Acadiana landfill defeat most one-sided ‘ever’

Saying ‘no’ in Acadiana Parish:

- A little more than 31 percent of registered voters went to the polls May 3 to decide the fate of a landfill.
- Of the 11,142 voters who participated, 10,531 — or 94.52 percent — voted "no" to the proposition. Only 611, or 5.48 percent, favored the proposal.

The Wirepress

"This was definitely the most one-sided election ever," Robby Barousse, chief deputy clerk of court, said after the officials numbers were recorded Tuesday.

Barousse added that a 31 percent turnout for a ballot with only one proposition on it is "amazing in itself."

"I thought we’d hold that record forever," an Acadiana Parish School Board member was overheard saying during an informal discussion of Saturday’s vote. He was referring to the Jan. 16 ballot propositions for the Crowley School Board. More than 77 percent of the voters opposed those propositions.

The referendum

The referendum would have allowed the police jury to name a nine-member landfill commission charged with developing the landfill onto a regional facility for the receipt and disposal of non-hazardous solid waste from outside the parish.

The revenues — tipping fees — generated from operating the proposed regional landfill would have been divided among the police jury and the seven incorporated municipalities within the parish on a per capita basis, determined by the last federal census.

The police jury’s portion was to be dedicated for constructing and improving public roads and bridges and boosting economic development in the parish. The municipalities’ share would have been spent on capital improvement and economic development.

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Covington in the three largest municipalities in the parish — Crowley, Rayne and Church Point — had adopted resolutions supporting the plan. The Iota Town Council and the Acadiana Parish School Board went on record opposing the proposition.

The original proposition, first presented to the jury in early March by the Acadiana Economic Development Corp., contained strong language relating to reducing the waste stream into the landfill.

In 1988 voters across the parish approved a dedication of the sales tax whereby any surplus in the solid waste fund could be used to repair and maintain parish roads.

"We’ve used $6 million on the rural roads," Labbe said. "Granted, everyone said it was needed. But what do the citizens in the rural areas do when their trash picked up once a week, same as everyone in the rural area, but that’s all.

While the plan sounds like a good one, one that would likely be embraced by all municipalities — there may be a problem, according to Catherine Lacombe, chairwoman of the jury’s solid waste committee and advocate for keeping the landfill for Acadiana use only.

According to Lacombe, surplus funds from the 1-cent sales tax have been dedicated to paying off bonds used for the initial phase of the parish road repair program.

Lacombe added that it was Labbe who offered the resolution to use those funds for that purpose.

"I’m willing to listen to what Mr. Labbe has to say but he must have forgotten that he has already offered a resolution concerning the use of the solid waste surplus funds, and his resolution was approved," Lacombe said. "So I’d suggest that Mr. Labbe refresh his memory by reviewing the minutes of the special meeting of July 11, 1996."

The resolution authorized the jury to advertise for the sale of $3.5 million in bonds to be paid from the solid waste surplus.

Labbe said he planned to bring his recommendations to the jury’s solid waste committee. Lacombe noted that there is no committee meeting scheduled for this Friday night’s meeting of the full jury.

The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. on the third floor of the courthouse here.