

## Officials to start panel on landfill funding

By RUFFIN PREVOST of the Gazette Wyoming Bureau | Posted: Tuesday, July 7, 2009

CODY - With a 50 percent increase in garbage tipping fees set to begin Oct. 1, elected officials from Park County, Cody, Powell and Meeteetse met Tuesday to discuss alternatives for paying for state-mandated landfill improvements.

The discussion comes late in the planning process, after years of preliminary meetings hosted by Park County aimed at creating a countywide integrated solid-waste management plan.

Cody Mayor Nancy Brown said that she was glad finally to see so many decision makers gathered in the same room, after a sometimes rancorous debate over whether landfill costs were being fairly shared between towns and the county.

Brown said there had been "some miscommunications" over the issue "that were not helpful" but added that the goal is to find a common long-term solution for efficient and fair funding of the landfill.

For the short term, a planned landfill expansion scheduled to start by December will be funded through higher tipping fees charged by Park County and passed on by public and private garbage haulers to residential and business customers.

Officials decided Tuesday to form a committee to study long-term funding solutions that could eventually mean lower tipping fees, including an optional 1-cent capital facilities tax and creating a solid-waste district funded by property taxes.

The makeup of the committee and its target funding amount was not yet clear. Up to \$15 million might be needed, and some private garbage haulers and members of the public would be included on the committee, officials said.

Because Park County's \$4.5 million landfill expansion will be among the first in Wyoming to comply with new regulations by the Department of Environmental Quality requiring installation of a liner, some wondered whether the state would eventually end up funding liners after other counties complain about costs.

"The idea of depending on the state is paper-thin. If they came through, I would be aghast," said Park County Commissioner Jill Shockley Siggins, adding that landfill money promised by last year's Legislature never materialized.

Powell City Council member Josh Shorb said the issue of cost "has kind of been the 600-pound gorilla in the room," with public and private haulers on the north end of the county facing higher fuel and transportation costs when the Powell landfill stops accepting municipal solid waste.

Shorb said that Powell leaders backed a plan to convert an old Park County maintenance building into a waste transfer station and regional recycling center.

"That's what we'd like to see, and that's what's in the best interest for the city of Powell and that whole side of the county," he said.

Dan Talkington, public-works director for Meeteetse, said the town's lone garbage truck was old and in disrepair, and that the increased collections and hauling that would come with the new landfill plan might require costly upgrades or a new truck.

Though Cody's transportation costs won't change under the new plan, a push to divert additional waste from the landfill was likely to further burden the city's recycling program with extra materials from county residents, Brown said.

Council member Jona Vanata said that many county residents drop off recyclables in Cody that the city pays to process, amounting to "representation without taxation."

Because many people drop off materials after hours, the city has no way to track county residents' recycling patterns, she said.

Cody representatives asked commissioners to fund \$35,000 of the city's annual \$140,000 recycling program costs, but Commissioner Tim French said he opposed providing funds without reliable figures on county residents' recycling.

Commissioner Bucky Hall said it made sense to divert as much trash as possible from the landfill, both by promoting recycling and by not generating waste to begin with.

"We have a huge problem out at the landfill with plastic bags blowing all over the place," Hall said, adding that some cities have imposed taxes on plastic shopping bags, with revenues going toward cleanup and recycling programs.

Many retailers offer reusable tote bags at a nominal cost, he said, adding that a plastic bag tax would be "a voluntary, optional tax that you can avoid by bringing your own tote bag."

Commissioner Dave Burke said that a ban on plastic bags would avoid taxing shoppers, and allow them to use their own tote bags or paper bags offered by retailers.

Siggins said the combined costs of landfill expansions over several decades, new trucks and other equipment for towns, a Powell transfer station and a regional recycling center could run as high as \$15 million.

"The reality is, recycling costs," Siggins said, adding that residents generally say they support the practice, but often don't want to pay for it, so a cap tax vote might help decide the issue.

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