

Council talks some trash

Curbside recycling plan moves closer to being a reality

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By June, 1,700 Laramie homes will have automated trash pick-up, and if that goes well, the city plans to phase curbside recycling into city services in the coming year.

"We really wanted to have the composting and recycling eventually pulled into" the automated garbage collection, Mayor Jodi Guerin said at a work session Tuesday night. The primary goal of citywide automated garbage collection was never to reduce costs for the city, she said. Instead the primary goal was to develop greater recycling options within the city, Guerin said. Several councilors expressed similar support.

"It is a significant milestone for the city to be committing to a date certain to start curbside recycling. I really applaud the staff for taking that step and not just leaving it out for the indefinable future," Councilor Erik Molvar said.

Supporters of the automated garbage collection program and the projected curbside-recycling program, which could also include a citywide composting program, filled the city council chambers. Resident Robert Waggener, who has spent significant time researching options for city recycling and composting programs, said he is excited about the city's plans.

"I am here to offer strong support for automated collection and the proposed curbside recycling program," Waggener said. "On behalf of nearly 1,000 Laramie residents, I am here to offer strong support for the proposed community compost program."

The city council will have to pass final changes to city code that regulates garbage collection for the automated collection to officially begin. The councilors have already passed the changes on the first of three readings, and they heard no protest at a public hearing also held Tuesday. The final vote will take place in the coming weeks.

The basic system for both the automated trash collection and curbside recycling pick-up will rely on recently ordered garbage trucks that automatically collect garbage receptacles with mechanical arms.

The trucks also reduce manpower from two workers on manual trucks to one worker on each automated truck, City Public Works Director Rich Elliott said. The trucks are projected to reduce worker's compensation claims, because workers will not be required to leave the trucks during regular pick-up, he added.

Elliott said residences scheduled for automated pick up this June will require new polycart garbage receptacles. Those include homes in West Laramie and Alta Vista.

The city will host additional educational meetings in the affected areas in the coming weeks, he said.

The city projects that a curbside recycling program could divert about 20 percent of waste from entering the Laramie Landfill, Elliott said, adding that a composting plan could divert an additional 15 percent of waste from the landfill.

Molvar cited national reports that an average curbside recycling program would divert 30 percent of waste from local landfills, and Elliott said the city would be pleased to hit a higher percentage.

Guerin asked if a curbside recycling program would be voluntary or mandatory. Elliott said the council would have to make that decision.

If the city council approves a curbside recycling program, which could begin as early as June 2010, the city will likely require participants to have a polycart receptacle different only in color from the garbage receptacles to collect newspaper, No. 1 and No. 2 plastic, glass, steel and A1 cans, magazines and cardboard. The material would be taken the Ark Recycling Center, which, until it had the capability to sort the material itself, would ship the recyclables to an adequate facility in Colorado, Bill Vance of Ark Recycling said.

"I hope all of you are as excited as I am about the day we drive to a facility and see huge piles of compostable materials and huge piles of finished compost, instead of seeing those materials being dumped into our landfill or shipped down the highway to a regional landfill at great expense," Waggener said.

In addition to Molvar and Guerin, councilors Joe Vitale, Scott Mullner, Klaus Hanson, Joe Shumway, Bryan Shuster and Karl McCracken were present Tuesday.

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