

Attorney to chair charter commission

By Chad Selweski, Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Gathering for their historic inaugural meeting, the Macomb County Charter Commission on Thursday unanimously elected Jacob Femminineo Jr., a prominent Mount Clemens attorney, to serve as chairman of the 26-member panel.

Femminineo promised a quick, orderly process of writing the county's first "home rule" charter— a county constitution that would put an elected executive at the helm.

"I will do everything in my power to ensure that we, as a Charter Commission, do everything necessary to create a great charter for the county of Macomb," said Femminineo, 38, a Democrat.

Holding their first organizational meeting since being elected Nov. 4, the Charter Commission also selected other officers, made plans to fill two vacancies on the commission, and agreed to solicit proposals for a legal team to assist in the drafting process.

Femminineo said that he hopes the panel will create a government leadership structure that will prevent the chronic budget deficits and employee layoffs that have plagued the Board of Commissioners. He supports a charter that would reduce the part-time board from 26 commissioners to seven and he's open to the prospect of giving them full-time status.

"If it's down that low (seven), full time is a possibility because the commissioners will have a greater number of constituents to deal with," he said.

The size of the board is among the issues that will be studied by separate committees formed by the commission. Other issues that will be hot topics include: taxes, spending, consolidating departments, ethics rules, term limits, economic development, environmental protection and road improvements.

The committees will be established at the commission's final organizational meeting on Dec. 23 at 5 p.m. An executive director, who will guide the process, may also be selected at that time.

Though other locations are under consideration, for now the commission meets at the county Administration Building in downtown Mount Clemens.

The panel will essentially serve as a constitutional convention. The document they produce will be presented to voters for approval, probably in August 2009. By law, they have 180 days to complete their work but Femminineo said he hopes they can finish much sooner.

Among the other actions taken Thursday by the commission:

Commissioner Marilyn Lane of Fraser was elected vice chair of the group; Commissioner James Kelly of Eastpointe was elected secretary; and **Commissioner David Willis** of Center Line was elected treasurer. All three are Democrats and they were all elected unanimously.

Though the commission is comprised of 22 Democrats and just four Republicans, GOP Commissioner Harry Awdey of Armada proposed the creation of a minority vice chair position to serve as a "voice for northern Macomb County." His motion died due to lack of support.

The resignations of Commissioner-elect Dan Acciavatti of Chesterfield Township and Commissioner-elect Jan Haggerty of Roseville were accepted. Acciavatti, a state representative, was ruled ineligible to serve on the Charter Commission. Haggerty, a Roseville city councilwoman, decided on Monday not to serve because her husband, county Commissioner Leonard Haggerty, is seriously ill.

The Charter Commission will accept applications for the two vacancies until noon on Dec. 10. They will meet at 7 p.m. that evening to make the appointments. By law, they must choose a replacement from the same party — a Republican to fill Acciavatti's seat, and a Democrat to serve Jan Haggerty's term.

Three Republican candidates came forward Thursday to announce their interest in the District 25 (southern Clinton Township) appointment. They are:

Maria Silamianos, a business owner; Charles Medley, a sheriff's department command officer; and David Joseph, a probation officer for the Macomb County Juvenile Court.

Medley, an Anchor Bay school board member, lost to Acciavatti in the District 25 GOP primary. Joseph was an unsuccessful candidate in November for Chesterfield Township trustee.

Haggerty has endorsed Nick Ciaramitaro, a union official and a former state representative, as her replacement. The appointment will be for District 21 (northern Roseville).

A motion passed to solicit proposals, including pro bono offers, from law firms and law schools to serve as the commission's legal advisers. Proposals must be turned in to the county clerk's office by Dec. 18 at 5 p.m.

County Clerk Carmella Sabaugh was appointed to serve as the commission's clerk. Sabaugh's staff will handle all the clerical duties, at a cost not to exceed \$40,000.

In the audience for Thursday's historic session were several county commissioners, county Prosecutor Eric Smith and Michigan Democratic Party Chairman Mark Brewer, who has advocated for a charter/executive government for nearly 24 years.

The group's chairman, Femminineo, was elected to the commission in District 17 (Mount Clemens and a portion of Clinton Township) after waging an aggressive, high-profile campaign. A former Macomb County Bar Association president, Femminineo spent \$26,000 on his election effort, relying on strong financial support from the legal community.

Shortly after the Nov. 4 election, Femminineo began lobbying for the commission chairmanship. Three other commissioners were also quietly vying for the top post but none had their name placed in nomination on Thursday.