

# Landfill shopping

## Oakland promises state-of-the-art

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

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

With one major exception, officials are vague when they talk about the landfill they envision for Oakland County. They don't know where it will be built. They don't know the precise lining it will have. They don't even know if the landfill will have a dome. But one thing is sure: The new landfill has to be a Cadillac — nothing less will do. "The new landfill will meet or exceed every state and federal regulation," said Gerald L. Miley, chief engineer for the solid waste unit of the Oakland County Department of Public Works. And it will play its part in the county's three-pronged attack against solid waste which also includes incineration and recycling. The state requires a minimum

buffer of 300 feet from the edge of the landfill to the property line. "We will have much larger buffers," Miley said. "It will be a state-of-the-art facility." No odors, no noise and no nuisance.

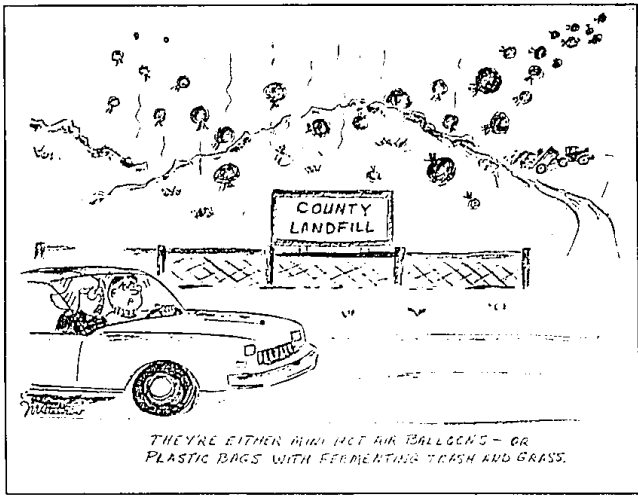
BEYOND THAT, Miley and others have few specifics about the new landfill.

"They know what they want. Furthermore, they are prepared to spend nearly \$200 million to acquire a site and build a landfill that other communities will envy. "Many of the specifics are still being discussed" with our consultants." The consultants are Bishop, Cook, Purcell & Reynolds of Washington, D.C. There is no shortage of information on up-to-date technology or state-of-the-art methods for landfills, he said. Experts from giants in the waste management industry — not to mention technicians from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — are ready with the latest information on what will work and what won't.

Most of these decisions won't be made until after the site of the new landfill has been made, he said. "Much of the details will be site specific." But the overriding concern is making sure officials have all the necessary data. One variable for the landfill, he said, is an inflatable dome — similar to the "tennis bubbles" in Birmingham and other communities. "I'm not a big advocate of inflated domes. But someone here in Oakland County may propose one, and we'll consider it." Another variable, Miley said, is burying the trash (in a lined pit, of course) or allowing it to pile up. "There are a lot of creative options."

THE SAME APPLIES for landscaping, he said. "Much of the details will be site specific." But the overriding concern is making sure officials have all the necessary data.

Next: How the county's plan will affect its residents and businesses.



Oakland County is planning a state-of-the-art landfill. But it must combat negative images, such as depicted in this cartoon by a Birmingham resident.

# ... but no one wants it in his/her backyard

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

County officials are determined the new, nearly \$200 million landfill will be top of the line — a Cadillac. State-of-the-art technology and proven waste disposal techniques will make the landfill a source of pride — something other communities will envy and emulate. That doesn't matter, however, to people living near the sites under consideration for the proposed landfill. To them the proposed Cadillac is a rusted-out junker. And they don't want it.

Hearing after hearing has been jammed with hundreds of residents who vocally express their anger about the prospect of having a landfill in their area. "I'VE NEVER SEEN such opposition to a landfill," said James G. Meehanan, one of dozens of knowledgeable county residents enlisted to encourage citizen input. Meehanan of Union Lake is a supervisor of environmental and energy systems at Argonaut AEC, a General Motors Corporation. He is also chairman of Oakland County's Solid Waste Task Force and

## taking on TRASH

frequently the target of caustic comments and misdirected anger. "I've been involved in landfills before," said Meehanan, an engineer. "And I've seen people mad. "But I've never seen anything like this," he said, referring to the opposition he has seen at meetings designed to inform residents about the county's plans. LAST FALL, the Landfill Siting Advisory Committee (LSAC) was appointed to advise officials. With consultants Rogers, Golden & Halpern (RGH) of Reston, Va., the

committee established criteria designed to minimize subjective factors and select possible sites on the basis of objective considerations. Considering factors such as groundwater, wetlands and proximity to populous areas, the committee narrowed the field of potential sites to 20, then 10 and finally five. THEN CAME A setback. A math error was discovered in the tabulations by RGH. When the error was corrected, rankings of the top five sites — those most likely to be the host community — were reshuffled. The new top-five list includes one in Oxford Township, another that straddles the Oxford-Addison Township line and three in Highland Township. The error was an understandable human error, according to Ardath A. Regan, chairman of the Village of

Holly and LSAC president. "I've seen a lot worse," said Regan, who has also served on the Michigan Toxic Substance Control Commission, the agency that helps select contaminated toxic waste sites for possible cleanup under the federal Superfund. Equally important, the math error undermined confidence in the site selection criteria and RGH. "RGH is incompetent," one resident of Highland Township told the board of commissioners recently. "They should be fired. The county's site selection process should be scrapped." DESPITE THE SETBACK, Regan believes residents know her committee is on the right track. "I think most people back us," she said. "They know selecting a landfill site is important." That's why the committee and

county commissioners have allocated additional money to conduct "walk-over" inspections of the top five sites. The walk-overs will enable some local representatives to accompany biologists and other experts making a final inspection — probably this spring. "It's a chance to make sure we're not disrupting the nesting areas of endangered species," Regan said, "or destroying endangered plant life." BUT THE walk-overs and the inspections have consumed time and delayed the anticipated timetable. "We expected to be boring soil samples by now," said Gerald Miley, chief engineer of the county's solid waste unit. "But the delay was unavoidable. We want to be thorough and complete in our selection process."

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