BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS          COUNTY OF MARQUETTE          MARCH 9, 1987

The Marquette County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session on Monday, March 9, 1987 at 5:00 p.m. in Room 231 of the Henry A. Skewis Annex, Marquette, Michigan.

Chairperson Lowe called the meeting to order, roll call was taken and the following roll recorded:
Absent: None.

A Salute to the Flag was given followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairperson Lowe opened the meeting for public comment, none was forthcoming.

Chairperson Lowe opened the public hearing by stating the purpose was for taking public comment regarding proposed user fee increases in the following County Departments; Health Department; Register of Deeds; Resource Management/Development; Sheriff; Equalization; County Clerk; and County Treasurer. Chairperson Lowe also advised the citizens in attendance on the rules and procedures set forth for public hearings, and requested anyone wishing to speak to limit their comments to five minutes, and submit their name in writing to the Chairperson or County Clerk.

Chairperson Lowe invited comment first from Mr. Chris Polischuk of D.M. Griffiths and Assoc. regarding the Marquette County User Fee Study. Mr. Polischuk declined comment at this time but will answer any questions that the Board, Staff, or the public may have in regards to the study.

Dennis Aloia, County Administrator, made an opening statement highlighting the following points. Marquette County has struggled with diminishing financial resources while costs continue to rise. The primary example of this is the County’s loss of $867,000.00 in revenue sharing funds. Another loss of $160,000.00 resulted in the reduction of the state equalized value of U.P. Generating Company. Also, in the near future is the potential loss in specific ore tax revenue from Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company, which is estimated between five-hundred-thousand dollars and one-million-one-hundred-thousand dollars.

The County Board took it upon themselves to improve the County’s financial stability by reducing costs and increasing revenues. A job freeze was instituted last year which saved approximately $130,000.00, and a capital improvements freeze was instituted in 1986 and saved an additional $230,000.00. The County Board also instituted a policy to fund capital improvement projects by utilizing the interest of the tax delinquent revolving fund while protecting the integrity of the fund. Another action was the consideration of user fee increases, and to that end the County Board hired D.M. Griffiths and Assoc. to analyze county user fees and evaluate potential sources of revenue. The Board included $175,000.00 in the 1987 budget in new user fees.

D.M. Griffiths’ study was completed several months ago and indicated clearly that Marquette County is underrecovering the full cost of many services in the amount of $1,267,794.00. All fees studied by D.M. Griffiths and Assoc. were analyzed by County Staff and reviewed by effected department heads. Recommendations were made regarding user fees that would be fair and equitable. The total recommended fee increases amount to $258,698.00, of which we can expect to receive only three-fourths for the remainder of this year.

Chairperson Lowe opened the meeting for comment, first by the appropriate department head or staff representative and then to the citizens attending the hearing.
Health Department

Randall M. Johnson, M.D., Director of the Marquette County Health Department, reviewed the proposed user fee increases for the Marquette County Health Department amounting to approximately $87,752.00 in four areas; a) the environmental health division; b) the health education division; c) the field nursing division; and d) the clinical services division.

Mr. Mike Roche, Marquette Chamber of Commerce, expressed concern regarding a 400% increase in restaurant inspection fees, and suggested the Health Department re-examine the amount spent on inspections. Perhaps it is too much. Mr. Roche also asked several questions and received following answers. It has been three years since the environmental health division increased any fees; the County cannot charge more than any service actually costs; it appears there is a large increase in some fees because the present fee is small; and Marquette County is the first County in the State of Michigan to implement a user fee study.

Mr. Don Potvin, of Marquette, expressed opposition to the increased inspection fees for restaurants. He doesn't believe the costs of the services are justified and suggests serious consideration be given by the Health Department to study costs. Perhaps the Health Department should consider contracting out inspection services.

There is no data available at this time as to what other counties are charging in comparison to cost for services, but Mr. Chris Polischuk of D.M. Griffiths and Associates indicated that Eaton and Wayne Counties are currently undergoing a user fee study.

Register of Deeds

There is no current fee being charged for the tract index and the proposed fee is $15.00 per hour or $250.00 a month for frequent users, which would generate additional revenues of approximately $29,000.00. D.M. Griffiths and Assoc. has identified $54,468.00 in total cost to annually maintain the tract index.

Mr. Eldor of Marquette, representing the Elder Agency and serves as the District Vice-President for the Michigan Association of Realtors, stated he is definitely opposed to the leasing of the tract index by a private firm. Mr. Elder described Marquette County's tract index as one of the finest to be found anywhere. The cost to realtors and abstractors would be double the proposed user fee if the tract index was leased out. Mr. Elder suggested perhaps a better way to generate revenue was to increase the recording fees in the Register of Deeds Office. Ultimately, no matter how revenue is generated, the cost will be passed on to the buyers and sellers of property. Mr. Elder recommended the $15.00 per hour fee be broken down to smaller time increments for infrequent users, but pointed out this will require additional staff to keep records of the time and prepare bills.

