, a West Bloomfield Township inhabitant, said the council represents a wealth of information and wisdom that county government officials could be tapping into. "We speak and we think from our hearts and we're sincere in what we say," he said. "And we're experts in our communities," Clark added.

Wanna be a member?

Folks interested in becoming members of the council, or speaking out on some issue, or making a suggestion may call Clark at 626-1359. One of the requirements for membership is that you be up on all the senior-aid activities in your community.

This is important, Clark said, because council members can share information about how senior organizations in their respective communities run their vari-

ous programs. A good program in Rochester, for example, might be duplicated in Farmington. But without the interaction on the council, Rochester and Farmington senior organizations might never have contact with each other.

Among the council's chief concerns is the dire economic circumstances some senior citizens are mired in. On Monday the members discussed the plans for help and funding they heard at a recent public hearing of the Michigan Office of Service to the Aging.

"When you listen to these people it will tear you apart. That could be very easily if we had

some reverse in our life," said Kondur, who was particularly moved by the testimony of a man with Alzheimer's disease.

Council member Patricia Somerville, a Rochester Hills resident, said she has seen seniors in the supermarket put two of three potatoes back because they couldn't afford them all.

Taxes are too high

Everyone lamented the fact that state and federal contributions to senior aid programs is drying up with no end in sight while taxes move in the other direction. "We're not going to get

any more money from anybody," said Mahany.

Southfield representative Gerald Kubn said, "All of us are up to here with taxes and millages and everything that takes a buck out of our pocket."

The senior council, on the other hand, doesn't take a buck out of anyone's pocket. With a budget of zero and members who work for free, the cost of running the council amounts to a few hours of electric lighting in the county building when meetings occur, a pot of county coffee and the time it takes a secretary to type up the record of each meeting.

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