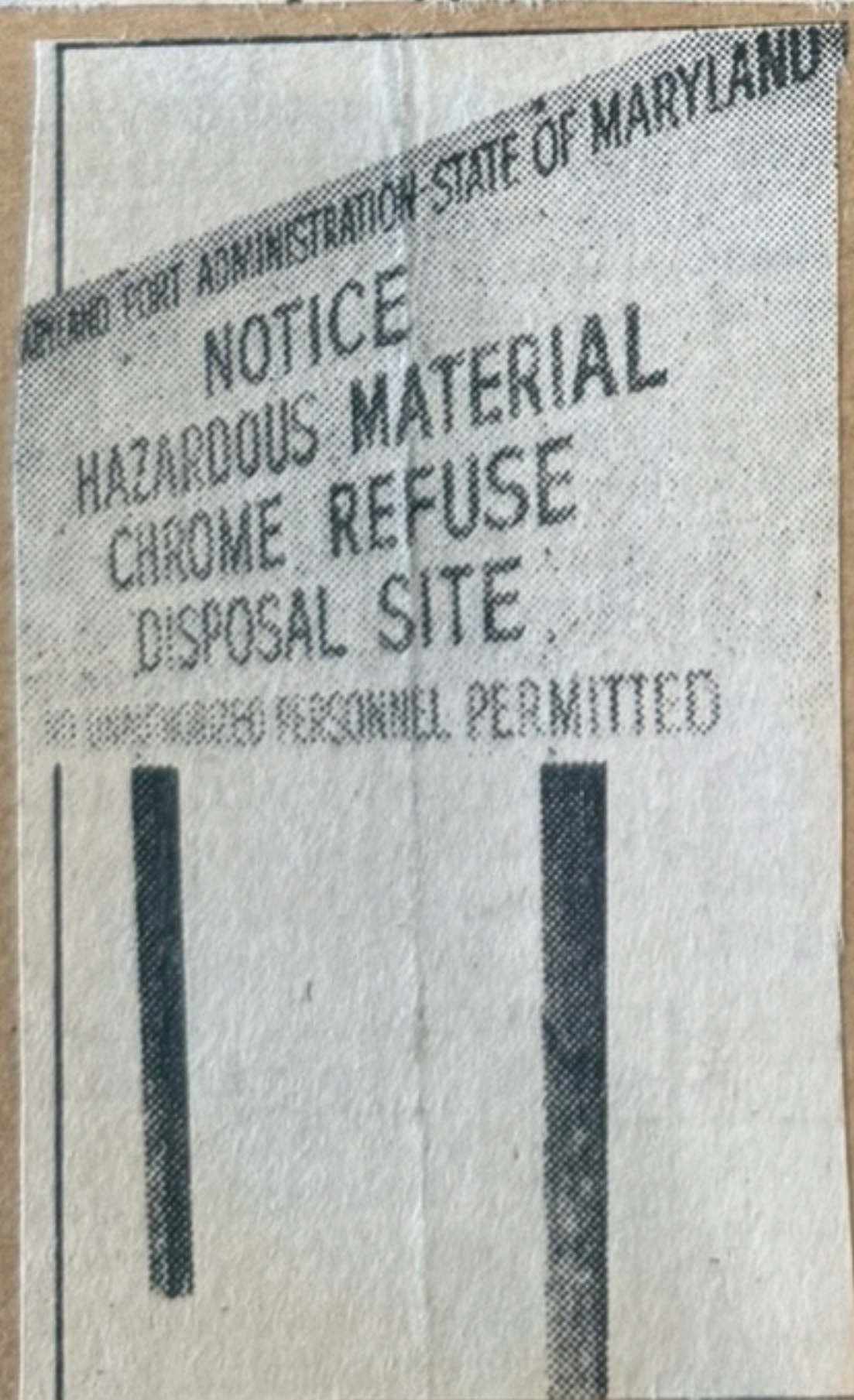


Photos by Lucian Perkins—The Washington Post

Nearby toxic waste dump may force Vernon Thomas, above right, and Fred Blagman, from their community.



high-priced technical talent came to the little church on the hill.

