

## Landfill, facilities tax Resolution elusive

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Tuesday, 16 February 2010

### Powell council wants county to start transportation

Members of the Powell City Council would like to see Park County's landfill system develop into a county-wide collection and transportation system as the Cody site becomes the county's only landfill for household waste.

The consolidation is part of meeting state Department of Environmental Quality regulations, and will involve closing the landfills in Powell, Clark and Meeteetse to household garbage over the next year or so.

The Cody site was found to be the cheapest to bring up to DEQ regulations. But it still will cost around \$61 million over the next 20 years to dig, line and maintain the Cody site and to monitor the soon-to-be closed sites.

Landfill tipping fees rose by 50 percent last year — from \$60 to \$90 per ton — and are projected to increase by 8 percent every five years.

Instead of meeting those costs solely through higher garbage rates, a group of officials from Powell, Cody, Meeteetse and the county has been looking at the option of a 1-cent capital facilities sales tax to help cover the costs. That would spread roughly a quarter of the expense to visiting tourists.

Members of the tax group met with the Powell City Council on Feb. 8 to discuss some ideas.

Based on Cody's garbage rates, passing a \$15 million capital facilities tax as a cash infusion for landfill improvements would save the average commercial customer nearly \$75 a year over the next 20 years, while the average residential customer would save about \$28 annually. That is according to numbers crunched by Holm, Blough and Co., a county-hired landfill consultant.

Powell officials want any tax proposal to include the cost of constructing a transfer station in Powell, as well as sites at the other existing sites — Meeteetse and Clark.

Powell City Administrator Zane Logan has long advocated for a flat county-wide garbage rate, with those closer to the site near Cody essentially subsidizing the transportation costs of those farther away. At the Feb. 8 meeting, Powell Mayor Scott Mangold said he wants to see the county handle the transport of garbage from satellite transfer stations to the Cody landfill.

Powell Councilmen John Wetzel and Don Hillman said the county should help areas outside of Cody pay for increased costs.

"Why does Powell have to pay to haul 22 miles, 28 miles, whatever it is," Wetzel asked, adding, "Where's the even-up for the county to the cities?"

"You're changing the location of the landfill," Hillman said to Commissioner Dave Burke. "Shouldn't you (the county) help?"

Burke said the county has been reluctant to expand its services to include garbage collection and transportation services.

With the exception of the Crandall area, which has a small county-provided transfer station for residents (who pay a roughly 50-percent higher per-ton rate), the county simply accepts trash.

"The county is not in the collection business," said Burke.

Burke said he personally supports the idea of a transfer station for Powell, but he added that he could not speak for the entire commission.

“You guys need to come up with a proposal,” Burke told the Powell council.

Council members asked Burke to have Holm, Blough and Co. come up with some numbers about what running a county-wide garbage transit system would cost.

At the Park County Commission’s Feb. 9 meeting, commissioners Tim French and Bucky Hall said they needed more information before they could form an opinion about a proposal.

“I don’t have enough, honestly, to say too much,” said French. “People have said maybe this, maybe this, maybe that.”

However, Hall noted that the numbers crunched by consultants said a transfer station would never be able to pay for itself in savings, “but that could change; maybe we’ll see some new numbers.”

The county’s solid waste management plan indicated that hauling the city of Powell’s garbage directly to Cody would be the cheapest option.

At last week’s council meeting, it was discussed that while a transfer station might cost more, it might provide savings in other areas — such as by reducing truck trips from Powell to Cody.

With direct hauling, Powell has said it would have to make 16 trips per week in trucks not designed for that much travel. With a transfer station, that number would be cut to three weekly trips, reducing the impact on traffic, the environment and the road.

“The less transportation, probably, the better,” Mangold said.

Mangold noted that a transfer station also would give rural folks who use the Powell landfill a continued place to take their trash.

As they have at past meetings regarding increased landfill costs, officials expressed frustration at finding no definitive answers.

“We’ve had how many meetings like this (one) now?” Burke asked.

Logan described the process as having too many pieces of a puzzle on the table without a frame in place.

“The problem is, what we’re running into is a time constraint,” said Mangold. He said a final proposal must be put together within the next couple of weeks.

One of the numbers mentioned at Monday’s meeting was \$18 million — \$15 million to buy down tipping fees, plus an additional \$3 million for transfer station infrastructure around the county.

“Well, that’s cheap compared to the hospital,” quipped Cody Council President Sam Krone, referring to a now-\$31 million capital facilities tax proposal from West Park Hospital to expand and upgrade its emergency facilities.

Though the landfill capital facilities committee has not come up with a proposal yet — or decided if it’s going to ask voters for a tax — it has asked that the two tax projects be kept separate on the ballot.

Krone said that might mean that voters in either August or November could be deciding whether they want to impose two

one-cent taxes — temporarily raising the county's rate to 6 percent.

To make it on the ballot and go before county voters, a facilities tax proposal must first get the OK from two of the three municipalities and then the Park County Commission.

The Cody City Council, which has twice delayed acting on West Park's request, plans to make a decision either next week or at its first March meeting, Krone said in a separate conversation.

"It's a really tough vote," he said.

Krone said the council has a responsibility to serve as a ballot gatekeeper, particularly with the hospital's proposal potentially competing for dollars with the landfill project.

"I haven't had one person say they're for it (West Park's proposal)," he added.

West Park made its pitch to the Meeteetse town council Wednesday night, but the council did not make a decision and instead tabled the matter until its March meeting.

West Park has yet to approach the Powell City Council with its proposal.

West Park CEO Doug McMillan previously told the Tribune that the hospital plans to see how Cody and Meeteetse act before approaching the Powell council.

Mayor Mangold said on Friday the decision to put Powell on hold was a "political mistake."

"We're more concerned about the Powell hospital," he said.