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Credit River stepping toward secession

By META GAERTNIER
The Minneapolis Star

"The mouse that roared," is how one Credit River Township resident described the 136-21 vote of homeowners Tuesday night to pursue action to secede from Scott County.

Almost 100 homeowners in the township, which lies directly south of Savage on the Dakota County border, have been at odds with county officials since they learned last February that 360 acres of nearby farmland is one of six proposed county landfill sites.

Voters said the informal referendum, prompted by what they allege is the county's lack of response to their concern, is more a way of dramatizing their opposition than an indication they actually want to leave Scott County.

"People really don't want to secede," said Bud Larson, one of the homeowners whose property borders the proposed site. "What we do want to do is get people like yourself out here to ask tough questions, because Scott County officials certainly aren't responding to us."

Carol Ripley, another Credit River resident, agreed. "I voted to secede just to let them know we really are concerned about this. But it's not something that's so far out that it couldn't happen if they don't start to listen."

Since the homeowners organized the Anti-Landfill Committee more than three months ago, the County Board of Commissioners and the task force in charge of recommending possible landfill sites have been subjected to a highly organized campaign against the Credit River location. It is 360 acres of land owned and farmed by Prior Lake resident Vince Speiker that the county sanitary landfill task force has listed as one of six possible sites.

The property is within three-quarters of a mile of 92 homes, whose occupants are concerned about water pollution, property values, and traffic, debris, rodent and odor problems if a landfill goes in.

Under the 1980 state Waste Management Act, each of the seven metropolitan counties must submit five landfill sites to the state Pollution Control Agency and the Metropolitan Council for public review. The sites probably will be reviewed by the Metro Council in June, which means Scott County must eliminate one of its six by then.

The suitable sites are then voted upon by the respective county boards of commissioners, with the Met Council deciding by early 1983 how many landfills each county needs through the year 2000. Finally, the county makes the final determination of which sites to use.

Members of the Anti-Landfill Committee fear the Credit River site has a pretty good chance of making it through those steps. Speiker volunteered the property for a privately run county landfill last summer, an offer which nearby residents are concerned makes the site particularly attractive to the landfill task force.

"A county commissioner who releases has indicated that a volunteered landfill site is a bonanza to the taxpayer because you don't have to go through the process of condemnation and the expense of the county operating the landfill site," Larson said.

Robert Berg, another committee member, said, "It's become very evident to us that because the land is volunteered, it's not being given the same consideration as the other sites. It appears our site could be included in the inventory regardless of the residents' concern."

Berg noted that in a recent ranking of the six possible sites by the county task force, the Credit River property placed second. Ranked first was expansion of a privately owned sanitary landfill in Louisville Township, on property also volunteered by the owner.

But Allen Frechette, Scott County environmental health specialist and solid waste officer, said those rankings are misleading. He said the top two sites were chosen on the basis of their soil borings, which have not been done on the other sites yet. The order could change once testings on the other sites are in, Frechette added.

Task force chairman Robert Schmidt has said the Credit River site has been given no priority and will be judged by the same criteria as the other sites.

Berg questioned those criteria as applied to the Credit River property. The criteria were to rule out agricultural land or acreage with homes nearby, but Frechette said the task force later relaxed its guidelines to ensure enough suitable sites. "It wasn't a hard and fast statement—each of the sites eventually chosen included some agricultural land," he said.

The Anti-Landfill Committee last week recommended to the Scott County Board of Commissioners that the Credit River site be replaced with an alternative for submission to the PCA. If that's not acceptable, reads the recommendation, then a new selection committee should be formed "to begin site selection procedures from scratch, making sure uniform criteria are used."

The board has said it will respond before Tuesday. If the commissioners reject the recommendations, said Larson, the committee will decide whether to take legal action or seriously pursue secession.

If the group decides to pack up its township and exit Scott County, it will have a lot of persuading to do first. Should committee members decide they would like to become part of adjoining Dakota County, they need petitions with the signatures of 5,000 Scott County voters and almost 24,000 Dakota County voters to put the issue on the counties' November 1982 general election ballots. (The figures are based on one-fourth of the number who voted in the last county elections.) Then a majority of voters in each county would have to approve.

If the members decide, however, that they would prefer to set up their own county, they're going to need more than votes. State law requires a new county to have an area of at least 400 square miles.

Credit River Township now covers six square miles.



Star Photo by David Brewster
Karen Lorinser held Todd as she cast her ballot

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