

County's embattled trash plan inches along

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By Pat Murphy
staff writer

The county's controversial solid waste plan received mixed reviews last week when presented to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

Some commissioners applauded it, while others voted for changes Thursday during a special meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners — the next-to-the-last time commissioners are scheduled to review it.

"I'm pleased," said board chairman Roy Rewold, R-Rochester. "We moved an important component of the solid waste plan along, . . . and we didn't get into any flat fights."

The plan — called the 641 update after Public Act 641 that mandated it — is the operational framework for how Oakland will handle the 300 tons of trash its residents and businesses generate daily.

The 641 update encompasses the county's \$470 million solid waste program, financed with bonds to be repaid by user fees; cooperative waste programs operated by communities in the southeast and southwest corners of the county, SOCRRA and RRRASOC, respectively; and the continued operations of six landfills.

THE 641 UPDATE was two years in the drafting and weighed nearly two pounds in its final form.

After five hours of often heated discussion, commissioners recommended nine changes and voted down other proposed modifications.

Those nine changes now go back to the 641 update committee — also called the Solid Waste Planning Committee. That committee will meet June 14 to review the recommendations.

The committee can accept or reject the changes as submitted, according to chairman James G. McEnahan. Or it can recommend modifications on the proposed changes.

"We are an advisory board," said McEnahan. "We don't have the power to approve anything. That power continues to rest with commissioners."

McEnahan said under state law, the 641 update committee has 30 days in which to complete its work and resubmit the plan to commissioners.

That will likely happen by June 28, in time for the county board's second meeting. At that time, the 641 update committee's work will be finished.

The plan will again be reviewed by commissioners whose options are to accept, reject or modify the plan. Commissioners did not debate funding the project, but were again warned about a possible law suit from Taxpayers United, tax rebels headed by Richard Headlee and William McMaster.

DURING THE public comment section of the meeting, Jerry Sutton, counsel to Taxpayers United, said his client plans to sue if commissioners

go ahead with plans to sell almost \$600 million in bonds without a vote of the people.

Commissioners took the warning under advisement. They expect to address the bonding issue at the June 28 meeting.

Once the 641 update plan is approved, as expected, it must be approved by 67 percent of the municipalities within the county, or 41 of the county's 61 political entities.

Once that happened, the plan would go to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources which under state law has six months to act upon it.

Some of the major components of the 641 update plan include:

- Waste-to-energy incinerators in Auburn Hills and Madison Heights.

- A recycling center in Novi to accommodate soon-to-be-implemented programs in Southfield, Farmington, Farmington Hills and other communities that make up TRRASOC, the Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of South-

west Oakland County. Other members are Novi, South Lyon, Walled Lake and Wixom.

- A recycling facility (Material Recovery Facility, MRF) in Auburn Hills, next to the incinerator.

- Continued landfill operations eight communities, including Ro-

chester Hills.

The 641 update does not include a proposed expansion of the Rochester Hills facility, which would have been enclosed in a dome, like the Pontiac Silverdome. But the existing landfill will continue operating, primarily for composting.

Parks foundation forms conservancy

The Oakland Land Conservancy has been established to help the county preserve and maintain natural areas.

Formation of the conservancy was announced recently, during a conference at Oakland University on protecting nature in the world.

"The conservancy is an opportunity to set aside natural areas of the county," said John Thurber, president of the Oakland Parks Foundation which founded the conservancy.

"It will help maintain our high quality of life in Oakland County."

Thurber said activities of the conservancy will include developing membership, identifying the most threatened areas in Oakland County, establishing an official registry and determining guidelines for land to be considered for active preservation.

Additional information is available by calling Frances Greenbaum, executive director of the foundation, at 335-2771.

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