

Cheyenne's great garbage debate

By Jodi Rogstad

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CHEYENNE -- The city's Sanitation Department is working to get a curbside recycling program ready by this fall for half the city's households.

At the same time, the city's new mayor is looking at whether turning garbage into electricity is an economic alternative to building a new landfill.

These two plans appear to be at odds with one another. But Mayor Rick Kaysen said the curbside recycling is still on and both programs could exist simultaneously.

"We would already have that separation process in place," Kaysen said.

Non-combustible items could still be recycled, and the remaining items would go into the incinerator.

Recycling and incinerators are on the agenda because the city's landfill at Happy Jack Road is nearing capacity, and building a new landfill at the Belvoir Ranch would cost \$40 million.

Since this spring, the city has been trucking 10 loads a day of municipal waste to a landfill near Ault, Colo., at a cost of \$395 a load. County trash haulers and individual residents continue to haul trash to the Happy Jack landfill. But starting April 1, the landfill will be closed to all incoming trash.

The city has \$2 million in funding to implement the first phase of curbside recycling, half of which comes from a state grant.

Phase one would bring curbside recycling as early as this fall to nearly 10,000 households south of Lincolnway, along with those east of Logan Avenue, city Sanitation Director Dennis Pino said.

The hope is to include apartment buildings as well.

Phase two will bring the remainder of the city online in 2010.

To Kaysen, recycling also is an economic issue. What are the economic advantages of turning, say, paper, into another product versus burning it?

"We have to look at the long term and what is in the best interest of the city," he added.

He didn't have a timetable for the study.

Local recycling advocate Carroll Schell would like to see the city make up its mind about its solid waste issues. He's been hearing about this problem for five years since he's moved here.

"It just seems it goes on and on and on. We need to take the bull by the horns and stop talking and start moving," he said.

He also doesn't see how the city could both incinerate and maintain a curbside recycling program.

"Once you get all of that stuff out of the system, what's left to burn?" Schell said. "You need to do one or the other."

In his opinion, recycling would be better than incinerating. If the statistic is correct that cardboard can be recycled seven times, he said, "it's got to be cheaper than cutting down a tree and making it fresh every time."

At the same time, Carroll and others wonder why it's taking so long to get curbside recycling going. Carroll's group, Citizens for Recycling, had stopped meeting because they believed the city was ready to implement curbside recycling.

Pino said the department needs time to build facilities, acquire equipment and get the city's crews acclimated to the new program.

In December, the State Loan and Investment Board approved a \$1.1 million Countywide Consensus Block Grant for the city to build an addition to the transfer station and buy a baler to bundle recyclables -- recycling companies are more willing to pick them up when the materials, especially cardboard, are bundled.

Construction on the building would start this spring -- "when it's warm enough to pour concrete," Pino said.

Later this winter, the city will bid on 10,000 bins and two automated trucks. Costs for this would approach \$1 million, paid for by the Public Works Department's equipment replacement fund.

Early this spring, the city will seek bids from a firm to pick up the recyclables at the transfer station and haul them away. Pino said minus the pickup costs, the city likely would make about \$15 a ton.

Expanding curbside recycling to cover all 19,000 residential households will be a learning process for the drivers, Pino said.

He said the program would add three jobs -- two drivers and one baler operator.

"If I try and do the city all at once, it's going to be a lot tougher," Pino said.

There will be new routes to plan and test, he said.

And dumping these bins will be different than regular trash pickup because recyclables will be loose, not bagged. That means cans, papers and plastic bottles are apt to escape with a gust of wind.

Also, staff will have to enter the serial number assigned to each container at each household into a database, which will take months.

"It's a lot of work, putting 10,000 carts out," Pino said.

He added that when the city switched from manual pickup to automated, that also was phased in.

Kaysen said he has met with Pino and is convinced that phasing in recycling is a good plan.