

Big burn

2,000-ton-per-day incinerator tops off waste plan

This is the second in a series of articles looking at Oakland County's program for managing solid waste, a plan for which county officials are prepared to spend \$470 million.

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

In terms of volume, the 2,000-ton-per-day incinerator to be built in Auburn Hills is possibly the most important segment of Oakland County's three-part plan to manage solid waste.

"Most important" is a label officials hesitate to use, however, because all three components are crucial in the ambitious, 20-year plan.

The other two parts — the Materials Recovery Facility (the recycling unit known as MRF) and the landfill (both to be featured in subsequent articles of this series) — are equally important as part of an integrated plan.

But the numbers themselves speak to the importance of the incinerator, possibly the linchpin of the county's solid waste program.

When the incinerator is operational, probably in the early 1990s, it will burn more than half of the 3,677

taking on TRASH

tons of trash generated daily in Oakland County, generating electricity to be sold to Detroit Edison at a yet-to-be-determined price.

ASH FROM THE incinerator is expected to be buried in the new county landfill.

The trash-to-energy incinerator is expected to generate about 400 million kilowatt hours of electricity per year, or enough to supply about 40,000 households.

Plans call for the incinerator to be built on a 32-acre tract of land southwest of Brown and Giddings roads. The site is contiguous to 52.6 acres already owned by the county, on which the animal shelter and other facilities are located.

The county has an option to purchase the 32 acres at the eye-opening price of \$110,000 per acre.

The county hopes to put another key component of its trash management system on 10 of those acres.

That's the \$15 million Materials Recovery Facility.

While the \$110,000-per-acre price may seem steep, Jack C. Hays, the county's corporation counsel, said it probably isn't excessive given development in the area and the corresponding increase in land values.

THE PROPERTY will be appraised, Hays told county commissioners during their regular meeting last Thursday. "But appraisals don't really mean much in that area. It's a very volatile area. The price of land varies by the minute."

The site is within a few miles of the Palace of Auburn Hills, the General Motors Corp. Orion plant and the \$250 million mall proposed by the Western Development Corp.

That 220-acre mall, situated between I-75 and Lake Angelus, Jody and Baldwin roads, is expected to alter traffic patterns and lifestyles as well as property values.

The price of the land isn't the only cost that raises eyebrows — and objections — at Thursday's Board of Commissioners meeting.

The contract for allowing the incinerator to be located in Auburn Hills will cost taxpayers about \$9.3 million, including some \$500,000 in sewer debts the city owes but that

Oakland County will forgive.

Under the agreement approved Thursday, \$1 million will be paid to the city when the contract is signed. If for any reason the incinerator is not built, Auburn Hills will have 10 years to repay the money at three percent interest.

COUNTY BOARD chairman Roy Rewold, R-Rochester, candidly admits that part of the reason he thinks Auburn Hills is an attractive incinerator site is the anticipated lack of opposition.

By selecting the Auburn Hills location, he said, county officials can expect to avoid extensive litigation from opponents. Besides being costly, such litigation could delay projects, and time is money.

The contract was negotiated over several months and extensively reviewed at the board's various committee meetings.

Upon seeing the contract's dollar figures at one such meeting, Commissioner John E. Gosling, R-Huntington Woods, shook his head and said, only half jokingly, "I don't see why other communities" don't line up to get this incinerator and the contract.

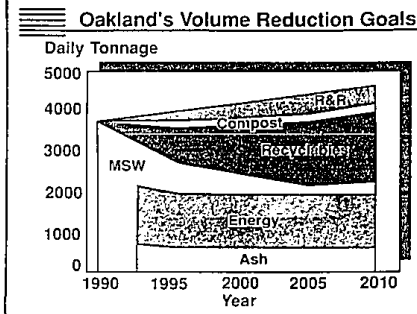
John King, a West Bloomfield resident and county commissioner, said Auburn Hills for what he consid-

ered an overly lucrative contract.

"It may be legal," King said of the contract. "But it's morally and ethically wrong wrong wrong to pay that kind of money. Auburn Hills should

be ashamed of itself."

NEXT: A look at MRF, the county's proposed recycling unit, and how it fits into the solid waste plan.



This chart shows how more than half the 3,677 tons of trash generated daily in Oakland County will be incinerated, as indicated in the "energy and ash" shaded area.