Administrator Aloia explained that infrequent users will be required to pay as they use the tract index.

Seth Johnson, an infrequent user of the tract index, spoke against leasing out the tract index. Mr. Johnson declared the tract index is a public record, and under the Freedom of Information Act it should be available free of charge to the public. Chief Civil Counsel, Gary Walker, pointed out the Freedom of Information Act provides for public access to public records, but the public body may charge reasonable costs incurred in the reproduction and maintaining of such records. Charging user fees for the tract index is not a violation of the Freedom of Information Act. Administrator Aloia also pointed out it is the infrequent user which costs the County more than the professional. Infrequent users require more staff assistance and are less familiar with the tract index.
Earl Yelle, Sanda Township Supervisor, expressed his opposition to any increased user fee for any service in Marquette County. Mr. Yelle contended this was a poor day to hold a public hearing in that the units of government were conducting board of review hearings. Restaurant owners pay high property taxes for County services, and increased inspection fees are unfair.

Resource Management/Development Department

County Administrator, Dennis Aloia, commented on the proposed fee increases in four areas of the Resource Management/Development Department. The increases in camping fees at Perkins Park fall within the realm of what other agencies such as cities, counties and states charge for use at camp sites. The new fees will generate an additional $5,000.00 revenue for Marquette County. In the areas of zoning appeals, conditional use permits, zoning changes, rezoning permits, etc., no action can be taken by the County Board until there is an amendment to the zoning ordinance. This cannot be accomplished until public hearings are held by the Planning Commission. The additional revenue generated from these sources will amount to several hundred dollars.

Sheriff's Department

County Administrator, Dennis Aloia, recommended the work pass fees of $7.00 a day to be increased to $10.00 a day, which would provide additional revenue of $5,649.00. Also, fees for report copies would be increased from $2.00 to $3.00 providing additional revenue of $362.00. Chief Civil Counsel, Gary Walker, pointed out the requirements to monitor work passes in the Sheriff's Department. The inmate must be checked out when leaving for work, and then checked back in to see if there has been any use of alcohol or drugs, or if they are carrying weapons, etc. Places of employment must also be called to see if the person is at work.

Equalization Department

County Administrator, Dennis Aloia, explained the increase in fees for the tax roll preparation will have to be negotiated with the townships and will not take effect until 1988. The current fee is thirty-three cents per parcel and the proposed fee would be sixty cents per parcel. This will generate an additional revenue of $9,147.00.

County Clerk

There are no recommended fee increases in the County Clerk's Department.

County Treasurer's Department

There are no fee increases proposed in this department.

District Court

The District Court was not on the agenda because the fees are statutorily set by the Judges. They went into effect on March 2, 1987.

The following statements were made by several Commissioners.

Comm. DeFant pointed out we may call user fees a subsidy for the use of a County service, but no matter what they are called, we are raising government revenues and therefore the user fee is the same as a tax. Comm. DeFant doesn't like it, but it is a less painful way of raising revenue than a millage. It may possibly come to that in the future.
Comm. Corkin had no argument with the user fee concept. At budget time he maintained we must cut costs and raise revenues to balance the budget.

Comm. Seppanen contended using the user fee study is more than just for the purpose of raising revenue, it is also, how we are going to allocate the revenue? Raising revenues will also require the County Board to set priorities.

Comm. Valente felt if a citizen uses a County service they should pay for the service.

Chairperson Lowe opened the meeting for further public comment regarding the user fees proposal. None was forthcoming.

Chairperson Lowe declared the public hearing portion of the meeting closed.

It was moved by Comm. DeFant, supported by Comm. Seppanen and unanimously carried that the County Board take final action on the user fee proposal at the next regular County Board meeting of March 17, 1987.

Chairperson Lowe opened the meeting for public comment, none was forthcoming.

There being no further business to come before the special meeting of the County Board the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

David J. Roberts
Marquette County Clerk
MARQUETTE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL MEETING
Monday, March 9, 1987, 5:00 p.m.
Room 231, Henry A. Skewis Annex, Marquette, Michigan

1. ROLL CALL.
2. SALUTE TO THE FLAG AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.
3. PUBLIC COMMENT.
4. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA.
5. Public Hearing of proposed user fees for the following County Departments.
   a. Health Department
   b. Register of Deeds
   c. Resource Management/Development
   d. Sheriff
   e. Equalization
   f. County Clerk
   g. County Treasurer
   (Commissioners please bring materials that were previously distributed)
6. PUBLIC COMMENT.
7. ANNOUNCEMENTS.
8. ADJOURNMENT.