

Major disagreements hold up solid waste plan

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Oakland County commissioners go into today's meeting like a juggler who develops a hand crank — everything's up in the air and there's no telling how they will come down. Today's meeting is important as commissioners face crucial decisions as the controversial solid waste program goes from the planning stage into reality.

Beside answering basic questions — such as how to get \$470 million worth of bonds to finance the project — commissioners must grapple with nuts and bolts concerns like providing \$30 million in "working capital."

"We're months behind schedule," Roy Rewold advised his fellow Republican commissioners Monday during a somewhat inconclusive caucus.

Republican commissioners — who outnumber Democrats 20 to 7 — met for four hours before agreeing they have major disagreements. There was no consensus, no positions taken. The lack of agreement meant to-

day's meeting will have even more importance, even though — as with the juggler — things are very much up in the air.

"I THOUGHT tonight's caucus was important and beneficial even though we didn't decide anything," said commissioner Donna L. Wolf, Farmington Hills. "People were candid," and they got a lot of important things out in the open.

For example:

- Commissioners have until 5 p.m. on May 29 to get the question of how to sell the bonds on the Aug. 7 primary ballot.
- Commissioners have been grappling with putting the funding on the ballot. Some feel voters should be consulted, while others are concerned about the threat of a lawsuit from tax foes.

"I believe voters should be asked if they will pledge taxes (in the form of general obligation bonds) for the solid waste plan," said commissioner John Pappageorge of Troy. But they must realize the county will have to finance the plan another way if they say no, "and it will cost more money."

Other commissioners believe they should decide the issue. "Under our representative form of government, it's our job to be informed and to make the hard decisions," said commissioner David L. Moffitt, Farmington Hills. "It's not arrogant. We're supposed to make the hard decisions."

- Should the county advance \$20 million to provide the solid waste program with "working capital?"
- The money is needed to purchase

32 acres in Auburn Hills on which both the waste-to-energy incinerator and the Material Recovery Facility will be located.

The county is willing to advance the money, with the stipulation it will be repaid with interest once bonds are sold later this year.

But commissioners question the wisdom of advancing money when, as some contend, the bonds might never be sold leaving the county to suffer the losses.

"What happens if the county advances the money and can't sell the bonds?" asked commissioner Mark W. Chester, Troy.

To advance the money without a payback guarantee would be "fiscal insanity," said commissioner Donald W. Jensen of Birmingham.

- What happens if individual

communities don't support the waste program by pledging their trash?

The system needs a steady, reliable flow of trash — as much as 200 tons per day — to operate efficiently.

Officials hope to solidify that waste stream with intergovernmental agreements committing community trash to the waste-to-energy incinerator or the recycling facilities like the MRF for composting centers.

- Can, if necessary, the recycling portion of the program be put into place without the controversial incinerator?

Some commissioners, like Donald E. Bishop, Rochester Hills, say no. He and others say the proposed waste program is an integrated sys-

tem, that recycling by itself won't be adequate to accommodate the 400 tons of trash generated daily in Oakland County.

Even after Monday's inconclusive caucus, Rewold remained confident there would be enough votes at today's board meeting to advance the solid waste program — incinerator and all, without putting the issue on the ballot.

Rewold, one of the program's staunchest supporters, said he hopes to parlay enough votes — including some from Democrats — to keep the solid waste program alive and back on schedule.

"Solid waste is possibly the biggest issue facing this county," he has said repeatedly. "And we've got to face it."

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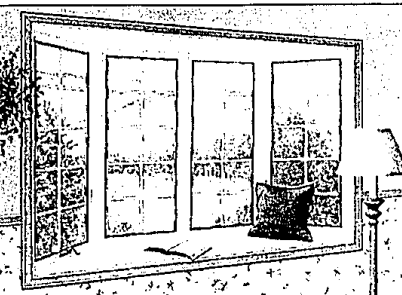
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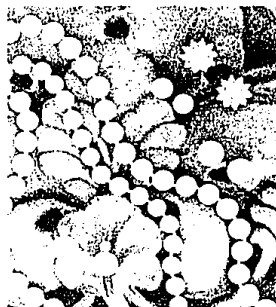
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