

Tim Richard writes

Our Trash Could Heat Factories -- No Dream

Imagine a heating plant in the industrial corridor of Livonia and Plymouth that could serve:

• Chevrolet's Spring and Bumper plant, the Ford Transmission plant, National Can Corp., Observer Newspapers, Burroughs Corp., Associated Spring, Evans Products, perhaps even Madonna College and St. Mary Hospital.

Imagine further that this plant burned neither oil nor gas but trash -- the tons of solid wastes that homes and businesses place at their curbs and alleys to be trucked away and buried.

It's possible, says Arch Vallier, who prides himself on being a practical engineer and man of business, and not a pie-in-the-sky visionary.

Last week the executive committee of SEMCOG (Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) gave Vallier another go-ahead signal for a project that may be 10 or 15 years away.

In Overland, Vallier is known as a retired engineer, former Plymouth city commissioner and current member of the Schoolcraft College board. But Vallier is also chairman of a SEMCOG advisory body called the Council on Environmental Strategy.

A couple of months ago, SEMCOG received an engineering re-

port from the consulting firm of Metcalf and Eddy, Inc. which Vallier denounced as "politically unsalable." He said it failed to recognize the interests of local governments and business in disposing of solid waste.

SEMCOG's new action, taken at Vallier's request, was to set up a Solid Waste Committee of policy-makers rather than engineers.

"Our stress will be on a long-range program of energy recovery," said Vallier when interviewed. "We want to turn waste into some kind of useful products. We'll have two meetings a month and offer some policy plans by the end of the year."

The Solid Waste Committee is to make recommendations on:

- "The establishment of the responsibility for the disposal of all types of solid wastes generated in the region."
- "The administrative framework."
- "Legislative proposals" to accomplish those tasks.
- "A configuration of facilities" to dispose of solid wastes that will have (a) minimum negative effect on the environment; (b) maximum resource recovery and (c) least cost.

How to finance the capital costs and pay operating costs. Two familiar names on the

committee will be State Sen. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth) and Oakland County Commissioner Lawrence Pernick (D-Southfield).

Other members are expected to come from auto companies, a bottling firm, the state Dept. of Natural Resources and local government.

That's why Vallier calls it a policy committee rather than an engineering group.

But about that giant heating plant in the Overland industrial corridor: "No more of this burying trash," Vallier told me, "although landfills will have to be the short-term solution to disposing of solid waste."

Trash can be burned and used for heat. Vallier notes that GM's Pontiac truck and coach plant plans to do just that, and reduce its consumption of coal by 40 per cent next year. He has also studied with enthusiasm Nashville's new project to heat and cool 20 major downtown buildings from a trash-burning thermal plant.

Trash can be a source of metals.

Trash can even be a source of oil. Vallier wants to find out more about a reported Connecticut project to do just that. It's not as wild an idea as it sounds, he says, because "oil is just trees and garbage under high temperature and pressure."

WHY NOT?



Leonard Poger writes

Official Acts Are Legal, But Public Has Doubts

From the State Supreme Court in Lansing to the local city halls in the suburbs, ethical conflict of interest issues have been raised about public officials' actions.

The aftermath of the Watergate disclosures created an attitude of super cynicism among voters and the press.

Another element of pressure is the political axes some public and private persons want to grind at the expense of elected officials.

But the most serious flaw in past and present conflict of interest issues is the lack of vision possessed by public officials caught in the middle of controversies.

This lack leads public officials to ask attorneys or legal advisors if there is any "legal" conflict of interest in a pending issue they are involved in.

In all cases, the conclusion has been there is none, and those officials are free to pursue their proposed course.

But they fail to see the ethical conflict which is obvious to many other persons familiar with the facts.

The only legal barrier against an elected official being directly involved with a zoning issue or contract or related issue is whether the official has a direct financial interest.

There are numerous other factors entering the situation which make it clear -- actually crystal clear -- that the legal definition of a conflict of interest leaves much to be desired from public officials.

The most recent conflict issue in Lansing was resolved last week when Supreme Court Justice Thomas Brennan announced his resignation to work fulltime for his private law school.

The school was partially supported by donations generated by a mass solicitation of lawyers. While lawyers are free to contrib-

ute funds or ignore the financial plea from the law school, it takes no professor of political science to determine the plea for funds stands a better chance when the man making it is a State Supreme Court justice.

There is an unspoken threat made by the justice who solicits funds from lawyers who stand the possibility of appearing before the court.

On a more local level, Westland City Councilman Glenn Shaw Jr. saw no legal conflict of interest in supporting a rezoning petition in which his employer was a partner.

Shaw changed his mind a day later, but recall petitions drafted by homeowners opposed to the rezoning are still being circulated against Shaw.

Public officials in other suburbs display more discretion about potential conflicts.

In Berkley a councilman employed by Detroit Edison Co. refused to vote or discuss any matter involving Edison. He left the council chambers while the matter was being debated so his presence would put no pressure on his colleagues.

That kind of vision toward future consequences and what the public might think if the opposite actions were taken is what elected officials need.

If they lack vision, ethical conflict of interest issues will continue to plague suburban officials.

Our readers may be wondering why some of their favorite features appear to have vanished from the Observer Newspapers columns in the past two editions.

