

Last-minute rush

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As the Macomb County Charter Commission faces its final three days of deliberations, pesky issues that still linger include pay and benefits for county officials, control of the Road Commission, term limits for some officials and special status for the Senior Services Department.

The Charter Commission will meet today to address a packed agenda with 19 proposed amendments to the charter document — Macomb's first county constitution. The final session will be held Wednesday before the charter is sent to Gov. Jennifer Granholm for her approval.

A continuing sticking point for the Charter Commission has been the issue of compensation for the 26-member county board, which would be chopped down to 13 members by the charter.

The part-time commissioners earn \$32,000 in pay and qualify for a full slate

of fringe benefits. Charter Commission Chairman Jake Femminineo proclaimed the compensation issue dead after two amendments were defeated last week by a sharply divided Charter Commission. But Femminineo predicted that the issue will be revived during the 2010 campaigns for the new 13-member board.

"For now, I think it's just going to die a lonely death," said Femminineo, a Mount Clemens Democrat, who predicted the charter will remain silent on the matter. "The good thing is that part of their (commissioner candidates') campaign can say that the Board of Commissioners should not receive retirement benefits and they should not get health care and they should not be paid more than \$15,000 a year.

"It ... gives the power to the people. Voters will hold these commissioners to their campaign promises."

Charter Commissioner Harry Awdey saw his charter amendment calling for an end to benefits for the part-time Board of Commissioners go down to defeat last week. An Armada Republican, Awdey said certain fiscal policy provisions in the charter could become "poison pills" that doom the document's chances of winning voter approval in November.

He then paused and said poison pill is the wrong terminology. In some cases, he explained, "we're being stupid and irresponsible."

"What the charter commissioners need to realize is that hardly anyone in Macomb County wants the part-time commissioners to receive a pension after eight years or thinks they're worth what they get paid or that they should set their own salaries," said the outspoken charter

commissioner.

Awdey is also unhappy with the charter's formula for county executive pay, which withstood two competing amendments last week that went down to defeat. The proposed charter calls for the executive to be paid eight times the salary of the lowest-paid, full-time county employee.

That would put the initial salary for the elected executive at about \$140,000. In comparison, Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson is paid \$180,658, and Wayne County Executive Robert Ficano receives \$171,690.

When the Macomb County Charter Commission meets Monday night, here are some key issues on the agenda:

Approval of language that would allow voters to decide whether to fold the Macomb County Road Commission into the new government, under the control of the county executive. Legislation to make this change legal, and allow for a November ballot proposal, was approved by the state House and Senate and signed into law by Granholm on Friday.

Term limits for the executive and commissioners that would force officials to leave office after 12 years. One amendment mandates a limit of three 4-year terms for the executive, and another seeks six 2-year terms for commissioners.

Restricting the size of the executive's office staff, which can be hired without confirmation from the board. One proposal calls for board approval of the executive's choice for deputy executive. Another plan would allow the executive to appoint three administrative assistants without consulting the commissioners.

An amendment that would give the Senior Citizen Services Department special status by being ingrained into the charter. The amendment is proposed by **Charter Commissioner David Willis**, a Center Line Democrat, whose mother, Angela Willis, is the senior department director.