County board OKs trash-to-energy project

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

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The contract for the county's proposed trash-to-energy incinerator triggered some sharp comments — and an outright threat by the mayor of Auburn Hills — before being

2 other incinerators burn Oakland trash

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Besides the proposed trash-to-energy incinerator in Auburn Hills, there are two other incinerators in Oakland County.

One is owned by General Motors at its Truck and Coach plant in Pontiac where it burns waste and generates steam energy used within the facility.

The other is owned by 14 communities collectively known as the Southeast Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority (SOCHRA).

Its member communities are Berkeley, Beverly Hills, Birmingham, Clawson, Hazel Park, Ferndale, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Madison Heights, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak, Royal Oak Township and Troy.

Until several months ago, SOCHRA was known as SOCIA (Southeastern Oakland County Incinerator Authority).

The new moniker reflects a change in the consortium's overall goal. Instead of merely burning trash from member communities, the consortium is recycling some trash such as household batteries, grass clippings and leaves.

UNTIL JULY 1, 1988, the incinerator — located on John R. north of Twelve Mile Road in Madison Heights — had been operating since 1955. It cost about \$16 million to build, according to Thomas G. Waffin, the authority's general manager, and shares its 34-acre site with a golf course and ball fields.

The incinerator was shut down in 1988 after state air pollution authorities ruled its emissions didn't meet Michigan's air quality standards.

Waffin said the facility is undergoing about \$50 million worth of retrofitting to bring it into compliance with emission standards. A tentative

overwhelmingly approved by the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

The \$2.3 million contract, which was negotiated over several months by officials in Oakland County and Auburn Hills, calls for a 2,000-ton-per-day incinerator as part of the county's long-range plans to manage toxic waste.

But when it came up for approval at last Thursday's regular board meeting, commissioners voiced concern, saying they didn't fully understand its provisions and obligations.

"I think we're proceeding too quickly," said commissioner Marilyn E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills. "I think we should take time to re-think" the contract, she said.

Thomas A. Law, R-West Bloomfield, said he appreciated the efforts of County Executive Daniel Murphy, commission chairman Roy Rewold, R-Rochester, and others who helped negotiate the contract.

"BUT WE'RE moving too fast," he said. "We could burn taxpayers and their children for a long, long time. I feel like we are sheep being led to slaughter."

Among the specific points to which commissioners objected was

the unavailability of any appraisal on the 32 acres on which the incinerator would be built and the negotiated purchase price.

The county has an option to purchase the property at \$110,000 per acre.

Commissioners balked, saying the price was excessive. But Corporation Counsel Jack C. Hays, who negotiated the agreement, insisted the price was reasonable given the price "volatility" of land values in the area.

"The price of land varies by the minute," he said.

By a 12 to 11 vote, commissioners postponed a vote on the contract to allow commissioners more time to digest its contents.

Robert W. Grusnick, mayor of Auburn Hills, took the floor and chided commissioners about what he considered their waffling.

"We negotiated this contract in

good faith and our city council unanimously approved it," Grusnick said. "In view of today's vote, I'm going to take it (the contract) back to the council and recommend withdrawal."

DURING A five-minute recess, Grusnick privately told reporters the commissioners' indecision was "political bulls..."

"If they want to solve their waste problems, we'll help," the mayor said. "But we can become NIMBY."

NIMBY, of course, is an acronym for "Not in my back yard," an attitude reflected by residents who outwardly support a project — like a prison, incinerator or landfill — but not in their neighborhoods where their property values might be adversely affected.

During the recess, Rewold chatted with some commissioners who voted

against approving the contract.

"He took umbrage," he said, "at Law's reference to commissioners being sheep led to slaughter."

"If commissioners attended all their committee meetings on time (and did their homework)," Rewold said without mentioning names, "they would know what this contract contains and they would know we have discussed it at length."

Following the recess, commissioners approved the contract by a 18 to 4 vote. Voting against it were Law, Gosling, John E. Olsen, R-Huntington Woods and Ruel E. McPherson, D-Hazel Park.

After the meeting, Law privately told reporters he felt Grusnick was "bluffing" when he threatened to recommend withdrawal of the contract.

"That's a sweetheart contract for Auburn Hills," he said.

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