

Powell, Cody joining forces on recycling

County effort may eventually expand to take in regional towns

By RUFFIN PREVOST
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CODY - Planners in Cody and Powell are moving forward with development of a regional recycling center that would serve Park County and could later accept materials from other communities in the Bighorn Basin.

"Powell Valley Recycling has agreed to be the management group for a regional recycling effort, and the city of Cody has agreed to partner with them," County Commissioner Dave Burke said.

Burke led a discussion Thursday that brought together city and county solid waste managers, business leaders, community members and charitable groups in an effort to develop a plan for how such a regional recycling center might operate.

The center won't be completed before 2011, but communities must start now to develop plans for how it would operate, whom it would serve and how it would be funded, he said.

Recycling programs almost never cover their costs, and the drop in commodity prices over the past several months has meant less revenue for recyclables like aluminum and paper and a halt to cardboard processing, said Andy Whiteman, Cody city administrator.

Powell helps fund recycling by adding a \$1.50 monthly surcharge to each waste collection account, while Cody integrates its program into the overall solid waste management budget, he said.

Park County has a dormant solid waste district that was established in 1984, when the county assumed control of Cody's landfill, said Roy Holm of Holm, Blough & Co. consulting engineers.

Efforts to fund the district through property taxes were unsuccessful, and it has no board members, he said.

Under current tax rates, the solid waste district could raise about \$2 million annually, Whiteman said.

Myra Peak, an environmental consultant assisting with Park County's waste management planning, said other counties often pursue a number of funding sources for recycling programs.

Because county residents typically use city recycling facilities, a combination of tipping fees, mill levies, surcharges or other funding sources spreads the cost more evenly, she said.

Burke said small collection sites would probably be set up in Clark and Meeteetse.

Keith Viles, Cody's solid waste superintendent, said the city's recycling center was operating at capacity, and could not process or store much more material.

The Park County maintenance shop in Powell was one location being considered for a regional recycling center, Burke said.

The 3,600-square-foot building on three acres will be vacated when a new maintenance building is completed in the near future, he said.

Mary Jo Decker, manager of Powell Valley Recycling, said the maintenance shop site might be able to handle the combined recycling of Cody and Powell, plus a 20 percent increase.

Decker said Powell diverts as much as 15 percent of its waste stream to recycling, with a majority of local businesses involved in the program.

"There is more interest and involvement in Powell than there is in Cody," said Dave Larson, a member of It's About Time, a regional business development network that promotes sustainability.

David Fike is a member of Christ Episcopal Church in Cody, which operates a thrift shop and sends second-hand clothes to developing nations.

High fuel costs and falling prices for used clothes - as low as 2 cents per pound - means the church may instead be forced to send unsold goods to the landfill, Fike said.

He said a regional center might make it easier for residents to donate clothes and could allow charities to pool their goods into more economical shipments to West Coast distributors.

Burke said the group would meet again after Peak has developed broad cost estimates for the development and operation of a regional facility, with the goal of drafting a preliminary agreement between Cody and Powell on how to advance plans for the center.

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