

City, county officials search for best way for public to fund landfill

By Kristen Inbody

Officials from Park County, Powell, Cody and Meeteetse found common ground Tuesday in the need for a cross-county landfill task force.

"We all live in Park County and all have a stake in this," Mayor Nancy Tia Brown said.

The task force will look at a capital facilities tax or property taxes as landfill funding solutions, along with the tipping fee increase set for October.

The group would expect to have solutions ready by the 2010 election should members ask voters to decide on a tax to cover landfill costs instead of the higher tipping fees.

Voters should have the option of deciding how they want to pay, city council president Sam Krone said.

The county faces a \$4.5 million landfill expansion and lining, and long-term landfill costs could total \$15 million.

The county will raise tipping fees 50 percent, a rate increase passed along to residents and businesses by the cities, towns and private trash carriers.

The city predicts residential rates to rise Oct. 1 by \$4.80, from \$19.46 to \$24.26.

Business rates would increase \$22 from \$31.97 per dumpster to \$53.90.

Powell and Meeteetse have added costs, their representatives said.

Powell's landfill is closing, and the one south of Cody is 25 miles away. The city hopes for a transfer station to load trash from garbage trucks into semi-trucks to bring it to the county landfill, Powell City Council member Josh Shorb said. That means a new fleet and more man hours.

Meeteetse soon will have to start hauling their garbage out of the town, too, but the town's truck may not be up the wear and tear the 30-mile commute would bring, Meeteetse public works director Dan Talkington said.

The task force also is slated to look at added costs, such as trucks, a transfer facility and future landfill needs.

Cody City Council members have argued the tipping fee puts an unfair burden on city residents, who can't opt out of garbage services the way rural residents can.

"How can we make this work on a county level because everyone should participate?" Brown asked.

Commissioner Tom French argued that because of the nature of their spending habits, a cap tax costs rural people more than city residents.

County commissioner Jill Shockley Siggins said she "can't imagine anyone saying yes" to higher property taxes as an alternate to the cap tax or tipping fees.

Brown pushed the commissioners to support the task force and its finding.

Commission chairman Bill Brewer said, "If the public tells me yes, I would probably support it."

That yes or no comes through a vote, Brown countered.

Shockley Siggins argued that the public, as with cap taxes for the jail and library-pools, will let the commissioners know their views.

"If they want you to stop, they'll stop you," she said.

When asked if she thought the state would come through with funding, Shockley Siggins said she had "paper thin" confidence in funding from the Legislature.

Cody council member Stan Wolz said the task force would also be charged with getting the message out that the county has to pay for the landfill somehow.

"I've had people who would take neither option," he added.

Recycling

The city council asked the county to help support the city's recycling program since rural residents bring in material to recycle.

"We've seen the cost of what we get paid for recycling material go way, way down," Krone said. "It's been a 75 percent decrease."

Of the 800 tons the city recycles, half comes from homes and half is commercial.

But the drop-off nature of the program means the city has no figures on how much material comes from rural households.

Shockley Siggins said recycling should be decided by the voters. She suggested a public vote on a \$10 million landfill cap tax proposal or a \$15 million landfill plus recycling cap tax.

Shorb said Powell charges a recycling fee with utility bills and gets "tons" of material to recycle from rural people.

What about Powell getting money? he asked.

And in Meeteetse, the town picks up the tab for recycling.

At their evening meeting Tuesday, the city council voted to table the recycling fee until their next meeting.

Commissioner wants to tax plastic bags

One way to keep some trash out of the landfill and to raise money for recycling is a tax on plastic bags, according to commissioner Bucky Hall.

He suggested a 20-cent tax on plastic shopping bags. Other cities and countries have implemented such a tax.

"It's a tax you can avoid by bringing your own bag," he said.

Shoppers who didn't bring a reusable bag would pay 20 cents per plastic bag that their purchases go into. That revenue could subsidize recycling or the landfill, he said.

It's a question of the cities having the guts to take on Wal-Mart, Hall said.

Since rural residents also shop, they would share in the tax, too.

Hall said that tax would help people get in the habit of bringing their own bags, which also are available at most major stores.

That would mean less trash to the landfill and fewer plastic bags littering the area, he said.

"We have a huge problem at the landfill with plastic bags flying out," he said.

"To divert from municipal waste is a really admirable goal," he added. "But we might have to force-feed it to the public for awhile."

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