

## Council nixes curbside recycling initiative 3-2

Written by By Babette Herrmann Sun Editor  
Friday, 26 February 2016 03:03

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### TO Re-evaluate program in 1-year

While there's some disenchantment over the current state of drop off recycling spots around town, it's still a cheap enough option for the Gallup City Council to try and remedy for \$100,000 when compared to the nearly \$1.3 million it will cost the city to implement a curbside recycling program.

The council voted 3-2 against the curbside recycling program Feb. 23. Councilors Allan Landavazo and Fran Palochak wanted to see Gallup take a progressive step toward the home pickup system, but their peers felt the cost outweighed the reported benefits.

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“I am at a loss,” Palochak said. “I recycle and it’s a pain in the keister. The time is now, and we can’t always drag our feet.”

Mayor McKinney expressed concern over the recyclables commodities market, saying that, for example, payments for plastic recyclables is down 90 percent when compared to previous years. He also said that he’s concerned about the “long term reoccurring costs” of a curbside program.

“Are we buying a white elephant?” he said.

Landavazo was first to make the motion that went against the grain of staff’s recommendation to fix problems with the three drop off spots.

“I think it’s one of those staple things that people look at in a model community,” he said. “We want to be attractive to the outside world ... we have to be bold.”

Prior to the vote, financial details and city-generated surveys were presented in a slideshow-type format by Gallup Water and Sanitation Department Director Vince Tovar.

The results were mixed, but out of the 1,521 people surveyed, 59 percent said they would participate in the program, followed by 41 percent that said they would not participate in the program. When it came to the implementation of a monthly fee, 46 percent were against it, but a combined 53 percent said they would pay between \$2 to \$5 per month.

Details of the the curbside recycling budget were broken down in increments. To explain, the city would have to budget \$310,00 for a facility; \$80,000 for field employees; \$82,000 for administrative employees; \$325,000 for a vehicle; \$450,000 for recycle carts; \$10,000 for fuel and maintenance; and \$15,000 for hauling.

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If each resident were charged \$3 per month, amortized for about seven years, the seven year revenue total without interest would be about \$1.5 million.

In contrast, there were no breakdowns on exactly how the \$100,000 will be spent to improve the three current sites, just a commitment to mitigate the issues. In Tovar's slideshow presentation, photos showed bins overflowing with garbage.

Tovar's plans for the drop off locations, entails adding two employees to assist people during business hours, Tuesday - Saturday; seek public input to add up to two additional locations; add appropriate and accurate signage to drop off locations; provide community recycling education; make it user friendly, and as Tovar puts it, provide the public with "easy to monitor metrics."

Before the council voted, public comments tipped mostly in favor of curbside pickup, with some negative comments about the drop off spots as noted in Tovar's presentation.

Some residents, such as Pat Scheely of Mentmore, said to "make it doable." It's a matter of pride." School Board member Lynn Huenemann said conceptually it's very easy to implement.

But local engineer Mike Daly and local columnist Joe Schaller both said that New Mexico has plenty of room for landfills.

"Recycling is nice, but this a rural state and there's a lot of room for landfill," Daly said, adding that Albuquerque, among other communities have felt the pinch of increasing recycling costs that get passed on to consumers.

Tovar said the money for recycling programs is tapped from the Environmental Surcharge Tax fund. Right now the fund is stretched thin with the rehabilitation of the Grandview tank at a cost of about \$3.7 million.

And the alleyways between Strong and Puerco need water and wastewater lines replaced as

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the lifecycle for that infrastructure is coming to an end. Essentially, there's millions of dollars in curb and gutter, and infrastructure projects that need priority funding, he explained.

"We are behind and we have a backlog," Tovar said.

Meanwhile, after the council struck down Landavazo's motion, they took a second vote to start planning the upgrade to the three recycling centers located at the Gallup Transfer Station, Gallup Cultural Center and Larry Brian Mitchell Recreation Center.

The council plans on revisiting the curbside recycling initiative next year.

***By Babette Herrmann***  
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