

Trash stays: City to use landfill, not haul refuse to Casper

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Reporter

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The solid waste discussions that have peppered city council agendas for the last several months took a definitive direction, as council members voted to continue operating the local landfill in lieu of hauling garbage to Casper.

The decision reached April 13 will call for the city to continue the use of its current unlined landfill setup with the likely construction of a new building and possible later installation of a solid waste baling device. The device will allow garbage to be compacted and shrouded in plastic, saving space in the landfill and creating fewer potential contamination issues. Council members also emphasized increased recycling efforts as part of the decision.

Though the council voted to keep storing garbage locally, solid waste costs will likely increase for residents.

"I would suspect it's going to go up some," Mayor Jim Schneider said.

"We're hoping for some government aid on it but so far it's been nil."

Schneider didn't know how much rates could jump as the plan is still in the early stages.

Currently, the city operates an unlined landfill cell for its solid waste, but any newly constructed cells require an expensive lining to comply with federal and state environmental regulations. The city hopes to use the unlined cell as long as possible.

The new baler technology and improved recycling plan could drastically lengthen the current cell's lifespan, Schneider said.

"It could be up to fifteen (years) if we recycle enough," he said. "The present pit, which we don't have to line, is good for at least another four or five years without any question before we'd have to get into lining a pit."

With pressure from the Department of Environmental Quality to move forward with a solid waste decision, council members cast their ballots Monday. However, the city can modify or change its plan entirely in the coming months if needed.

The push for solid waste plans state-wide is to gauge cost estimates. These estimates will be delivered to the state legislature to consider funding waste management plans in future budget sessions, according to a city council memo.

The City of Douglas is the last municipality in the East Central Planning Landfills (ECPL) region to reach a decision on waste management.

Though many cities state-wide are opting to haul solid waste to regional centers, maintaining local control would allow Douglas to service nearby municipalities' garbage needs and thereby potentially lowering costs. A local landfill option also avoids transportation costs.

"That was a big concern for me is what's going to happen to transportation costs in the near future and long-term," Councilperson Kathy Russell said.

The time constraints for a decision were mainly about which plan the city would choose, Russell said. Now that a decision is reached, the city is under fewer time constraints for the construction of the sorting building and baling system.

Schneider didn't give a time line for construction of the building or baler system, but said the council will be working on a proposal in the coming months for specifics of the project.