

Siting a landfill: working 'in the blind'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

TAKE a map of Oakland County. Put an overlay showing park lands across it — they're off limits. Then drop a second overlay with existing landfills — also off limits. Then a third overlay with airports and prohibited zones.

Your map has fewer and fewer white spaces.

What you're looking for is at least 460 acres of land for the ultimate landfill — a place to store ash from incinerators and construction debris that will serve a county of 1.2 million for 40 years.

Soon you will have perhaps 10 or 15 tracts. They bear no names of townships, villages or cities.

Don't even bother asking the names of Larry Fox, the Washington lawyer who is Oakland's solid waste consultant; don't ask John Rogers, the Philadelphia regional planner who is working on the landfill project; don't ask Mitt Handorf, the

county public works/solid waste chief.

They'll be fired for answering, even if they know.

"THEY ARE doing this in the blind. They will have no knowledge of where the candidate sites are," Rogers told a luncheon meeting of news people this week.

"They" are 25 members of a Landfill Solid Waste Advisory Committee. Twice a month (see schedule) they meet to attach numerical values to unnamed sites. At the end, they will recommend one site and one backup for a landfill. Only then will they know its identity.

"This process for siting is ingenious," said Patrick Nowak, deputy county executive.

"You are most likely not to be sued under this process and are most assured of winning if you are sued. You (the committee) have raised all the questions that are going to be

raised." A judge hearing a lawsuit who rejects the committee's work risks "pandemonium," Fox said.

A LANDFILL is the final step in Oakland's billion-dollar solid waste plan. Six existing landfills have less than five years of life, said Handorf, adding, "We've got five years to a crisis."

Oakland's plan is the first in the country to be "integrated" — relating all elements to each other. The elements:

- Three "cookers" — political slang for incinerators with 1,500 tons a day capacity. The county Board of Commissioners last week awarded a \$123 million construction contract for No. 1, in Pontiac. They will generate electricity and steam.

- One composting site of about 20 acres for about 300 tons daily of organic wastes.

- Two resource recovery facilities for recycling glass, metal and some plastics, about 10 acres each. (This element could go up or down, depending on private industry's interest in recycling.)

- One 40-year landfill of 460 acres or more. It will hold ash from the incinerators and construction debris.

A LANDFILL is more than a hole in the ground.

Rogers said it will be constructed, with clay or other impervious liners to collect liquids, which will be treated like sewage. Each day, waste will be compacted and monitored.

Groundwater will be monitored daily. The perimeter will be landscaped. Tires of dump trucks

will be cleaned before they leave the site.

THERE ARE three ways you can pick a landfill site, Fox said.

One is to find a landowner who wants to get rich and whose price you can afford.

The second is NIMBY — "not in my backyard." You put together a political coalition and inflict the site on the party with the fewest votes.

The third is "as objectively as possible" — and Fox gives Oakland credit for this approach.

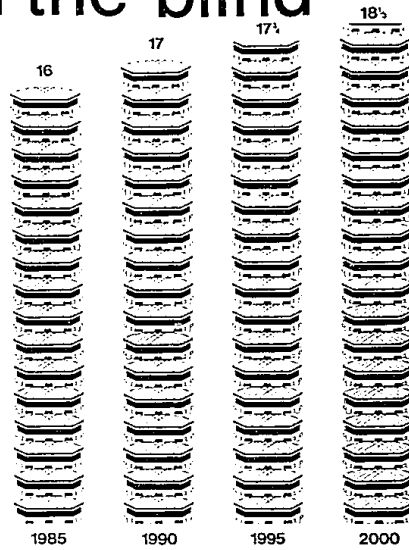
Usually it's kind of a closed approach. You (Oakland) do not develop plans behind closed doors. It's a goldfish bowl approach.

Technically, the landfill site group isn't subject to Michigan's Open Meetings Act, but the county executive's office advertises them as if they were, even mentioning snacks.

"This is the single most important thing the county is doing — by the ton, seven days a week. It involves energy, the environment, health and safety of people. It's unrelated to the job you hold. It's an every-day decision.

"If done improperly, it can be a horror show."

