

Nancy Kourtjian

Two choices on trash: Fight or find solution

With this article, Nancy Kourtjian concludes her three-part series on the Oakland County Solid Waste Planning Committee, of which she is a member. The views are her own.

"Don't dump on us." Oakland County residents gave battle to new landfill sites with signs and shouts as the Solid Waste Planning Committee toured their townships.

But more and more trash must go somewhere. The public has two choices. To fight and protest or to participate. To help the county design a solid waste system that is efficient and fair to all would be the way to participate.

AFTER THE bus tour, the committee concluded that much work lies ahead.

Though Act 641 designated each county as the agency with power to plan and implement proper solid-waste management for its residents, the issue of where to put facilities to do this job may block the way.

If enough citizens rebel, local governments may try to assert "home rule" to prevent placement of landfills in their communities.

The consequences of this local intervention between the authority of state law and its execution by the county may be a succession of lengthy court cases, costly delays which will aggravate the real problem of where to put trash.

All to no avail. Something must be done.

The "put it in Texas" solution works no better for household wastes than it does for nuclear. The law not only gives the county the right to do the job, but says it must do it.

FRED KELLOW, chief of the Resource Recovery Division of the Michigan DNR, affirmed that all present local ordinances will be in effect only if approved by the county plans. If they are in conflict, they will no longer be valid (Sec. 30 No. 4).

"Condemnation has often been used to circumvent local zoning," Kellow

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added. He also said that though private companies are encouraged to continue solid-waste operation, "it is crucial that the counties have control over future developments."

Kellow said that most of these disputes would be settled in court.

Zoning cases involving both the Lyon II and Marlowe sites are presently in court. A recent ruling in Kent County (Grand Rapids area) reinforced the power 641 to override local zoning.

BUT WHERE are the "best places for non-toxic solid-waste disposal?" Oakland County is attempting to determine these sites fairly, yet with assurance of public-health safeguards.


The county plan includes meetings and communications to provide information to the public. If the need for sites is fully understood, and if affected residents are offered choices and the opportunity to participate in decision making, their trust in government may be reaffirmed.

In March, the DNR hosted a solid-waste workshop at Waldenwoods for planners from southeastern Michigan counties. Two major goals were stressed:

- to find enough safe sites,
- to help the public perceive the problem.

Act 641 prescribes power to protect public health. It prescribes penalties to force citizen compliance, such as fines and/or ordinances. It also authorizes appropriations that could be used to compensate communities that cooperate, such as reduced waste-disposal costs.

The tools to accomplish cooperation for waste disposal instead of confrontation are at hand. We need only use them.




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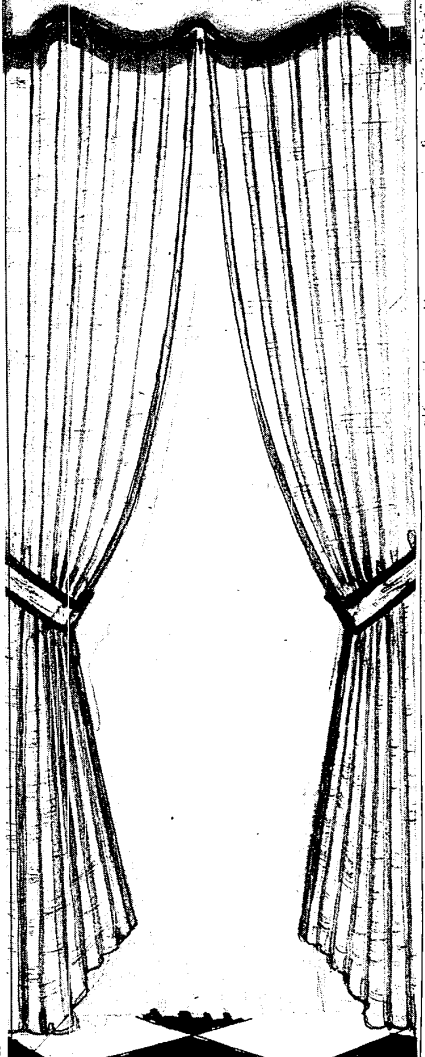
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