

Solid Waste Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes: 7/17/08, submitted by Doug DeDe, Councilor, Ward 2

Among the issues discussed were new practices at the Recycle Center, a change in the price of 'green' bags and Bulky Item tags, and a possible discount plan for the Construction Debris dumpster which now includes all wood previously dumped for free.

The principal change in practices at the recycle center is the addition of (no-charge) 'Resident' stickers to ensure that the use of our facility is limited to those who support the center with their tax dollars. (Some will remember that several years ago when the center was located off River Street, permits were required; free, but required.)

Cardboard is now deposited directly into a compactor instead of a dumpster. This provides our vendor with fewer trips to pick up the cardboard, ultimately saving money. There are problems however in that extra large pieces of cardboard which are not 'broken-down' and are deposited into the dumpster cause jams involving staff attention. In the words of one of our staff, '...it requires a lot of babysitting...' Residents can help by limiting the cardboard placed into the 'hopper' to 4' x 4' because that size fits into the hopper.

The 'clean wood' dumpster has been eliminated. Now, all wood must go into the construction debris dumpster, so the loads must first be weighed by driving across the scale before and again after the dump and paying by check for either the minimum dump of \$5.00, or the per pound rate of .07 cents per pound. Since all wood now must go into a 'paid' dumpster and since only checks can be accepted for payment, there have been instances when some citizens using the Construction Debris dumpster have been abusive when they were told they could not pay in cash. The fact that 'clean' wood used to be dumped for free results in anxiety about the fact that it now requires a check for payment. Those patrons previously came to the center without a checkbook. Consideration *is* being given to setting up a 'punch-card' for \$35 that will entitle the holder to drop off 100 lb or less ten times for the price of seven times. The Recycle Center management staff is looking into the number of times we have 'minimum' dumps. A decision to recommend this may come forward in another month or so. The Recycle Center Staff is also investigating alternatives to use of a bank-check.

The subject of citizen abuse of Recycle Center Staff was discussed and the SWAC members were appalled to hear that the incidence of occurrence of abusive behavior is approximately FIFTY PER CENT of the time! In at least one case, physical abuse was involved which may result in prosecution.

There have been situations when items were placed into the plastics bin that did not belong there. The problem was discovered after the dumpster had been transported to our deposit location and upon inspection was refused. That caused the entire dumpster to be transported back to the recycle center whereupon Recycle Staff went through all of the items and extracted the inappropriately deposited materials by hand. In order to correct this situation, the Recycle Center Staff relocated the bins next to the trailer office and installed plywood covers with openings designed to prevent deposits of inappropriate items. Since then, some patrons of the center have removed the clamps that held the plywood covers on and lifted the plywood to ensure that they would be able to put anything they brought down into the container. The (expensive) clamps were taken too!

When a Recycle Center Staff member recently approached someone attempting to put a non-conforming object into the bin, the patron responded with abusive language in a threatening tone and body language that could only be considered aggressive. This situation is intolerable and will be discussed with the Police Chief to establish a consistent reaction to any such inappropriate behavior on the part of Recycle Center patrons. The actions can range from a 'Disorderly Conduct' warning or citation, to suspension of privileges of use of the Center, to Criminal Prosecution. The members of the SWAC were justifiably appalled that our City Employees have been subjected to this kind of abuse and are committed to take any necessary steps to ensure that it is abruptly curtailed.

There is an ongoing problem with trash being put out at the curbside earlier than the requisite (evening before the scheduled pickup date) and left out beyond the pickup date. Some examples have shown clearly that refuse is simply put at the curb when the bag is filled irrespective of any scheduled pickup date. There are also problems with bulky items simply being left at curbside with no bulky item tag. These problems are occurring principally at rental properties. A list of properties where the problem has become endemic is being compiled.

By Ordinance (97-8-1 & 97-12), the property owner is responsible for the correction of any such violations within 48 hours of notice and is subject to a fine of at least \$200, and up to \$1,000 dollars in addition to any 'removal' costs incurred by the City if the situation is not corrected. This ordinance has not been enforced in recent years and the problem has grown exponentially, particularly in multi-family properties where tenants either have not been informed of this responsibility or have chosen to ignore it. Once landlords start paying fines, the problem will, in all likelihood be mitigated.

Currently the process by which this notification and fine can be accomplished efficiently is being reviewed. It should be a fair warning to landlords from this meeting on that they are required to provide trash receptacles out of the public's view for their tenants and violations of Ordinances 97-8-1 & 97-12 by their tenants will result in fines to be paid by the property owner. The SWAC and the City Administration are also exploring alternatives to ensure that property owners are warned though it must be added that ignorance is never an acceptable excuse for violation of any law.

Lastly, a review of the trend of costs for our award winning Recycling Program indicate clearly that there will need to be an increase in the price of both sizes of 'green bags' as well as a price increase in the cost of a Bulky-Item tag. The SWAC feels that it will be better to have a smaller increase in a timely manner today rather than forcing much steeper 'catch-up' cost increases at a later date. The costs of the small bags will be recommended to increase by 10 cents, the larger bags by 15 cents and the Bulky Item tag by 1 dollar. The SWAC will recommend that this increase be effective on September 1, 2008.