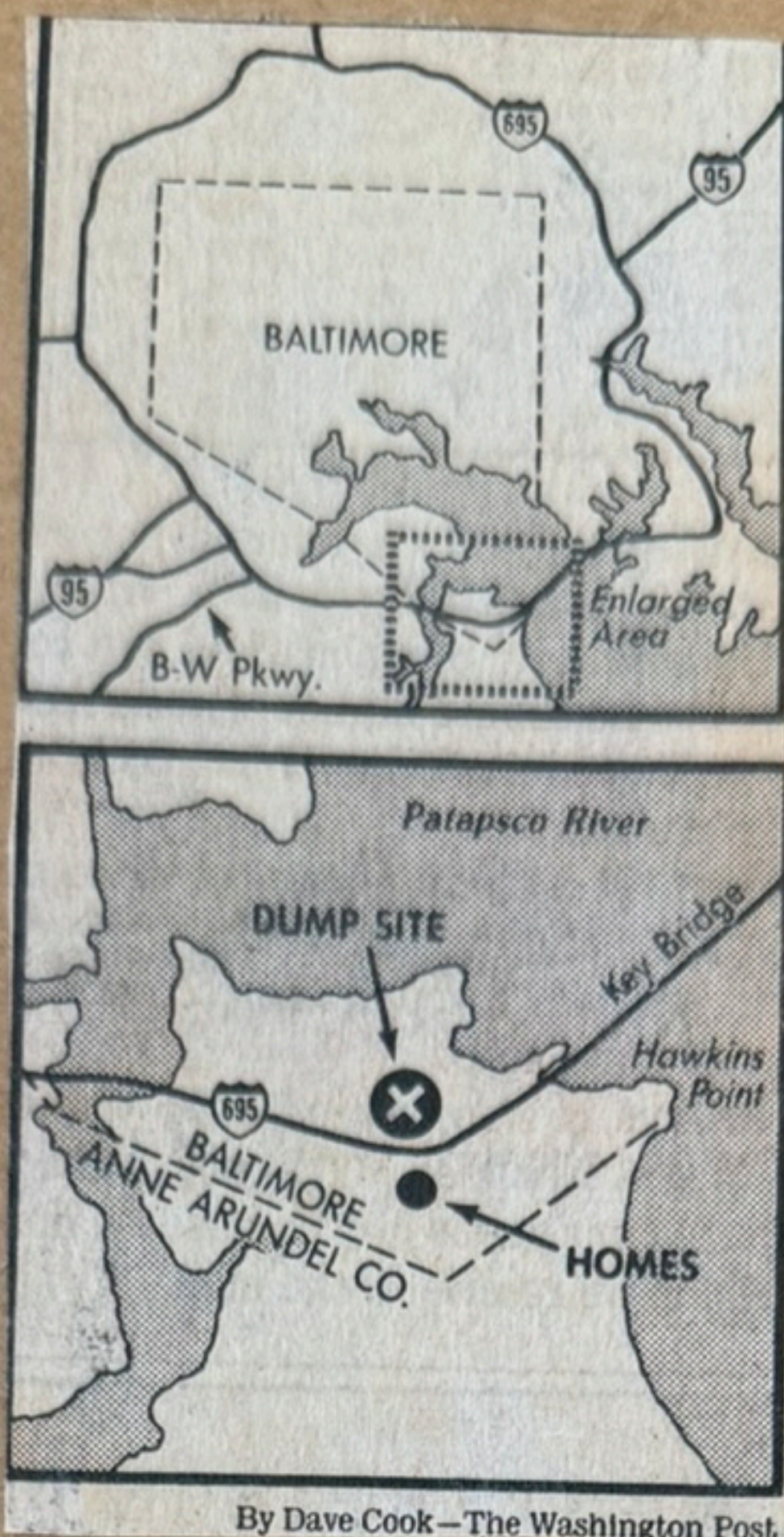
The officials said they thought they were there to make a formal presentation on the design of the landfill. The people would hear none of it. What they wanted instead were answers to their questions, and they came away mostly dissatisfied. "Trust us," that's their favorite word," scoffed Vernon Thomas. But there was no trust in the room.

They had talked about selling out before, in the early stages, and a vote had been taken. Just a bare majority favored it then. It was one of the few times in memory, the people said, they had disagreed deeply over anything. Despite the pollution, it is still quiet and crime-free, and there are even roosters and hens to be found in Hawkins Point. 3-21-82

"Where else can you go to find a neighborhood like this?" Thomas said. "Who wants to leave paradise?"

But as the reality sunk in, so did what may be the only alternative to a long, protracted lawsuit they could win or lose. "The game's just about over," said Thomas. "You're in the last inning and there aren't too many at bats left." Wash. Post.

So they voted again Thursday, and this time, although there were some tears, there was no audible dissent. Heads drooped as Mongure Ali, their civic association president, announced the result. "We go our separate ways," said Regina Darden. "That's the hard part."



Toxic Wastes Are Ruining 'Paradise'

By Eugene L. Meyer
Washington Post Staff Writer

BALTIMORE—They were here first, seemingly a long time ago, but now the inhabitants of Hawkins Point—an incongruous rural community of 22 households in a remote corner of what the people call "that" city—are an isolated island in an expanding sea of hazardous waste.

And because the state is planning to expand its toxic dump nearby to handle Maryland's industrial waste for another decade, the citizens of Hawkins Point have decided to try to sell their homes and land to the state. *Wash. Post* 3.21.82

Thursday night, by secret ballot taken in a tiny country church on Hawkins Point Road, they voted unanimously to call it quits, although they know that by their action, something of intangible value will forever be lost.

"I call them paradise killers," Vernon Thomas said of the waste dumpers and those who lend them official sanction, "because that's what this was. They've killed the air, they killed the ground and in the meantime, they're killing the people. There's no use joking yourself. If you stay here, you gonna die." 3.21.82

The buy-out plan was first suggested by a local legislator and informally endorsed by John Griffin, a top aide to Gov. Harry Hughes. It calls for using up to \$2 million to purchase the homes whose predominantly black owner-occupants have roots deeply imbedded in what tests have shown to be the contaminated soil of Hawkins Point. *Wash. Post*

"We're going to investigate further to see if it's technically and politically feasible with the legislature," said Griffin. The money would come from funds tentatively earmarked to fix up abandoned turn-of-the-century Fort Armistead on the Patapsco River.

