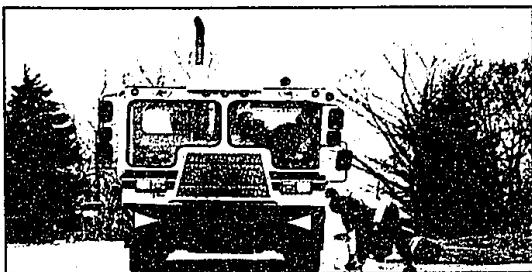


**Sweeping up:** Mike Lane does what every good recycling truck driver does when he breaks a bottle. He keeps a broom on board for such happenings.



## Recycling from page 1A

Lane has been driving recycling trucks for Waste Management Inc., which serves Farmington and Farmington Hills, for the three years the cities have had curbside recycling.

He generally works 10-hour days and has had some much longer when the weather didn't cooperate.

"You work until you get it done," he said.

Farmington Hills recycling coordinator Karen Birkholz said weather has never stopped the city's recycling operation.

"They never miss a beat," she said. "When we had that cold spell (record-setting temperatures), they got the job done."

Residents are used to the idea of putting out their bins once a week. And even with the anticipated rain, they don't shy away from recycling.

That has made Lane's job all the more important, since he often answers residents' questions about recycling.

At one point he drops a glass bottle that breaks on the pavement. He sweeps up the mess.

"Obviously, it wouldn't be a good idea to leave a mess behind," he says.

Lane says he hustles in part to finish his route at a reasonable time and in part to fend off the boredom of doing the same thing all day. But although he is tak-

ing some business classes, he's happy to have the work.

"I'll see how that works out (taking business classes)," he says. "But you can make a decent living doing this."

Although he's used to the long hours of almost constant movement, he says he still gets tired by the end of the day.

He also drives a garbage truck on some days, but says for the most part, he prefers the recycling route.

"Driving the garbage truck is easier because the other guy does most of the work," he said. "But you really have to be careful driving. People will speed right around you."

Lane's LoDol truck has a steering wheel on both sides of the cab so he can hop out or in either side depending on where the bins are. And there's no need to accelerate because he rarely drives on main roads as he does with a garbage truck.

"Yeah, my buddies kid me about driving a garbage truck," he said. "But I think it is becoming a more important job. You can see how it reduces the amount of garbage that goes in a landfill, because when you come back with a garbage truck there is a lot less than there used to be."

Although residents first com-

plained about the service, they're now embracing recycling, Birkholz said.

"They want to recycle more," she said. "And once we get the MRF (Material Recycling Facility) up and running, we'll be able to do that."

Tom Biswell, Hills director of public services, said that the new facility, which is being built in Southfield and will open this fall (see related story this page), will help the city reduce rates to customers from \$44.50 a year to \$43.75 a year. And as part of the contract between Waste Management and the eight Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County communities, which includes Farmington and Farmington Hills, the cities could save more money in the future.

"The contract says that if they (Waste Management) are making over a certain amount per ton on recycled material, we share in the profits."

That money could come back to residents in the form of reduced rates, if the city council so chooses, he said.

At any rate, recycling's future seems as certain as death and taxes.

"I don't worry about running out of work," Lane says.



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LA MIRA

**Recycling route:** Mike Lane uses two hands to accomplish his one-man task of loading recyclables.

## Regional recycling station Earth-breaking's Friday

RRRASOC is getting r-r-revved up to r-r-recycle.

The Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County will break ground at 10 a.m. Friday — Earth Day — for the construction in Southfield of a recycling transfer station to serve that city, as well as Farmington Hills and Farmington and five other area communities.

The \$7.1 million state-of-the-art facility at the northeast corner of Eight Mile Road and Evergreen is a public-private partnership between the authority and Waste Management of Michigan.

The depot will sort, crush and bundle recyclable materials such as newspapers, glass, aluminum and plastic and ship them out for sale. About 300 tons will be handled daily.

"We're real excited," Southfield

city administrator Robert Block said Tuesday. "It's an opportunity for the member communities to get more aggressively involved with the recycling and reuse industry. It's essential to the future."

About 20 percent of the recyclables will be collected by waste haulers from residents in the RRRASOC communities. The other 80 percent will come from outside residential programs and commercial businesses.

The station, known in the business as a material recovery facility, will sit on a seven-acre site. The 53,000-foot facility will include RRRASOC offices and operations offices for Waste Management. The planned opening is October.

City managers, administrators and other public officials from the member communities are ex-

pected to attend the groundbreaking. Members in addition to Southfield, Farmington and Farmington Hills are Wixom, Novi, Walled Lake, South Lyon and Lyon Township.

As host city, Southfield will be paid 28 cents a ton for the processed materials in the first year, and it will increase by four percent annually. RRRASOC also will receive fees.

Also, the authority will receive revenues for the recycled material based on published market indices.

RRRASOC will charge a family 77.3 cents a month for the service, and Waste Management will require communities to pay \$10.373 per family for collections if under a five-year contract, or \$10.148 if communities agree to a 15-year deal.

## City's road improvement plan would pave way to flat tax rate

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington residents who enjoy a smooth ride could be paying a flat tax instead of a special assessment under a road improvement plan being considered.

City property owners would be asked to pay a millage, which would be collected to fix city streets.

Officials believe such a plan would be more fair. As of now, property owners are billed — some as much as \$6,000-\$8,000 over a 10-year period — for road work on their particular street.

That's too much for some residents, especially for those on a fixed income.

A tax would spread the burden evenly. Also, money collected through a millage rate could earn interest, allowing some road improvements to pay for themselves.

City council said it's interested, and has asked the city administration to report back with more details. How much tax residents would be asked to pay is one pressing detail.

"I'm hoping it's less than 2 mills," said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauff. "... I'm hoping it's even less than that."

A mill equals one dollar for \$1,000 of state equalized value of property. For example, a person who owned a \$100,000 home would pay \$100 a year in additional tax if a 2-mill rate was used.

City officials see a window of opportunity to implement such a plan.

During the next 10 to 20 years, Lauff predicts the need for road repairs will dramatically increase. He doesn't expect the state or the federal government to come up with more money.

A six-year capital improvement plan prepared by the planning commission identified \$700,000 worth of road repairs that are needed immediately. Most of those are residential streets.

"We're seeing a time when people are seeing a reduction in their taxes," Lauff said. "Perhaps it's a time... when we can look at a plan to improve our roads."

Council members, who would have to approve of such a plan, embrace the concept.

"I'm impressed with the idea, and I think it's a worthwhile program to investigate," said councilwoman JoAnne McShane. "Everyone uses the roads going through Farmington."

Said Mayor Arnold Campbell: "I think it's a worthwhile option, and I would favor asking administration to do it and see what kind of plan they can develop for us."

Resident Bill Liba said he likes a tax over a special assessment. Unlike with a special assessment, people will be able to get tax credit, he said.

"And, another thing, I hope we can get it started this year so we can get the program started," Liba said.

City roads are replaced under two circumstances: If residents petition city council, or the city manager informs council that a street has become unsafe and requires major construction.

The city maintains more than 34 miles of roads, 26 of which are defined as local or residential.

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