

Proposed state tax on solid waste raises concerns

-- The commissioners OK'd a hospital bond issue and accepted a lease agreement involving a \$428,000 renovation project.

By Dennis Pelham -- Daily Telegram Staff Writer

ADRIAN -- A proposed state tax on garbage, a \$20 million hospital bond issue and a lease agreement that includes a renovation project at the Lenawee County Human Services Building were among the items taken up at Wednesday's county commission session.

Commissioners gave their approval for a ProMedica Health System bond issue. The money is to be used for a renovation and expansion project at Herrick Memorial Hospital in Tecumseh and for new equipment, upgrades and debt restructuring at Bixby Medical Center and Provincial House nursing home in Adrian.

Commission approval for the bond issue is required although the county will not back the debt or hold any liability for the borrowing.

A \$428,000 renovation project at the county human services office building on South Winter Street was moved forward with approval of a new lease agreement with the Lenawee Community Mental Health Authority. The lease through February 2011 authorizes the agency to hire a contractor for the project. The county is paying \$213,000 of the costs for carpeting, painting and air conditioning work. Monthly rent payments set at \$27,116 include debt retirement expenses for the building.

Trash was a major topic of discussion Wednesday, with commissioners expressing concern over a proposed \$7.50 per ton state tax on garbage taken to Michigan landfills.

"I am concerned how it will affect the citizens as taxpayers as well as the county solid waste department," said John Tuckerman, R-Blissfield, the commission's appointed member of a committee that oversees the solid waste department.

The solid waste department's recycling and environmental programs are funded with a \$1 per ton fee collected on trash received at the Great Lakes Waste Systems landfill in Palmyra Township. The \$7.50 per ton tax proposed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm could replace the county fee.

"If the money's not there, what do we do? Close the door, if we have one?" commented Sue Ringman, coordinator of the county solid waste department.

Commission chairman Larry Gould, R-Seneca Twp., said Granholm's proposal calls for returning some of the new state fees to local governments for recycling programs, but

only as grants that match local contributions.

Gould also worried that raising the cost of using the landfill could cause more trash to end up dumped illegally in roadside ditches.

Old television sets are already showing up more frequently along rural roads since the local landfill stopped accepting them last fall, said Ralph Tillotson, R-Adrian Twp.

Tillotson also questioned a proposal by state Rep. Dudley Spade, D-Adrian, to require state government inspections of imported trash to discourage the flow of trash from outside Michigan. Reductions in Michigan State Police numbers make it seem unlikely troopers will be available for garbage inspections, he said.

"I have a hard time picturing state police going there and certifying it," Tillotson said.

Household trash has already stopped coming across the Ohio border from Fulton County to the Great Lakes Waste System landfill near Adrian. Landfill manager Matt Terrill said last week that he stopped accepting waste from Fulton County because of a Michigan law that took effect Nov. 1 that makes imported trash subject to the same laws as Michigan trash in regulating what can be put in landfills.

Terrill told the Lenawee County Solid Waste Coordinating Committee that the landfill lost \$75,000 a month in business due to that law.

While household garbage and other regular waste from outside the state is now barred, according to Terrill, the landfill is still receiving special waste material from East Coast automotive recycling businesses. Non-metallic "shredder fluff" left from recycling operations is used primarily as a daily cover in place of soil, he said.

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