

Investigation heats up

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

A probe into an alleged violation of the Michigan Open Meetings Act has intensified — with Oakland county commissioners denying any wrongdoing and pledging cooperation.

"They didn't do anything wrong," said attorney William P. Hampton, referring to a complaint that county commissioners violated the state open meetings statute by discussing the controversial solid waste program at a convention of the National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C.

Hampton represented Commissioner Roy Rewold, chairman of the board, last week during a two-hour interview with investigators from the Oakland County Prosecutor's office.

"We had a friendly conversation," said Hampton. "And I think

the matter will be resolved in a satisfactory manner."

Rewold, R-Oakland Township, called the meeting on the spur of the moment while commissioners were in a hospitality suite at the NACo meeting March 17, said Hampton.

SHORTLY-AFTER commissioners returned and word of the meeting circulated, the president of RAIL (Residents Against Incinerators and Landfills) complained it violated that portion of the open meetings act that prohibits official gatherings when the public could not reasonably be expected to attend.

Marilynne Burton-Ristau of the board, last week also complained that on March 12, the leader of the Republican caucus violated the open meetings act by barring her use of a tape recorder while commissioners were discussing the sol-

id waste program.

Although the complaint was filed shortly after the March incidents, the prosecutor's office did not start investigating until last week — a coincidence that prompted some commissioners to complain.

Commissioner James D. Ferris, D-Pontiac, said he thought the timing was an attempt by prosecutor Richard Thompson to intimidate commissioners as they were about to consider his request for more personnel.

The allegation prompted Thompson to chuckle. "That's laughable," he said. "If I was trying to influence commissioners, I would have done nothing."

Investigators are looking into the complaint now, Thompson said, because they have the time. "It's a matter of timing and priorities," he said.

Solid waste plan on hold

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Except for continuing to provide information needed to get an air quality permit, activity on the proposed Oakland solid waste program — with the controversial incinerator in Auburn Hills — is on hold.

County officials continue to provide data to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and other regulating agencies. But most spending on consulting contracts or other major expenditures is frozen until after the Nov. 5 vote on funding.

"That's the way it should be until we find out what voters want to do," said Commissioner Marilynne E. Gosling, R-Bloomfield Hills.

Gosling is one of many people who predict the ballot issue will be turned into a referendum on the proposed incinerator in Auburn Hills — and defeated.

"When that happens, the county will have to reassess its position," said Gosling, who believes the county should reject the incinerator and proceed with a program built on recycling.

A smaller incinerator might be necessary, she acknowledges. "But only as a last resort" and only after recycling has been implemented and pushed.

THE CHAIRMAN of the Board of Commissioners, however, continues to reiterate his contention that the county should turn solid waste over to local communities if voters turn down the Nov. 5 ballot issue.

"A program without an incinerator will not meet the county's needs," said Roy Rewold, R-Oakland Township. "If the ballot issue is defeated, I think the county should leave solid waste to individual communities."

Commissioner Donald W. Jensen, R-Birmingham, said he believes the

bond issue will pass, giving the county the boost it needs to implement the waste program, including the Auburn Hills incinerator.

"I think people are reasonable enough to learn the facts and approve the waste program, including the incinerator," said Jensen.

Oakland's Solid Waste Management Department, however, continues to negotiate with state officials in Lansing in order to obtain the air quality permit needed to proceed with the \$175 million waste-to-energy incinerator.

Commissioners have approved the expenditure of funds related to the air quality permit, but frozen money needed to continue consulting services — such as the money needed to retain consultants for the sale of bonds.

Roger Smith, the county's deputy director of public works, said the freeze will not adversely affect the solid waste program.

Rewold hit by 4th recall effort

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

A fourth attempt to recall Commissioner Roy Rewold because of his advocacy of an incinerator as part of the county's solid waste program has been filed with the Oakland County Board of Elections.

Rewold, an Oakland Township Republican who is also chairman of the board of commissioners, is named in a recall petition filed Thursday by Laurie Rupert-Eaton, a resident of Auburn Hills and a member of RAIL (Residents Against Incineration and Landfills).

Rupert-Eaton claims Rewold

should be recalled for signing a contract with the Westinghouse Corp. House Corp. to build the proposed incinerator in Auburn Hills.

Rupert-Eaton claims Rewold and other commissioners signed the contract before giving residents the chance to vote on the solid waste program and the controversial incinerator.

"...thereby making the people of Oakland County financially liable for a signed contract."

She is referring to the \$175 million contract Oakland signed with Westinghouse to build and operate the 2,000 ton per day incinerator.

THE COUNTY deputy director of solid waste management, however, said that Rupert-Eaton is mistaken.


"We have a contract with Westing-

house," Roger Smith said Friday. "But like other contracts, it's conditional. It doesn't become binding unless other things happen."

For example, the county would have to sell bonds to assure financing and get pledges that individual communities would commit their waste to be burned in the incinerator, Smith said. "Neither of those things can happen before the Nov. 5 ballot."

The county election commission scheduled a hearing on this latest recall petition for 8:30 a.m. on Aug. 16.

THAT WOULD be the third such hearing on a Rewold recall petition since May 23, when county commissioners voted to put bonding on an election ballot.



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