

# Oakland's solid waste plan still afloat

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

Watching the development of the proposed Oakland County solid waste program is something like watching a movie about the Titanic. Admittedly it's taking great liberties to compare the two, but there's a whimsical parallel between the maiden voyage of the Titanic and launching Oakland's solid waste program.

There's one big difference, of course. The Titanic is history, a ship that went down 78 years ago on April 14-15 in 1912, after hitting an iceberg in the north Atlantic. About 1,500 people died.

Oakland's solid waste program is a ship still sailing. It's drifted at times, and floundered. Furthermore, opponents would like to sink it. And political lives may be in peril. But Oakland's ship of solid waste is still afloat and may yet reach port, despite hazardous waters ahead.

Oakland solid waste program was formulated over nearly two decades. Plans were in the works even before state law mandated counties to draft their own plans to handle solid waste, or face the possibility of state officials doing it for them.

AND OAKLAND PLANNERS came up with a luxury liner — a

## analysis

\$470 million program designed to handle trash well into the 21st century.

Captains Daniel T. Murphy and Roy Rewold, county executive and chairman of the Oakland Board of County Commissioners, respectively, have touted the plan as a model for other communities to emulate.

It calls for a \$175 million waste-to-energy incinerator; a \$30 million Material Recovery Facility (MRF) to recycle glass, metal and other reusable material; composting facilities to convert grass clippings and leaves into fertilizer; and landfill facilities for incinerator ash and trash that can't be burned or recycled.

The county's solid waste program seems perfect — on paper anyway.

... much like the Titanic seemed unsinkable. This week in particular, the solid waste program seemed to be sailing along, gathering a full head of steam.

HERE ARE SOME signs of smooth sailing:

• Bids on the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) came in about 45 percent under the anticipated cost — about \$15.5 million, rather than the expected \$30 million.

Navigator Roger Smith, director of Oakland's solid waste unit, told the county's Solid Waste Task Force that lower-than-expected bids would result in lower-than-expected tipping fees.

• The 90-day period for public comment on the solid waste program (known as the 641 plan) elapsed at 5 p.m. last Thursday.

Although complaints were so numerous that officials weighed them — rather than counting them — Smith and others said most objections were aimed at three proposed landfills.

An estimated 90 percent of the hundreds of complaints were aimed at the county-owned 40-year landfill, the Holly Disposal landfill in Holly Township and the Holloway Type III landfill in Novi Township.

Officials hope to mollify opposition by abandoning plans for a county-owned 40-year landfill and canceling plans for dumps in Holly and Novi townships.

Surprisingly, officials said they received "very few" complaints about locating the waste-to-energy incinerator in Auburn Hills, directly west — and upwind — of upscale Rochester Hills.

"I've received a number of complaints," said Commissioner Donald Bishop, R-Rochester. "But only one or two about the incinerator."

• Oakland's solid waste plan has been endorsed — incinerator and all — by the East Michigan Environmental Action Council.

That endorsement is mostly symbolic. But it seems to weaken opposition based on environmental concerns.

But while these developments are

favorable, Oakland's solid waste program is still a long way from port. The Titanic was cruising along too, until it reached the iceberg.

Oakland's plan seems to be cruising along. But there's a sense of foreboding. Reports of icebergs are increasing.

### HERE'S A FEW:

• Richard H. Headlee, chairman of the watchdog group Taxpayers United and author of the tax amendment, has notified county officials he will sue if they don't allow residents to vote on the solid waste plan, the \$10 million computer center and the \$80 million addition to the courthouse.

"I'm not necessarily opposed to Oakland's solid waste plan," Headlee said in a phone interview Tuesday. "But I think county officials (specifically Captains Murphy and Rewold) are arrogant to commit the county's full faith and credit to these plans without first getting voter approval." (See related story)

Rewold and others say they welcome public comment on the solid waste plan. But they candidly predict voters will shoot the solid waste plan down if they get the chance.

• A story in The Oakland Press Sunday reported that County Executive Murphy — who has guided the waste program since it was launched — received more than \$20,000 in contributions from companies that could get substantial contracts if the plan is implemented.

Such contributions are completely

legal. But the mere hint of a possible conflict of interest could stir the political waters well into 1992 when the executive is up for re-election.