One of the advantages of choosing Hawkins Point, from the state's viewpoint, is that it is by now, "environmentally blighted," with decades of dumping to its debit, as the head of the state health department put it.

The residents saw things differently. "I think it's because it's a black neighborhood, to be truthful," said Thomas, 60, who married into one of the two or three families that settled here early in this century. "If this was a white neighborhood with \$100,000 homes, do you think they'd put this hazardous waste dump up here?"

Environmentally blighted, Thomas and his neighbors will tell you, Hawkins Point is. But it was not always so, they hasten to add. *Wash. Post*

When Fred Blagmon, now retired from the Coast Guard, came here in 1947, it was "just a peaceful place with a lot of trees and a lot of families. It was a dumping ground, but it wasn't of no concern." 3.21.82

Everyone had a garden, and there was a sandy beach on the Patapsco River where the crabbing was good, and a pond full of perch and bass for fisherman to catch.

Then the factories came, Glidden Pigments and Atlantic Cement, W.R. Grace and U.S. Gypsum. Streets with names like Chemical Road and Quarantine Road bisected the land. Waste was spewed into the air and the water, and the fish died and the crabs turned black inside, the residents said.

"I'd rather fish out of my toilet," said Roy Darden, whose wife, Regina, is secretary of the Hawkins Point Improvement Association. *Wash. Post*

They filled in the lake to complete the Baltimore Beltway that slices the point before bridging the Patapsco, and other industry came to dump its waste on public and private landfills that dot the area. Now, the industrial dust turns the white houses brown and destroys the finish on the cars. Only a couple of households had gardens last year, since the poisonous powder covered the crops. 3.21.82

The Rev. James Wright of Mt. Ararat Church, which doubles as a community center, complains of shortness of breath and carries an oxygen tank. Other residents complain of other ailments, the sources of which may best be conjectured. But the people of the point think they know.

What residents regard as the final assault on this peaceful enclave looms just across the Baltimore Beltway in the shadow of the Francis Scott Key Bridge. There, in a no man's land of chemically-saturated hills and valleys, the state-owned Maryland Environmental Service is scheduled to substantially expand its hazardous waste landfill in May. *Wash. Post*

Already the bulldozers are hard at work, preparing the hazardous waste "cell" that state officials say will contain a clay liner and a cover, to keep the carcinogenic excretions of industry from leaching into ground water and streams, into the Patapsco and the Chesapeake, or from running off in the opposite direction toward the old frame houses of Hawkins Point. 3.21.82

The dump, they assert, will be a "secure hazardous waste landfill," or at least as good as today's technology permits.

The selection of Hawkins Point to fulfill the needs of industry in the 1980s culminated a controversial year-long search by MES for the Maryland Hazardous Waste Facilities Siting Board. The board was established under pressure from industry to override local opposition that invariably arises to the siting of any toxic dump.

Particularly active in the lobbying effort was Allied Chemical Corp., which accounts for more than half of the state's hazardous waste, and was running out of room to dump its toxic chrome. *Wash. Post*

As citizens around the state—from Cecil County in the northeast to Allegany in the west—mobilized to battle any new toxic landfill in their own bailiwick, the site searchers zeroed in on their existing dump at Hawkins Point. By merely expanding its operation on state-owned land (which was already receiving Allied chrome), MES could skirt the siting board entirely.

"Many people are confused and frustrated seeing a process occur through what some people would call loopholes in the law," said John Menke, a siting board member from Montgomery County. "It can make a lot of people feel cynical about the law and the board feel frustrated. We put in a lot of work and here we are being bypassed." *Wash. Post*

But other officials saw in the MES dump not a loophole but a target of opportunity, a way to rapidly replace Maryland's only other operating hazardous waste landfill, on Solly Road in nearby Anne Arundel County. Residents there had succeeded in revoking the landfill's zoning and permits, and, although the issue is being litigated, the Solly Road dump is expected to close in May. 3.21.82

Starting a new dump could take two or three years, including a prolonged public process before the state siting board. Hawkins Point, however, was already open for business.

Although state officials say they had pretty much picked Hawkins Point as their preferred site by September, the residents only learned about it in November—from newspapers. *Wash. Post*

"I was disgusted," said Regina Darden. "The state didn't even think enough of us to get in touch with us. This is the little forgotten spot of Baltimore."

The Hawkins Pointers joined with other threatened communities in the Maryland Waste Coalition, and they learned about the law and about chemical carcinogens and about politics. They even retained a savvy, young environmental lawyer from Silver Spring whom they heard at a seminar on how to combat hazardous waste.

On Jan. 12, they presented 22 written questions to Thomas McKewen, director of the Maryland Environmental Service. Two months later, McKewen and an array of