

Addendum to SWAC Report to San Juan County Council
Submitted by Jack Yelverton

The Solid Waste Advisory Committee made an unfortunate error some time ago when it decided that cost must not be a factor in the process of selecting a site for the proposed transfer station. The policies of the Comprehensive Plan state clearly and unambiguously that minimizing public cost of a project is and must be a leading consideration. Ignoring both project cost and the present economic condition of the County and the State has led the Committee to issue a report that must be rejected by the Council. The Town of Friday Harbor has formally requested the County to consider economic factors in developing a new facility but this request has not been considered. The people of San Juan County understand that the County must make financially-driven decisions, not decisions that may offer marginal improvements only at far greater cost, particularly when the benefit is to only one island but the cost becomes a burden for all.

In selecting a location for the San Juan Island transfer station, there are substantial cost differences among the alternatives available to the County and the Council will certainly need thorough, accurate advice in selecting a site that meets the technical and operational needs of the County at the lowest possible expenditure.

Three sites have been under serious consideration: Beaverton Valley Road, Daniel Lane and Sutton Road. While cost data so far have been only engineering estimates and the true costs will be known only at some future date, one fact is abundantly clear. The Beaverton Valley Road location is certain to be by far THE MOST EXPENSIVE of the alternatives available to the County. While this location meets the SWAC self-defined task of selecting the absolutely best site for a state-of-the-art "resource recovery" center to serve the needs of the County for many years to come, it does so at excessive cost at the very time that the County is more financially stressed than ever before. Selecting the most expensive alternative at marginal benefit, if there are any benefits at all, would be a disservice to the people of San Juan County.

The Beaverton Valley Road property was purchased by the Public Works Department three years ago for the express purpose of moving the transfer station to that location. The County is obligated to build an extensive ten-foot high berm along the southern boundary of the property, an obligation that adds to the expense of land acquisition for what has so far been an idle asset. The physical facility for the designed

transfer stations is estimated to be roughly the same for each of the three locations.

However, the Beaverton Valley Road project will require major additional expenditures not needed at the other two sites. If the Beaverton Valley site is selected, Number Two Schoolhouse road must be paved (including new ballast and conduits). More significantly, Beaverton Valley Road itself must be widened, a process that the traffic engineers hired by Public Works succinctly describe as "PROHIBITIVELY EXPENSIVE". This caveat has been ignored by SWAC. At this time nobody knows exactly what this will cost, but current best estimates suggest that the roadwork and earthwork will add between two and three million dollars to the total cost of the project.

While Public Works paid an unfortunately high price for the Beaverton Valley Road property, at least some of these funds could be recovered by selling the parcel. Sales proceeds would give the county a good start on constructing required facilities at another location. Going forward with the Beaverton Valley site will require additional funding of at least \$10 million. Selling the property and applying the money to either alternative site would require the County to fund only about \$5 million.

The County has other alternatives and the SWAC report is remiss in not providing the Council with an evaluation of these. By far the least expensive alternative available to the Council is mandating curbside pickup by the private contractor who provides this service to the Town of Friday Harbor. The County could simply get out of the trash/recycle business. Many municipalities throughout the country have found this to be economic wisdom. The existing site at Sutton Road could be brought into compliance simply by erecting a structure over the tipping site. This would cost a few hundred thousand dollars, not several million. Similarly, the County could eliminate the plan for a recovery/resale facility in the new transfer station. An existing private concern, Consignment Treasures, is providing recovery and resale of appliances and construction materials and offers to expand the business. Together with the non-profit resale shop that provides funds to the Fire Department Thrift House, this function can continue to be served very well without need for the County to be involved. The County should not use public funds to establish operations that will compete with private or charitable organizations.

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The conclusions of the SWAC report fail to take into consideration a number of issues that will have a negative cost impact on the Beaverton Valley Road site

as final engineering and construction details are sure to show. For example, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement points out that the consultants measurement of sound propagation at both Beaverton Valley and Daniel Lane sites exceeds WAC limits while the same measurements at Sutton Road were well below the same WAC limits. The SWAC report ignores these findings. Those excessive noise levels will have to be mitigated in some way. Also, the Draft Environmental Impact Statement does not address FAA regulations that will affect the design and construction of facilities at Beaverton Valley Road. Perhaps the final Statement will correctly address these matters and cost estimates can then more accurately demonstrate the expense of a move to Beaverton Valley Road.