

Solid Waste Management A Local Issue

by Bryan Weinert

Solid waste issues - including landfills, waste-to-energy facilities, recycling, and composting - are hot topics these days in the corridors of City Hall and County offices. The reason? Several Washtenaw County communities, like so many communities throughout the country, are approaching a crisis in solid waste management. Unlike many communities, Washtenaw County has recognized the growing threat with enough lead time to address the issue comprehensively and rationally - we hope.

Several recent developments on the Washtenaw County solid waste management scene are worth noting.

- Ann Arbor's landfill, as presently sized (Phase II), has less than three years of life left. Negotiations with the state of Michigan on a proposed Phase III are moving slowly. If Phase III is approved, it could add 10-15 years of landfill capacity along Ellsworth Road.

- A private corporation is moving ahead with plans to construct a Type II (solid waste) landfill near Liberty and Wagner Roads in Scio Township. Their goal is to have the landfill on line within two years.

- A Waste-to-Energy (WTE) Feasibility Study was completed for Washtenaw County in November 1986. If a WTE facility is constructed, solid waste disposal costs could increase 300% over current levels.

- Washtenaw County has also recently completed a Composting Feasibility Study. An aggressive county-wide composting program could reduce the amount of waste entering a landfill or incinerator by 12-15%.

- A three-month Recycling Feasibility Study is now underway for Washtenaw County with a preliminary report due by the end of April. In addition, a year-long Waste Stream Assessment is to begin in the spring, evaluating the volume and type of waste being generated

within Washtenaw County.

All of these developments suggest that the disposal of our solid waste will soon be approached differently. These developments bring with them both opportunities and risks for environmentalists and recyclers. New landfill space could diminish the short-term disposal crisis and allow policymakers to return to an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality on solid waste issues.

Waste-to-Energy plants bring with them a unique set of environmental and economic concerns. Recycling and composting can either be viewed as distinct opportunities or dismissed as "nice ideas" but impractical.

Public opinion and input is essential in this critical stage of policy development. Clearly, the forces for recycling, composting, and waste reduction do not reside in board rooms or on engineering drawings - they rest in the values and concerns of environmentally conscious citizens.

Three committees involved in solid waste management now exist

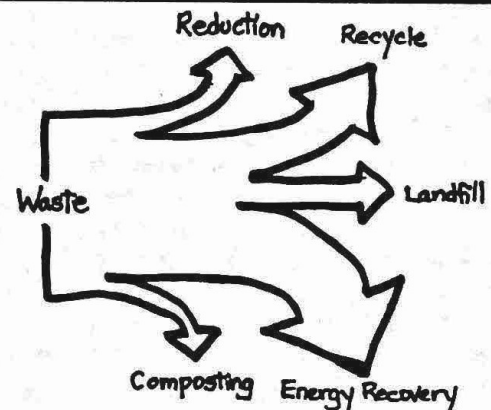
at the county level: Source Separation, Landfill Siting, and Energy. For information on these committees, and on Washtenaw County solid waste issues, contact Department of Public Works Director Jack Durbin at 994-2398.

The City of Ann Arbor has recently established a Solid Waste Task Force that will address Ann Arbor's long-term direction for the collection and disposal of solid waste. For information on the Task Force and on city-related solid waste issues, contact either Solid Waste Department Director John Newman at 994-2807 or Solid Waste Consultant Cynthia Conklin at 994-2912. Let them know about your interest and concerns.

Finally, for specific information or to give feedback on recycling, composting, or waste reduction strategies, contact the Ecology Center at 761-3186, or stop in and use our library. We are going to need your help!

This is part 2 of a series that will explore waste management issues.

What Is Integrated Waste Management?



Traditionally, solid waste management has primarily relied on one or two methods of waste disposal. In the U.S., landfilling has been the method of choice.

Integrated Waste Management treats landfilling as only one of many waste management options, and integrates several waste management strategies into a single system.

This approach requires that waste management plans emphasize reducing the waste stream first and recycling and composting everything possible next. After these strategies have been used, energy recovery methods treat the remaining waste stream. Finally, the small amounts of waste that are left over are buried in a landfill.

- Ruth Kraut