No, it isn't true! Such articles have been dropped; the truth of the matter is the Observers, like newspapers in every section of the land, have been caught in the newsprint shortage and are doing everything possible to conserve use.

The strikes of eight Canadian newsprint mills have made the situation critical for most newspapers in the United States. Two of the mills shut down by labor difficulties are Price Co. pulp and paper plants.

Price Co. is one of the two suppliers of the Observers, and loss of that newsprint places the group of seven newspapers in a precarious position.

Realizing that the strike may continue for some time, the Observers are tightening up at every possible point, cutting corners wherever possible to make the available supply of newsprint last as long as possible.

That's why some things may be missing from your editions. The news and editorial space have been reduced. There may be restrictions on some kinds of advertising. Everything will be tightened to conserve newsprint and assure readers of getting their newspapers delivered as usual until the situation eases.

We hope you'll bear with us during a trying time. It could well be that additional reductions will have to be made in editorial space, but the Observer staff is geared to turn out the same bright, spritely product as always.

Observer Newspapers Inc.

We, Too, Are Caught By Newsprint Shortage

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R.T. Thompson writes

Will SR Voters Follow Plymouth's Lead At The Polls?

Do voters in the South Redford District care whether extra-curricular activities continue, or are they going to take the attitude that such things are so much nonsense and should be dropped as soon as possible?

Basically, that's the question that will be answered in Saturday's election when electors will either approve a request for three additional mills for operations or turn it down.

The same question was asked in June, and it went down to a resounding "No."

If it is rejected for the second time in three months, then school officials will be forced to make cutbacks of \$790,000 in services.

And among the items slated to go would be all varsity sports. This is taken to mean all sports at Thurston High, including the recently introduced programs for girls.

Strangely enough, the marching band is not listed among the proposed cuts but one wonders just what a well trained group of musicians will do this fall if there isn't a football team to attract crowds.

What will the bandsmen do during the winter if there isn't a bas-

ketball program? We wonder how many folks would walk out to the football field on the cool days of the early fall to see the band go through its maneuvers.

We guarantee the stands would be quite empty except for the parents and relatives who showed up to see what their sons, daughters, nephews and nieces had planned for the halftime show at the games.

We would like to make a head concert during the winter on the basketball court in place of the regular game.

One concert, perhaps two, might have a crowd but for 10 programs? . . . Well, we believe there would be plenty of other attractions in the area that would be most interesting.

We can't quite believe voters in South Redford can be that hard-nosed to reject the millage request. However, if they do tell the school board to go ahead and make the cuts by nixing the request, then the trustees should make the cutbacks and FORGET ABOUT additional millage for this year.

Drop the programs, drop everything it said it would, and when

the complaints start pouring in, just tell the voters: "This is what you voted for, and we'll let it stand for this school year."

Plymouth was faced with the same kind of decision recently when a second request was made for new school millage after it failed in June.

The question there was: Who cares about the proposed cutbacks? Is it only the parents of participants who want the programs continued? Does the community as a whole care that much?

The answer, judging from the second vote in Plymouth, is parents of the participants and friends.

They want to see their children perform; they believe in the value of extra-curricular activities and want to give their youngsters every chance to perform.

Whether the parents can work the same miracle in South Redford that happened in Plymouth remains to be seen.

In the first Plymouth vote in June, the vote was 2,697 AGAINST and 1,899 for, with a scant 20 per cent turning out.

In the balloting three weeks back, the story was 2,283 for and 1,917 against with a mere 18 per cent at the polls. It proves that more parents turned out the second time while fewer of the anti group bothered to vote. Would you want to believe only 4,200 took time to go to the voting booths for such an important issue?

Perhaps that's what the South Redford board hopes will take place Saturday. The parents and friends vote, and the "no" group finds other things to do.

What other reason could there be to hold an election on a millage increase on a Saturday? We haven't heard of a Saturday election in this area for a long time. Maybe the trustees know what they are doing, but just suppose they guessed wrong and the anti-anything group as far as tax boosters are concerned does get to the polls. It will be interesting to see what the final count is come Saturday night.

Sense And Nonsense

A former Overland city manager who resigned under pressure was seen recently driving with a bumper sticker on his car touting the famous free fair held annually in the Michigan city he's been eyeing for a new job.

School truancy is against the law but can be justified because the law hasn't thrown errant pupils into jail. Thus, the reward of escaping boredom is greater than the punishment.

Teachers who disagree with this rationalization ought to consider their position of breaking the law by striking for economic advan-

tages, knowing well that the law won't throw errant educators in jail.

The alternatives are (1) for the Legislature to revise attendance and public employe strike laws, or (2) for teacher and pupil to meet in the pokeny.

An Overland service club member commented recently at a luncheon meeting that the Detroit News traditionally criticizes large firms, such as the Auto Club and American Motors, for moving offices from Detroit to the suburbs and thereby "abandoning" the central city.

The club member then noted that nothing was said about The News moving all of its production operations to its new Sterling Heights plant.

In a fine gesture of non-partisan support, Farmington Councilman John Allen insisted on equal privileges when the Oakland County Republicans came before the council for a permit for fund-raising.

I think that when the...what's the name of that other party? Well, anyway, we ought to give them the same privilege in the resolution."

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