

Transfer stations scrapped from landfill proposal

Written by Powell Tribune

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Powell leaders fear the future of local garbage disposal is bleak.

For years, they have known that the city's landfill would be closed to household waste as Park County leaders create a regional landfill in Cody that will meet federal requirements. Ultimately, the landfill in Powell will close to all household trash, though the state Department of Environmental Quality is now indicating that closure might not have to come until the summer of 2012.

Until Monday night, Powell City Council members had hoped a transfer station would be built at the Powell landfill site when it closes, allowing household waste to be disposed there before heading to Cody.

"I think the idea of a transfer station in eastern Park County is dead. As it sits today, it's gone," Councilman Josh Shorb told the council Monday.

Shorb said an \$18-million capital facilities tax proposal, which earmarked \$3 million to construct county-operated transfer stations in Powell, Clark and Meeteetse, will not be proposed to the Park County Commission.

The proposal also outlined \$14 million to buy down the county's landfill tipping fees and \$1 million toward recycling, Shorb said.

The county's municipalities had been scheduled to make a presentation to the commission on Tuesday, but a majority of the commissioners indicated they would not support that proposal.

"We're in a philosophical disagreement with them, and they don't support a cap tax in that form," Shorb said.

To go before voters in the fall, the tax proposal hinges on support from the Park County Commission and two of the three municipalities.

Shorb said the proposed county-operated transfer stations were deal-breakers for some commissioners.

"The commissioners aren't interested in hauling trash. They had reservations about putting in a transfer station," Shorb said.

On Tuesday, Commissioner Bucky Hall said he did not support the idea of a county-run transfer station and transportation system, voicing opposition to the expansion in county services.

"It would take a heck of a sales job to get me to support that," said Hall.

"I was just opposed to the \$18 million tax hike," said Commissioner Tim French, adding, "I just didn't think it was necessary."

"There's a lot in this package that I personally am not about to say I support," Siggins said a meeting last week.

She noted that the increased tipping fees and other funding sources have the landfill essentially paid for.

"In that respect, there is no longer any mandate over the county's head; we'll be ready to open (the new landfill cell in Cody) in September," she said.

On Tuesday, Hall noted that the county's Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan concluded that direct hauling garbage to the site in Cody was the cheapest option for Powell.

"The study showed that was the most economic way to go," said Hall.

Powell officials have estimated it will cost the city \$100,000 each year to directly haul to Cody. It's estimated a transfer station could cost twice that annually, based on numbers from a county-hired consultant.

Rural residents will have to hire private haulers or drive garbage to Cody themselves, Shorb said. However, the county's tentative plans have called for the installation of roll-off bins at the closed landfills, which could allow rural residents to continue disposing of their waste there.

The county recently received a letter from the DEQ stating that the Powell landfill could be allowed to operate until June 20, 2012 — if there is enough space for the trash in the existing cell.

"We're really close to capacity (in Powell) right now," said county landfill office manager Sandie Morris.

Powell councilmen said Monday they believe all three municipal councils would have supported the \$18-million tax proposal with transfer stations.

However, Shorb noted that the county's support is crucial for the tax proposal to move forward.

Commissioner Dave Burke was the lone member of the commission to voice support for a transfer station system.

"We need to have a plan that everyone supports," Shorb said. "A plan that doesn't have everyone's support is not a plan."

Shorb added that the county has good ideas for the regional landfill and said he didn't "want to throw stones at them."

Commissioners have unanimously expressed a willingness to deal with the increased costs of disposing of trash in Powell and Meeteetse by providing a break on tipping fees.

"I think the board is still committed in doing that for the communities with a longer haul," said Siggins last week.

Shorb said the Landfill Capital Facilities Tax Committee plans to retool the tax proposal to make it more agreeable to commissioners.

"They didn't like that proposal, so we're coming back," Shorb said. "It won't be a transfer station. It'll be trucks and trailers."

Powell leaders are worried about the wear and tear direct hauling will have on its own trucks and how it will affect Meeteetse, which has a 12-year-old truck.

"Meeteetse is in a critical position," Shorb said.

With a small population and older residents on a fixed income, the town will have difficulty paying to haul to Cody, Shorb said.

Councilman Jim Hillberry said, based on conversations he's had, residents countywide support the idea for a 1-cent tax to pay for landfill costs.

"I haven't had any objections for the cap tax for the landfill," Hillberry said. "People in Cody, Meeteetse and especially

Powell all tend to favor (it). That's not what I've heard for the hospital (tax), but that's another story."

"It would serve everybody in the county equally," Shorb added. "Not everyone is going to benefit from the hospital tax equally."

Mayor Scott Mangold said he wishes the transfer station decision had been reached sooner, as the last couple of years could have been spent working on a recycling plan and other proposals.

Disappointed that Powell will not be getting a transfer station, the mayor said, "We're looking at a bad future for garbage, especially for Powell."

Still, he said he's optimistic.

"I'm hoping the cap tax committee can come up with an alternate plan or at least give us a little bit of hope," Mangold said.