

Waste plans drawing fire

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Rochester Hills Mayor Billie Ireland is rallying opposition to Oakland County's \$470 million solid waste program, which is in the final stages of preparation.

Ireland is threatening to revive a lawsuit against an expanded landfill within her city and she's preparing to muster two city councils to fight the waste-to-energy incinerator to be located upwind in Auburn Hills.

Ireland outlined her opposition — and plans to organize it — Friday, the day after the county's 641 committee (short for Oakland County Solid Waste Management Planning Committee of Public Act 641) began approving the final version of the plan.

The 641 committee met for more than three hours Thursday before a largely hostile crowd in the county auditorium. The meeting will be continued at 7 p.m. April 25 in the county auditorium.

"We expect to complete our work at that time and submit the solid waste plan to the board of commissioners," said James G. Meenahan, committee chairman.

AS OF THURSDAY, the plan included six recycling centers (either existing or in the planning stage), three waste-to-energy incinerators and 10 existing or proposed landfills.

Meenahan said the plans include major changes made on the basis of public comment offered during the 90-day period concluded March 29. He said they include:

- Abandoning plans for a county-owned landfill with a 40-year capacity.

The county may yet own landfills, but they will be much smaller, with relatively short expected life expectancies — less than 20 years.

Otherwise, the county will rely on existing privately operated landfills to accommodate ash from its incinerator and trash that can not be recycled.

'The proposed landfill is wrong for many reasons. Allowing the landfill . . . with the Clinton River, the wetlands and the flood plain makes absolutely no sense.'

— Mayor Billie Ireland,

- Abandoning plans for landfills in Holly and Novi townships.

- Requiring that subsequent additions to the solid waste plan get final approval from the Oakland Board of Commissioners, rather than the county executive.

The final change was a political concession, Meenahan acknowledged. Residents wanted commissioners — as opposed to the executive — to give final approval because they could exercise closer scrutiny, and pressure, over commissioners on the explosive issue of solid waste.

Mayor Ireland, however, wants more changes. Specifically, she wants one of the three landfills — the one north of Aven Road, south of Bloomer State Park — closed rather than expanded.

THE LANDFILL is owned by the Southeast Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority, which includes

14 communities including Birmingham, Troy and Madison Heights. Under the existing solid waste plan, that landfill would be expanded, although it would be enclosed in a bubble-like dome to minimize odors, noise and other nuisances.

In a letter to commissioners, Ireland said continuing to operate the landfill — much less expanding it — is inappropriate because of the adjacent terrain and population.

The mayor said contamination from the landfill could adversely affect wetlands, the Clinton River and Bloomer State Park. She also notes that a mobile home park with 1,800 residents is located adjacent to the landfill's west property line.

"The proposed landfill is wrong for many reasons," Ireland said in her letter. "Allowing the landfill . . . with the Clinton River, the wetlands and the flood plain makes absolutely no sense. The city appeals to you to vote to remove the site from the updated solid waste plan."

Ireland said Rochester Hills filed suit against the landfill last fall, only to see the suit dismissed as premature because plans that include the facility had not yet been approved.

"We will renege that suit if the landfill is not removed," Ireland vowed.

Ireland said she is equally displeased because the plan includes the incinerator in Auburn Hills, directly west of — and upwind from — Rochester and Rochester Hills.

Ireland said she plans to call "one heck of a meeting" with the city councils from Rochester and Rochester Hills to muster and organize opposition.

She wants the incinerator canceled or moved, Ireland said.

Commissioners were expected to receive Ireland's letter over the weekend or sometime today. When informed of Ireland's sentiments, the vice chairman of the board said the mayor was overreacting.

"We've got an incinerator in our back yard," said Commissioner Nancy McConnell, a Republican who lives on Deauville Lane in Bloomfield Hills.

She was referring to the General Motors trash-to-energy facility at the Truck and Bus plant, on Opdyke Road south of South Boulevard in Pontiac.

THAT FACILITY, which converts trash from GM into power used at the plant, is one of three incinerators included in the 641 plan.

That incinerator is upwind of Bloomfield Hills much the same as the proposed Auburn Hills incinerator is upwind of Rochester Hills, said McConnell.

"It doesn't cause problems and it doesn't lower property values," said McConnell. "And the technology used for the new incinerator will be far more sophisticated (and presumably have cleaner air emissions)."

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