Oxford and Highland are landfill sites

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

Either Oxford or Highland township would be the best site for Oakland County's new mile-square solid waste landfill, according to information presented to the county board of commissioners by a citizens' committee.

The site in Oxford is favored slightly over the Highland location. Because they were so closely ranked, test borings will be done simultaneously at each site to determine which is best suited for a landfill.

"I stand here this evening and I honestly tell you that the process worked," said Ardath Regan of Holly. Regan chaired the Landfill Solid Waste Advisory Committee, a group of 25 citizens charged with choosing the best site for the landfill.

The process Regan referred to let committee members pick qualities they thought should be incorporated into a landfill, such as adequate drainage, without knowing the landfill site. This blind process was chosen to neutralize political decisions and "NIMBY" — the "not in my back yard" syndrome.

The committee gave each of 28 qualities a numerical value and re-evaluated the same set of qualities five times. The top two sites were those with the highest scores.

OXFORD TOWNSHIP'S SITE, the one that could be considered the leading candidate, received 4,813 points from the committee, which has been meeting since February.

The site boundaries are Ludwig Road to the north, Route 24 to the east, Hummer Lake Road on the south and Coats Road to the west. Currently, the land is used for a mix of agricultural, residential, industrial and institutional purposes.

County Commissioner Ruth Johnson, R-Holly, whose district include the Oxford site, said she thought the selection process was fair but noted the debate isn't over yet.

"The county board will choose. We've only allowed them to drill to test hydrogeologic conditions," Johnson said. At the Thursday night meeting, the commissioners voted, prior to knowing where the sites were, to accept the criteria used to select the site and fund testing. About $200,000 has been allocated for testing.

State Rep. Mat Dunaskiss, R-Lake Orion, whose district spreads across Oxford and Oakland townships, said it was "a terrible location. You can't get any further north. Transportation costs will be high.

"I question the need for a landfill this large. Why plan a 40-year landfill? Forty years from now, in 2030, we're not going to bury garbage," he said.

The second site, in Highland Township, is bordered by Wardlow Road on the north, Park Boulevard on the east, Highland Road to the south and Hickory Ridge Road to the west. It received 4,796 points from the committee.

Existing land use is residential, woodland, and vacant or old agricultural fields.

WHEN ASKED what he would do about having the landfill in Highland, Commissioner Rochard Skarritt, R-Milford, said "nothing. Stand pat. It was an open process."

Rep. Willis Bullard Jr., R-Highland, said "I don't think the process is complete. It was a fair process up to this point. Who knows (what soil borings will show)?"

This landfill is the last step in the county's billion-dollar solid waste plan. The six existing landfills have less than five years of life, according to Milton Handorf, director of the county's public works department. This landfill will hold ash from incinerators and construction debris in two separate areas.

Much was made of the committee's selection process. It was noted that 15 meetings were held, each lasting several hours, during which members were briefed by consultants on landfill construction. Committee members were selected to represent a cross-section of county residents.

With that information, committee members developed the 28 criteria and then weighted them in order of importance. They started with 27 sites, narrowed them to 16, then 10, and then the top two.

Throughout the process, only the consultants knew which sites best met the qualities chosen by the committee. After test borings are complete, results will be made available to the commissioners, who then will be asked to decide on the landfill's location.

Group touts 2-cent increase

School property taxes for homeowners in some municipalities will be cut by as much as 50 percent next year if voters approve the 2-cent sales tax increase on the November ballot, according to the Michigan Municipal League.

"Property tax reduction is the reason the board of the Michigan Municipal League supports the 2-cent plan," George D. Goodman, executive director of the league, stated recently in announcing the municipal league's position on the sales tax proposals on the Nov. 7 statewide ballot.

The Municipal League's Board of Trustees recently reviewed estimates of the impact of the two ballot proposals.

"The preliminary estimates indicate that the 2-cent plan will provide an average one-third reduction in homeowner school taxes," Goodman said.

'Property tax reduction is the reason the board of the Michigan Municipal League supports the 2-cent plan.'
— George D. Goodman

"The municipal league has advocated a property tax cut for over a year, and we are willing to support the tax increase that is needed to pay for it," he said.

The other proposal on the ballot would increase the sales tax by one-half cent. "It has merit," Goodman said, "but the league's board of trustees decided to endorse the plan that provides property tax relief." Both plans provide more money for schools, he pointed out.

"We don't oppose the half-cent plan," Goodman said, "but we clearly prefer the 2-cent plan because most of it will go to provide property tax relief."

"Although the 2-cent plan is not perfect," he said, "it is the only proposal that will put a permanent cap on school operating property tax rates and reduce school taxes in almost all cities and villages."

According to Goodman, the municipal league would have preferred expanding the sales tax base, closing tax loopholes or increasing the state income tax to pay for property tax relief, but the Legislature decided to propose a sales tax increase instead. "Other ways of financing property tax relief did not have sufficient support in the Legislature," he said.

"The 2-cent plan also reduces the financial disparities among school districts to a much greater extent than does the half-cent plan. Achieving greater equity among school districts is another factor which led the league to support the 2-cent plan," he said.

The Michigan Municipal League has 501 member cities and villages. The group aims to improve the administration of municipal government.

Hearing on budget set

A public hearing on the Oakland County Road Commission's 1990 budget and road improvement program will be held at 7:30 p.m. Thursday in the Oakland County Auditorium, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac.

Copies of the budget are available from the Road Commission Department of Citizen Services.

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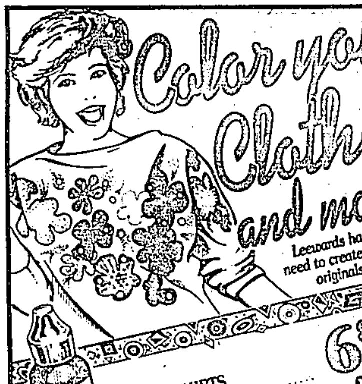

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