

Would you want me in your back yard?

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Oakland County's solid waste program is being held up in the Michigan Legislature because Rep. Charles Harrison doesn't want a \$262 million incinerator in Pontiac.

"Would you want one in your back yard?" asked Harrison, D-Pontiac, as the House adjourned with Oakland's two bills still on the calendar.

(Senate Bill) 364 amends existing state law to allow the county to locate a facility anywhere it wants. The local community has no say-so.

"Everything undesirable — this, a prison — they want to dump on the city of Pontiac."

COUNTY OFFICIALS say delay in passing the permissive measures

could be costly — as much as \$25 million, according to one estimate.

They are scrambling for ways to meet Harrison's objections but are having trouble even talking to the 56-year-old, eight-term lawmaker.

As a member of the majority party, Harrison reportedly goes to majority floor leader Pat Gagliardi, D-Drummond Island, and says he doesn't want them voted on, other officials say. Gagliardi decides which calendar items are on the day's agenda.

Said Sen. Rudy Nichols, R-Waterford, sponsor of SB 363 and 364: "He's told people they're not going to pass — 'those bills aren't going anywhere.'"

"I'm a little disgusted," Nichols went on. "He went to the Dominican Republic (for a trip of several days)

and put a hold on it. He didn't even make a phone call saying why. He's offensive and rude."

JOE MULLEN, legislative agent for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, confirmed that Harrison is holding up the bills.

"I've been calling on Gagliardi, and he says 'we won't do anything unless Charlie says we do something.'"

"He (Harrison) was very adamant about it. He said, 'You guys just don't give a damn about Pontiac and the black people living there.'"

The two bills sailed through the Senate with virtually no opposition.

"They permit a county with 'unified' administration — meaning an executive or manager — to set up a solid waste department and sell revenue bonds to finance projects. The bills are tie-barred, meaning neither becomes law unless both pass.

The total tab for Oakland's program — up to three incinerators, recycling, composting and a special landfill for incinerator ash — has been estimated at \$1 billion.

SO FAR, THE county board has

plecked county property in Pontiac for the first incinerator with a capacity of 1,500 tons a day.

It awarded a \$262 million construction contract to Westinghouse Electric Corp. But the work can't go forward until the county sells bonds.

Another lawmaker who was unhappy with Oakland's program is Rep. Matt Dunaskiss, R-Lake Orion.

"I'll vote no, but I won't continue to hold up the bills," said Dunaskiss.

The conservative lawmaker calls Oakland's program "solid waste management overkill. Oakland County has bought into these high-priced consultants and is trying to build an edifice."

"The program is \$1 billion. That's four times the county's (operating) budget."

A former county commissioner himself, Dunaskiss would prefer to build several smaller incinerators. With recycling, he thinks the program should be scaled down and existing landfills used.

"There's going to be a buzzsaw on that landfill," he said, predicting it would take a condemnation action.

A special special committee of 25 Oakland residents is studying criteria

and possible sites for a landfill. Meeting Thursday evenings, it is due to pick a site sometime in July.

MEANWHILE, GOV. James J. Blanchard signed into law two bills setting standards for incinerator ash. Although critics say incinerator ash should be treated as a toxic waste — a much more expensive proposition — Blanchard pronounced them satisfactory.

"I have been assured the public

health and environment are protected by these standards, which may become a model for the nation in dealing with incinerator ash."

Use of incinerators in Detroit, the eastern suburbs and Jackson County has been held up during the controversy.

The laws were drafted by Rep. Michael Griffin, D-Jackson, and amended by Sen. Vern Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids.

County stops road repairs on Fridays

Never on Fridays.

That could be the new slogan of the Oakland County Road Commission as county road employees initiate a summertime four-day work week, working 10 hours a day, Monday through Thursday, until Sept. 1.

The move is expected to promote safety and ease travel in Oakland County by causing fewer disruptions on county roads each Friday, according to John Grubba, managing director of the Oakland County Road Commission. He said it should assist motorists planning three-day week

end getaways.

The Friday cutback was prompted by an agreement between the road commission and the employee union, calling for a work week of four days, 10 hours each. Employees will work 6:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday.

The agreement, originally initiated at the request of employee groups and tested in 1985, saves work time and allows road work to be completed in a more timely manner, according to Grubba.

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