

County's plans for solid waste near approval OK

By Suzie Rollins Singer
Staff writer

By Aug. 3, Oakland County should have a complete solid waste plan outlining proposed rubbish incineration and landfill sites for the next 20 years.

That's the day the Oakland County Board of Commissioners is expected to adopt the plan that's been on the drafting table for four years. After it's official, it will be sent to Oakland's 61 cities, townships and villages for final approval.

It must be adopted by two-thirds of the local governing bodies, although all municipalities will participate in the plan once accepted.

"After it's adopted, the next step will be signing contracts with the individual communities. There's no way to escape it, because if we don't adopt our plan, the state will draft its own," said George Schutte and the county supervisor of solid waste.

In 1975, the state legislature adopted Public Act 641 which became effective last Dec. 31. It

mandates counties must pass a 20-year plan for their garbage disposal. The deadline for plans to be submitted to the state is this month — although Schutte said the deadline can be stretched through August.

A SOLID waste consultant hired by the county has worked with a volunteer solid waste committee, comprised of field experts, to design the plan. Throughout the drafting period it has been reviewed by community representatives and disposal companies.

The plan calls for developing four landfills during the next 20 years, one of which is presently under construction in Lyon Township. Four energy recovery facilities (where garbage is burned and turned into steam to heat adjacent buildings) and two transfer station sites will also be constructed.

The other three landfills are proposed for Holly, Orion Township and Pontiac Township. All four will be privately owned.

To be sure the landfills are sanitary, county ordinances require that six inches of soil be

placed on top of each rubbish deposit. The sanitary landfills will also be equipped with special pipes that collect the leachate draining from the buried refuse and carry it to sealed collection tanks, he explained.

"It really works best to have private industry run the landfills and have them lease them to us. Private industry also has more tax advantages than the county," Schutte said.

THE PLAN calls for only one landfill in each of the four communities, a citizens information committee to serve as a forum for reviewing issues related to the landfill and royalties (amounts still unknown) to be paid to host communities.

There will also be transfer stations throughout the county, in light industrial areas, where small garbage trucks that collect rubbish from the curbsides at homes and businesses will transfer the waste to larger semi-trucks, that will haul it to landfills or incinerator stations.

After the landfill is filled to capacity (5 to 10 years), a golf course or park can be built over it.

With all the rules and provisions, people are still upset when they learn a landfill will be constructed in their area, Schutte said.

"Nothing can assure people who live close to a landfill that it won't smell and that the cost won't be prohibitive. The public has told us they want us to minimize the use of landfills, which we have done by planning incinerator stations," he added.

INCINERATOR stations, also known as energy recovery stations, are presently operating in Pontiac and in the southeast part of the county, burning garbage from those communities.

The combustors transform the solid waste to steam energy. Under the 20-year plan, one such facility is proposed for Rochester, next to the Parke-Davis plant, one next to the Ford Motor Plant in Wixom and one in the Oakland County Service Center.

"We looked for sites where industry could use the steam generated," he explained.

Although residents may favor burning 100 percent of the county's solid waste, is just isn't feasible, Schutte explained.

"It's difficult to capture every scrap generated and there must be 800 tons a day put into a combustible unit. There are certain times of the year that more waste comes through, like spring and summer when people are working on their lawns and other times when it's way down. We'd need a large constant flow, which we can't guarantee," he said.

Oakland County residents generate eight million pounds of solid waste a day. In 3 1/4 weeks, it is enough to fill the Silverdome to the roof.

As the plan nears approval stages, the fee system is still being debated, Schutte said.

It appears each municipality will be charged a flat rate and it will be passed on to the residents through an already-collected millage tax. Schutte noted that township residents will most likely save money on the whole deal, because they are presently required to contract for their waste collection.

"The new system might force townships to organize and have one collector for the area, not several, like they presently have," he added.

Parents want their kids to learn about computers, county phone survey says

Computers are going to play a major role in people's lives during the 1980s and Oakland County parents apparently want their children to learn about the advanced technology in school.

According to a survey of 384 Oakland County adults, 89 percent of those questioned said public schools should help students learn about computers.

The telephone survey was conducted by Project Outreach, a service of the Michigan State Board of Education. Ingham County Intermediate School District administered the project; the survey is conducted only when districts ask for the service.

"We present the results to the public through the local school district. The data is also available to the State Board of Education," said Philip Babcock, evaluation specialist with the Ingham County Intermediate School District.

THE 23-MINUTE survey included questions about school performances, financial concerns, citizen involvement and school closings. Persons were interviewed March 22-25 and 28 and 29.

Overall, persons surveyed rated finances as the biggest problem facing schools in Michigan.

Even though financial burdens are plaguing the schools, 44 percent of those questioned said the quality of the local school districts has stayed the same, while 11 percent said they are getting better. Twenty-four percent said they were getting worse.

But parents agreed that if it comes between cutting programs and closing schools to keep the education level high, they favored closing schools. The survey indicated that 77 percent supported school closing where declining enrollment occurs.

When discussing education, 44 percent said enough emphasis is placed on vocational and technical education programs. The basic education program has enough emphasis, said 50 percent of the respondents but 44 percent said there is not enough attention paid to individual needs.

The one question that garnered the most support asked about citizen involvement. Of those surveyed, 77 percent said people should be more involved in the public schools.

"I think the survey is quite representative of people's feelings," Babcock said.

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