

Solid waste plan architect resigns county seat

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Roy Rewold, considered by many to be the architect of Oakland's solid waste program, is resigning as county commissioner.

The Oakland Township Republican, who has been chairman of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners for five years, said he wants to devote more time to his business. "I am concerned about my ability to give the time the job (commissioner) so highly deserves," Rewold said in his resignation letter dated Jan. 2. He is chief executive officer of Frank Rewold and Son Inc., a general contracting company founded by his father in Rochester.

"I'M ALSO getting a little worn down," said Rewold, who previously spent 13 years in municipal government — first with the village of Rochester and then on its city council, including five years as mayor.

News of Rewold's resignation came as a surprise to his colleagues on the board, although not a total shock. Earlier this year he announced he would not seek re-election as chairman of the board and subsequently lobbied on behalf of his eventual successor, commissioner Larry Crake, R-Waterford.

"I CAN'T SAY his (Rewold's) resignation was a total surprise," said commissioner Donald Jensen. "He'll definitely be missed, although I'm sure Larry Crake will be a capable replacement (as chairman)."

Commissioner Nancy McConnell, R-Bloomfield Hills, said Rewold "brought good business judgment to the board."

"He could always see the big picture when the rest of us were busy with the minutia," said McConnell, who as vice chairman of the board frequently worked closely with Rewold.

Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick of Southfield said Rewold's resignation will be a "big loss for the county, and a big loss for Democrats."



Roy Rewold

Pernick, chairman of the Democratic caucus on the board, said Rewold took a cooperative bipartisan approach to county business. "He involved Democrats like few other county chairmen have done."

Pernick also praised Rewold's willingness to do what he considered to be the right thing, "regardless of the political consequences. Not many people are willing to do that."

PERNICK SPECIFICALLY was referring Rewold's role in planning and implementing the county's \$500 million solid waste program, the most expensive and controversial public project in the history of Oakland County.

Oakland County had been discussing a solid waste program — as required by state law — for more than two decades. But it's generally conceded those discussions were going nowhere before Rewold moved to implement them. Commissioner David L. Moffitt, R-Farmington Hills, put it this way, "Rewold took hold of the solid waste

program . . . and shook it. His leadership ultimately gave us the comprehensive plan voters approved last month."

The solid waste program — which calls for recycling 50 percent of the county's waste and a controversial waste-to-energy incinerator in Auburn Hills — was narrowly approved Nov. 5. Passage was by 186 votes out of 141,482 cast, making it the closest election in county history.

REWOLD SAID he considers passage of the solid waste program to be the most significant accomplishment of his tenure as a county commissioner.

"That vote showed that a significant number of voters realized the need for a comprehensive solid waste plan to take Oakland County into the next century," he said Monday.

Not everyone considered the solid waste program to be a victory, however. Opponents made Rewold's support of the solid waste program a major issue in the 1990 election, and Democrat Sandy Teague came within 562 votes of unseating him — a perilously close margin for an incumbent Republican in a safe district.

But the political fallout didn't end with Rewold's re-election. Four times this year Rewold was the target of recall attempts — each one citing his support of the controversial solid waste program.

NONE GOT BEYOND the petition stage, mainly because the Oakland County Election Board ruled the wording was so vague as to be misleading.

Rewold said those recall attempts were more a nuisance than a concern. "That's the price of leadership," he frequently said.

But after the fourth recall attempt, he said he was considering legal action because of what he consid-

ered undue harassment.

Even with those recall attempts, Rewold said his nine years on the board have been satisfying and personally gratifying. "There really haven't been any disappointments."

There is, however, one thing Rewold said he wishes he had done differently. That is the meeting he called on March 17, when he and 18 other commissioners were in Washington, D.C., for a convention of the National Association of Counties.

REWOLD SAID he didn't think commissioners outside the state's boundaries were subject to Michi-

gan's Open Meetings Act and called a closed meeting to discuss the solid waste program — then at a crucial stage.

In response to complaints, the Oakland County prosecutor subsequently ruled that Rewold and other commissioners unintentionally violated the Open Meetings Act.

After a highly publicized — and sometimes bitter — exchange with the prosecutor, Rewold and his colleagues signed an embarrassing agreement saying they would henceforth obey the law.

REWOLD'S RESIGNATION takes

effect Jan. 2, leaving slightly less than a year remaining on his unexpired term.

A special election is not required in this case, so Rewold's colleagues on the Board of Commissioners decided they will pick his successor.

Although Rewold has not decided if he will support any particular candidate as his successor, he already has words of wisdom ready.

"I would wish my successor luck," he said. "And advise him to go to work right away if he (or she) has any project in mind. It seems like the longer you're in there, the more difficult it becomes to do anything."

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