Incinerator trashed

County weighs solid waste options

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Now that Southfield, Troy, West Bloomfield and other communities have rejected any solid waste plan with an incinerator, Oakland County is preparing to address a new question:

What role, if any, should the county play in dealing with the 4,000 tons of municipal waste generated daily?

Officials are expected to begin grappling with that question this week after the deputy director of the county's waste management division makes a report — and recommendations — based on a survey of 60 cities, townships and villages.

"The communities spoke very clearly," said Roger A. Smith. "They don't want any part of an incinerator."

Based on that survey, Smith said he will recommend several options to County Executive Daniel Murphy and County Board Chairman Larry Crake.

Options explored

One option — the one he personally favors — is for the county to go ahead with plans to implement recycling measures aimed at reducing the county waste stream by 50 percent.

Other options, he said, are:

- Abandoning plans to deal with solid waste at the county level, leaving the problem to the municipalities and private waste haulers.
- Abandoning any operating role in solid waste, but maintaining a coordinating, educating or managing function.
- Operating the expanded landfill in Orion Township, a role that would help smaller communities that do not have contracts with private haulers.
- Some combination of the above.

"Whatever action we take, we must move without delay," said Smith. "Our (the county's) contracts on the landfill and the MRF (material recovery facility) expire June 30."

The landfill in Orion Township and MRF in Auburn Hills are major components of any recycling program.

The probability of Oakland abandoning plans for an incinerator were overwhelmingly favorable. Since the close vote in favor of the incinerator last November, the Westinghouse Corp. which would have built and developed it pulled out.

Critics 'overjoyed'

"I'm overjoyed," said Sherry Clair, a spokesman for HOPE (Help Oakland Preserve the Environment), one of the groups that opposed the incinerator for health and environmental reasons.

"We've talked about that possibility," she said. "Without the incinerator, the county has a wonderful plan. We're all for it."

County commissioner Donald Bishop, R-Rochester Hills, said the county should have rejected the incinerator long ago . . . and moved to implement recycling. "I've had a proposal like that in committee for a long time," he said.

Another opponent of the incinerator, commissioner Thomas Law, R-West Bloomfield, said, "That's what we should have done from day one. I thought it was a travesty the county wanted an incinerator when the people didn't."

Commissioner Lawrence Pernick, however, said he favors a reduced role for the county. "I think people have lost faith in the county's ability to deal with solid waste.

"I want to get some answers before I make a decision. But perhaps the county should commit itself to an educational role."

Many county officials privately speculated the incinerator was dead in March when the Westinghouse Corp. unilaterally canceled the $200 million contract to build the waste-to-energy facility in Auburn Hills.

Although Oakland could have simply renegotiated a new contract with one of the companies that also bid on the job, officials chose instead to consult with the communities that would have been served by the system.

Murphy and Crake sent new Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) asking if the communities wanted a system and, if so, what kind. The deadline for responding was last Friday.

Communities like Farmington Hills and Birmingham that belong to a larger solid waste authority (RRRASOC for Farmington Hills and SOCRRA for Birmingham) want no part of a county system, Smith said.

Their responses indicated the county system was "too expensive," he said. "And they have long-term export arrangements."

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Suburbs seek regional water board

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

State Sen. David Honigman — and other officials in Oakland County — want to replace the existing Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) and with a Regional Water and Sewerage Authority they say would treat the suburbs more fairly.

The regional authority gives counties and municipalities more say in rates and policies affecting water and sewer without taking money away from Detroit, Honigman said Thursday at a press conference with Oakland County Drain Commissioner George W. Kuhn.

The conference was called to discuss Senate Bill 906, introduced two days earlier by Honigman, calling for creation of the regional water and sewer authority.

The bill was referred to committee. Honigman said it has bipartisan support and would likely pass in the Senate, and meet serious opposition in the House.

The proposed legislation is aimed directly at the existing DWSD and would strip away some of the power of Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young, who appoints its commissioners.

Asked for a response, Bob Berg, Young's press secretary, said, "I hope it (the press conference) was paid for by the "Honigman for Congress Committee." It's an obvious grandstand play. He (Honigman) wanted some publicity, so he bashes Detroit."

Mayor 'not cooperative'

While Berg did not say what the Detroit mayor's response would be, Honigman and Kuhn predicted it would be uncooperative.

"We've been fighting over water rates for years," said Kuhn. "The mayor has a history of not cooperating."

Because of that history, Kuhn and Honigman said they didn't even bother to consult with him prior to introducing the legislation or holding the press conference. Berg, however, said it is Honigman and Kuhn who are uncooperative. "If they were serious about their proposal, they would have contacted us beforehand. But they didn't.

"Honigman bills himself as a new generation leader," Berg said. "It sure sounds like grandstanding as usual."

Honigman and Kuhn said the proposed regional authority would give control of water and sewer services to the communities and people who currently pay for them.

"It's the one-man, one-vote principle the mayor espous[illegible] state Legislature [illegible] was once [illegible] when th[illegible]

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