

'Landfill tax dead - for now'

By Carole Cloudwalker

Recent projections that the lifespan of the Powell Landfill will stretch until 2012 may be killing the possibility of a capital facilities tax for county landfills.

That's what Park County commissioner Tim French, who lives in Powell's Heart Mountain area, said Tuesday during a meeting between landfill managers and commissioners.

"The landfill cap tax is dead, for now," French said during the courthouse meeting. "I don't see the point, because it looks like we can operate until June 2012. That gives them (city of Powell) time to plan."

Commission chairman Jill Shockley Siggins said she has learned that capital facilities tax revenue cannot be used to "buy down" tipping fees at county landfills, something landfill cap tax proponents hoped could happen to make using the facilities more economical.

The Tuesday comments followed a report from Tim Wardell, the county's solid waste manager, who said there is "room until June 2012 in Powell."

He said both household waste and demolition material can be dumped there until that date, when the facility's current permit expires. Earlier it was estimated that household waste from Powell would have to be hauled to the regional landfill in Cody within one year, though demolition waste still could be left at the Powell site.

Wardell said Powell officials now have time to "run some trucks to Cody to get some real numbers" to help them determine just what future hauling costs would be.

"We'll make better decisions if we run this (Cody's new lined landfill cell) for a few years," French added.

It was paying for the liner, along with the knowledge that all the county's landfills are rapidly filling, that hiked landfill tipping fees and prompted long-term planning. More stringent state regulations also factored into the problem.

Wardell said the county "should try to keep Clark (landfill) open and fill the hole up to grade," something that could take up to two more years as well.

Otherwise, he said, the county will have to find fill material to cover the Clark facility. Wardell said he would work with the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) concerning the Clark landfill.

Previously, both Powell and Clark were thought to have far shorter life expectancies, and were slated to close well before 2012.

Shockley Siggins asked for a formal letter from the commissioners to the cities involved, indicating the anticipated lifespans of their landfill sites.

"We owe them that much," commissioner Dave Burke said.

Meanwhile, one Powell city council member, Josh Shorb, was not pleased when he learned of the commission's feelings about the landfill cap tax. He has supported proposals to use such a tax to build a transfer station in Powell as well as helping Meeteetse, which faces a landfill closure this year, to purchase a new garbage truck so that material can be hauled to Cody.

Shorb, who is on the county landfill task force, said he's still trying to organize a meeting between Cody, Powell and county leaders to work out "what would be acceptable" to the commissioners in terms of wording that would get a landfill cap tax on the ballot this fall.

But he's not overly optimistic.

"I knew it was dead last week," when he cancelled a meeting with the task force and commissioners, Shorb said.

"We've heard about the life expectancy (until 2012)of the landfill in Powell for quite some time," Shorb added.

But he said the landfill cap tax idea is "absolutely not" dead, because "after 2012, eastern Park County still has to get its trash to Cody."

While it's "nice that it will be open until 2012, it doesn't solve any long-term problems," Shorb added.

"What we've said from the beginning is that people in eastern Park County will face higher landfill costs because we'll have to pay to haul it," Shorb said.

"The city of Powell can plan, but county residents who live around Powell are getting screwed."

He said so far no date has been set for another landfill cap tax task force meeting.

"We have no commissioner from Powell" on the committee, Shorb added.

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