Florida's Pinellas County was first in the United States to have a resource recovery plant, said Fox, who was financial consultant on the project. He said Oakland has the better plan because it integrates incinerators, recycling, composting and the landfill.



The problem: Each year Oakland residents and businesses generate enough solid waste to fill the Silverdome Stadium many times over. The goal: to reduce solid waste by 20 percent by 1995 through incinerators, recycling, composting and one landfill.

Landfill panel schedule

The Landfill Solid Waste Advisory Committee holds public meetings about twice a month. All meetings take place in the basement cafeteria of the Oakland County Courthouse, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.

Snacks are available 6:30-7:30 p.m. Meetings begin promptly at 7:30 and end at 9:30 p.m. Future meetings and topics:

March 30 — Groundwater protection.

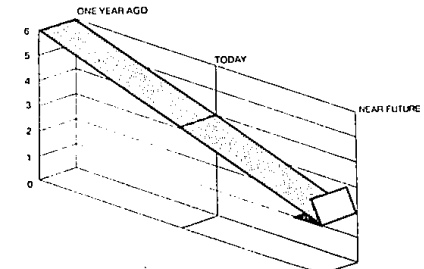
April 20 — Designing for groundwater protection.

April 27 — Day in the life of a landfill.

May 11 — Landfills: what do you do when it's full?

May 25, June 8, 22 and 29 — Criteria development for site ranking.

July 8 — Saturate site ranking workshop.



The landfill crunch: Oakland has five available landfills and limited use of a sixth, but in five years none will be left.

Zoo curator will teach conservation

Detroit Zoo director Steve Graham announced that Lori Canterbury has been named curator of education.

She moved to this area from Cincinnati, with a degree from Purdue University. Canterbury will work with the Detroit Zoo in Royal Oak, Belle Isle Zoo and Belle Isle Aquarium.

Previously she was coordinator of interpretative programs and education assistant for the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden and the Binder Park Zoo. Canterbury recruited and trained volunteers to present educational outreach programs to

members of the zoo society and public.

The education division will plan a variety of programs for the public in the near future. Graham said it is the intent of the zoo to give visitors an opportunity to learn more about conservation efforts through a recreational and participatory experience.

"I'm eager to spread the word that even at home in Michigan, we can increase the chance for such endangered species as the piping plover and gray wolf to survive in the wild," said Canterbury. "If we can make a difference in the future of animal species half a world away, imagine what we can do locally."

Salamone to head Friend of Court

Joseph G. Salamone of Orionville is the new head of Oakland County's Friend of the Court office. He replaces John J. Houghton, who retired at the end of 1988.

The appointment was announced by Robert C. Anderson, chief judge of Oakland Circuit Court, of which the Friend of the Court is an arm.

FOC, with a staff of 106, including 14 attorneys, enforces court custody, support and visitation orders affect-

ing minor children. Last year it handled 56,000 cases.

A 1974 graduate of the University of Detroit Law School, Salamone has been a referee with FOC since 1978. Earlier, he was in private practice and worked in engineering at Ford Motor Co.

A member of the State Bar Association, Salamone serves on the court rules committee of the family law section.

Chamber will hear Murphy

County Executive Daniel Murphy will be the speaker at the Oakland County Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting at 8 a.m. Thursday, April 6, in Roma's of Bloomfield.

Murphy will give a brief update on

issues, followed by a question and answer session.

The meeting is free, and a continental breakfast will be served, compliments of Michigan Bell Telephone Co. Reservations may be made by calling the Oakland County Chamber at 683-4747 or 644-1229.

Police group praises Bush

The Michigan Association of Police (MAP) is praising President George Bush for his consideration of law enforcement officers in banning the importation of military-style assault weapons.

"While most of today's police officers are outgunned by dopers — even the teen gangs — it is heartwarming to see the President

of this country stand up and say 'Enough is enough,'" said Carl Parsell, director of the Southfield-based MAP.

MAP also congratulated a U.S. manufacturer, Colt Industries, for volunteering to suspend sales on its AR-15 assault rifle. "We may never arrive at a kinder, gentler nation, but we have taken the first step to a safer one," Parsell said.

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