

Supporters ready to change SMART

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Confident of victory in Tuesday's election, SMART backers say they are ready to make changes to encourage communities to rejoin the system.

"We're ready to revamp (the transit system) from the bottom up" to persuade communities that withdrew from SMART to get back in, Deputy County Executive John L. Grubba said Wednesday at a press conference at the Troy Marriott.

Possible changes include new neighborhood-based routes and increased municipal credits (or state money) to communities that are part of SMART, according to Grubba and business, labor and community officials.

They gathered to gain voice support for the SMART millage proposal on Tuesday's ballot. In that election, voters in 20 Oakland communities will decide

whether they should raise property taxes by one-third of a mill to provide funds for SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation).

Similar ballot proposals have already been approved in Macomb and Wayne counties, and officials were confident it will pass in Oakland.

"We're not home yet," cautioned County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. "We let ourselves be lulled into a false sense of security."

Patterson acknowledged that officials have no contingency plans in the event the SMART millage proposal fails in Oakland, although they admit failure would be a "disaster" for people and businesses dependent on bus transportation.

But polling indicates a backup plan won't be needed. "We're running 7 to 3 in favor of the SMART millage," said Matthew W. Wir-

gau, a Bloomfield Township resident who is chairman of the SMART board of directors.

The biggest danger, Wirgau and others said, is a letdown in effort to get out the (pro-SMART) vote. That effort was put together and financed — by much of the same business-labor-government coalition as was at the press conference.

Ironically, Patterson, Wirgau and Grubba — among the most vocal supporters of SMART — won't be able to vote on Tuesday's ballot proposal. Their respective communities — Waterford, Bloomfield Township and Milford — are among the 41 that have opted out of SMART.

Those communities contend SMART is mismanaged, inefficient and too expensive. They favor letting SMART die and replacing it with a community-based system involving privatization.

Patterson, Wirgau and Grubba said they are mindful of that criticism and ready to restructure SMART. It will be a system they want to rejoin, said Wirgau.

'Walsh' Street Journal workshop



Local teachers attend: Attending the recent Walsh College workshop on the use of the *Wall Street Journal* are (from left) Dan Hamann, Walsh College's director of high school relations; Farmington High economics teachers Floyd Ross and Linda Siggia; Melinda Patterson Grenier, editor and publisher of the *Wall Street Journal* classroom edition. "We sponsor the edition to expose high school students to timely, informative business information," said Hamann. "It's our way of investing in the business leaders of tomorrow."

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