• There are growing indications that opposition from Rochester Hills — downwind neighbors of the proposed incinerator in neighboring Auburn Hills — is surging.

An increasing number of letters to the editor and telephone complaints seem to indicate citizens in that affluent community are getting increasingly angry about the threat to living standards and property values.

"BURNING is not the answer," one Rochester Hills couple wrote to Rewold, their county commissioner.

Their letter also contained the hint of a political threat against Rewold who is up for re-election this fall. "You will be remembered at election time," the couple reminded Rewold.

Oakland's 641 Committee — officially the Solid Waste Planning Committee formulated under Public Act 641 — is scheduled to meet tonight in the county auditorium.

Chairman James G. Meenahan said the committee is also prepared to meet next week as members review solid waste plans to be submitted to state officials for review.

Oakland's solid waste plan doesn't have a theme song and the 641 committee isn't scheduled to pick one. But if the committee were to select one, the odds-on favorite would undoubtedly be, "Nearer My God to Thee."

## ...but Headlee threatens suit on 'no vote' bonds

By Pat Murphy  
staff writer

Oakland officials may yet avoid a legal confrontation over allegations they are violating the state Constitution by not allowing residents to vote on funding its proposed solid waste program, according to commissioner Roy Rewold, chairman of the board of commissioners.

"I believe we can still talk to Mr. (Richard H.) Headlee," Rewold told the county's Solid Waste Task Force Tuesday. "But we won't know for a while."

Rewold, a Republican from Rochester, was referring to Headlee's threat to sue officials, if necessary, to force a vote on their plan to pledge tax funds to guarantee bonds to finance the solid waste program.

Oakland County is scheduled to begin selling up to \$500 million in bonds this summer to finance a trash-to-energy incinerator, a Material Recovery Facility (MRF) for recycling, composting facilities and landfill capacity.

In a surprise move Friday, Headlee notified County Clerk Lynn D. Allen he plans to sue if the county goes ahead with plans to sell bonds to finance the solid waste plan, the \$10 million computer center and the \$80 million addition to the courthouse.

HEADLEE, AUTHOR of the 1978 Headlee Tax Amendment and chairman of a watchdog organization called Taxpayers United, claims selling those bonds without a vote of the people is unconstitutional.

"The Constitution requires that bonds, like tax increases, must be approved by a majority vote of the people," Headlee said in his letter.

Rewold said he and other county officials met with Headlee last year to discuss his concerns and came away believing Headlee would not challenge their solid waste plans.

"I'm not that committed to the computer center or the courthouse addition," Rewold said. "But I am committed to the solid waste plan and I still hope we can convince Mr. Headlee not to sue over it."

Rewold and other officials disagree with Headlee on the need for a vote at least on the solid waste plan.

They say the county's corporation counsel concurs with their contention that a vote is not necessary because bonds for the solid waste plan would be paid off by user fees, rather than tax money.



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— Roy Rewold  
county board chairman

IN A PHONE conversation Tuesday, Headlee said he initially agreed not to intervene when the county tried to sell solid waste bonds.

"Our discussions convinced me they didn't intend to circumvent the will of the people (by not holding a vote)," Headlee said.

Headlee said he changed his mind, however, when Oakland also announced it would also sell so-called limited obligation bonds to finance the \$10 million computer center and the \$80 million addition to the courthouse.

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## Agency on aging sets public hearing

Oakland County senior citizens, service providers and other interested people are invited to attend a public hearing sponsored by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B.

Hearing on the Proposed Region 1-B Annual Implementation Plan Summary for Fiscal Year 1991 and Proposed Community Focal Points will be 8:30 a.m. Friday, April 27, at Lathrup Village City Hall, 27400 Southfield Road.

Public comments will assist the Area 1-B in finalizing planning and funding priorities for older adults in Oakland, as well as Livingston, Ma-

comb, Monroe, St. Clair and Washtenaw counties. Copies of the proposed annual implementation plan summary for fiscal year 1991 and proposed community focal points will be available at the Oakland-Livingston Human Service Agency, 196 Oakland Ave., Pontiac, 858-5103, and the Oakland County Reference Library, Executive Office Building, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac, 858-0783.

Written testimony on the proposed plan will be accepted through April 26 at the Area Agency on Aging 1-B office, 29508 Southfield Road, Southfield, MI 48076.

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