

Composting opponent standing firm

By **RUSS PARADICE**

Regional directors are looking at tightening up the criteria for the proposed UBC Research Farm fish waste composting facility in an attempt to ease residents' concerns.

But Father Charles Brandt, one of the most prominent critics of the facility's proposed site in the upper UBC farm area, says he remains staunchly opposed to the site -- changes or no changes to the proposed rezoning bylaw.

"People seem to think that the residents along Macaulay Road and in this area in general are opposed to this project. We're not. We think it's an absolute environmental necessity to have this facility. Our concern is the site.

"I still maintain the facility should be in the lower UBC farm, not the upper UBC farm where they're talking about now. The upper UBC farm just isn't a proper site because it's part of the Oyster River watershed. And we must protect our watersheds against even the slightest risk."

UBC Farm director Niels Holbek says two of the four conditions being considered by the

Fr. Brandt supports idea, but won't accept the site

regional district would, on their own, probably sink the project.

At its last meeting, the Comox-Strathcona regional district board received a report on the controversial rezoning from the public hearing committee which held the June public hearing into the issue.

The committee met July 11 to discuss how to proceed with the rezoning. As well as deciding to hold public information meetings on the rezoning, which were held last week, the committee agreed to "consider" making the following amendments to the rezoning bylaw:

- require the fish waste bound for composting to originate from within the boundaries of the C-SRD;

- redefine the "compost facility" designation in the bylaw to include "only fish offal and mortalities," meaning the composting

of any other waste material would be prohibited;

- ban any outdoor or unenclosed storage of any pre-processed product or silages;

- require the entire process to be conducted within an enclosed structure;

Holbek says the first two proposals cited above would "cause us great difficulties," while the last two are basically already covered by the project's plans.

Holbek says requiring the fish waste to originate from within the C-SRD would pose a "real problem" because of the way the Pacific Bio-Waste Society, formed to operate the facility, is set up.

The society is composed of industry and government members, plus UBC. A total of 15 industry memberships are available, of which 12 have already been taken out. Industry members have already made a financial

contribution to the project. Three of the 12 signed-up members are based outside the C-SRD.

"So we've got some people from outside the regional district who have made a financial contribution to establish this facility. We have a commitment to these people and I think we must live up to that commitment."

However, Holbek stressed that most of the fish waste, probably in the order of 60-80 per cent, would come from within the C-SRD's boundaries.

Secondly, amending the zoning bylaw to restrict the organic waste stream to just fish offal and mortalities causes a different problem, Holbek said.

Holbek noted it's quite possible that in five years a "higher and better use" will be found for fish waste than composting it. If that's the case, UBC would be interested in composting other elements of the organic waste stream -- such as food scraps and agricultural wastes.

"The point is, I don't think we can spend \$1 million on this project, with a lot of that being public money, if we're just going to build a facility that's going to

be obsolete in five years."

Holbek noted UBC's application for a waste management permit specifies fish waste and that any proposed changes would require a permit amendment.

"We understand the need to go through this process. But we don't want to have to go through a rezoning process so we can, for example, take lettuce from Safeway."

Holbek added UBC would be willing to amend the bylaw so that human waste could not be composted at the facility.

The committee was scheduled to next meet Aug. 7 to discuss whether to recommend making these bylaw amendments. It was also expected to consider whether to take the rezoning to another public hearing. To date, the bylaw has received two readings.

Gold River Mayor Anne Fiddick, who served as C-SRD board chairman during the board's brief discussion of the issue, said the committee is faced with two choices -- go to public hearing again on the issue or drop it entirely.

Committee chairman Jim Egan said the committee's decision

Aug. 7 will be based in part on the input received during the two recent public information meetings.

Meanwhile, Brandt says the vast majority of residents in the Macaulay Road area oppose the rezoning because of the additional traffic it will bring, potential odour problems and the risk, however minimal, of leachates and pathogens getting into the watershed.

Elaborating on his concern for the Oyster River watershed, Brandt says the site under consideration drains into Bear Creek which is an "extremely important coho creek" and a tributary of the Oyster River. Noting the "tremendous scarcity of coho" this year, Brandt says "it's very important that we protect these streams and yet we keep writing them off."

Brandt adds, "It's a glorious, beautiful piece of property up there and I don't think we should shame it by converting it into an industrial area."

Brandt says the project proponents are being disrespectful of the neighborhood by trying to force the facility on it.