

# County, DNR dispute landfill space available

BY PAT MURPHY  
STAFF WRITER

As Oakland prepares to make plans to handle refuse in the 21st Century, it faces a perplexing dilemma, according to the person most knowledgeable about the county's efforts to manage solid waste.

At a time when abundant landfill space is available, state officials are pressuring Oakland to site more landfills, according to

Roger J. Smith, manager of the Oakland County Department of Solid Waste Management.

Landfill space is so plentiful, said Smith, that it negates the need — and rationale — for any solid waste incinerator as the county had proposed two years ago.

Because of the large landfill capacity, Smith said, prices are at unexpectedly low levels . . . so low there's an influx of solid

waste from Canada and East Coast states, which find it cheaper to ship waste to Michigan than to bury it at home.

Smith talked privately about the dilemma Thursday at the regular meeting of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners.

One order of business at that meeting was to appoint 13 non-voting members to the county's Solid Waste Planning Committee, also known as the 641 planning

committee after Public Act 641 that mandated it.

Among those 13 are Robert Justin of Rochester Hills, Rich Pirrotta of Bloomfield Hills and Michael P. Tyler of Berkley.

They will work with voting members appointed to the 641 committee last month. They include Ben Marks of Farmington Hills, Robert E. Leininger of West Bloomfield, Yale Levin of Southfield, Alan Druschitz of

Troy, and Thomas G. Waffan of Bloomfield Hills.

The 641 committee will have its first formal meeting Thursday when it is expected to elect officers and establish rules of procedure.

Once those organizational chores are out of the way, Smith said he will begin to outline the county's dilemma as well as other aspects of Oakland's solid waste problems.

**Siting space**

One aspect is pressure from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) which wants Oakland to site enough landfill space to handle the county's estimated needs for 20 years.

"But that (requirement) doesn't make sense," said Thomas Waffan, who, besides being a voting member of the 641 committee, is general manager of the Southeastern Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority (SOCCRA). As Oakland sites more landfill space, prices remain low, attracting trash from other states and Canada.

The 641 committee's work begins while Oakland residents still have a sour taste from previous efforts to manage solid waste.

Those efforts resulted in a solid waste plan that was scrapped after costing more than \$16 million. Controversial components of the plan included a \$500 million waste-to-energy incinerator in Auburn Hills, a waste recovery facility and an Oakland County-owned landfill.

Also during Thursday's meet-

**Market forces**

Douglas, a vocal opponent of the proposed incinerator, said she is also pleased with the apparent glut of landfill space. "Market forces are at work," she said, "and landfill space is cheap. As long as it stays cheap, there's no need for any incinerator."

In 1990, landfill tipping fees were about \$11.50 per compacted cubic yard — and were expected to skyrocket, according to Smith. Last summer — with 10 active landfills competing in southeast Michigan — fees dropped to about \$8.50 per cubic yard although prices now seem to have stabilized around \$9.

"What we have is competition," Smith said. "And there appears to be ample capacity available in the long term at darn good prices."

Prices are so good, Smith said, that about 10 percent of the solid waste being landfilled in southeast Michigan comes from outside the state. He said Michigan can not block that influx of solid waste because of a 1992 ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court saying that doing so would be an unconstitutional limit to interstate commerce

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