

Schaller conducts his own curbside recycling 'analysis'

Written by By Joe Schallar Guest Columnist
Friday, 08 May 2015 00:59

I have been following the numerous city meetings on curbside recycling since last summer, asking questions, taking notes, following up with extensive research and even providing a condensed feasibility study from previous articles I have written in local publications.

I recently discovered the Sustainable Gallup Board already reached a curbside decision several months ago. Since neither the city council nor SGB will grant me twenty minutes speaking time, I am presenting my comprehensive analysis in writing.

I was formerly a Sierra Club hippie on a spiritual quest to save the planet in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1975 I studied wind energy at EWSC. In 1985 I instructed GHS sophomores on the 'greenhouse effect'.

In the 1990s I decided to study the science and economics of ecology as well as the history of the green culture, so I removed the blinders of faith, bid farewell to the romantic world of the Sierra Club congregation and became an environmental investigator, watchdog, whistleblower and free market environmentalist.

Since then I have put in considerable time investigating issues rather than relying on politically correct dogma, and have written several articles in local publications over the past decade exposing the corruption of the green culture, such as my study on indoor air pollution from wood and coal burning stoves which is considered by the World Health Organization as the greatest environmental health hazard in the world as well as the Navajo Nation.

That deadly respiratory hazard is caused by lack of access to affordable energy and is largely ignored by green activists in favor of an anti-industry, anti-energy campaign, and when I say green activists I include the *Gallup Independent*.

I have also written articles concerning renewable energy, and years ago even debated on public radio with SGB chairman on that topic yet despite my expertise was never invited onto the Sustainable Energy Board, which indicates to me a lack of intellectual honesty and diversity... so, I have experience on both sides of the green movement. I understand the green politics, bureaucracy, big business, eco-activism, and the psycho-social dynamics of the green culture

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and what motivates them. I have no skin in the game other than truth and justice.

I have attended five meetings on curbside recycling and have some issues. The first is with CDM Smith. They have a profit motive and are essentially salesmen selling us a service and product. They specialize in implementation rather than feasibility and it was their implementation report which was used as a feasibility study.

A feasibility study is supposed to investigate the pros and cons of an investment however only the benefits have been explored.

The McKinley Recycling Council offered only a simple community survey of 146 responders to the Sustainable Energy Board before the implementation process was initiated.

That was the official 'feasibility study', 146 responses to a questionnaire out of 6,000 Gallup households. Seriously? That's like a small church congregation of eco-activists making policy decisions for the city. As far as feasibility studies go we already have a city manager, who was left out of the initial process, and a sanitation director who was also absent. They are paid quite well to be experienced and knowledgeable in their areas of expertise. We also have nearly 30 years of national curbside recycling success or failure to draw from, yet the feasibility was determined by a simple local survey.

The CDM report examines hand-picked curbside programs of Farmington, Silver City, Las Cruces and Laramie WY with no mention of profitability or unintended costs.

Part 1 in a 3 part series. Continued next week.

Program efficiency is meaningless unless taken in context of costs, as many communities have learned. Section 5.2 is titled 'Benefits of curbside programs' yet there is no section or mention in

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the report of drawbacks or historical unintended consequences.

It is a report I would expect of a used car or solar panel salesman avoiding any harsh realities which may scare off the customer. My own condensed feasibility report which drew upon international scientific studies was offered at the first curbside meeting last summer, and then ignored - no intellectual curiosity by the Recycling Council nor City Council, no interest in investigation, no phone calls from Mr. O'Hara or Mr. Bright.

Up until now there has been mostly a one sided positive portrayal of curbside by CDM, MCRC and SGB. The SGB openly stated in March that they seek a "recycling victory" as an initial step in their green crusade, but this shouldn't be about chalking up victories by moral busybodies for elitist political causes, it should be about doing what's right for the commoners of Gallup, here in one of the most impoverished regions in the nation.

What I have primarily heard in numerous city meetings is misinformation by omission and a stunning lack of knowledge from CDM and green activists topped off with willful ignorance.

PART 2

A city councilor even conceded that we'll give it a try for a few years and see if it works. Isn't that the purpose of a feasibility study? Where's the SGB on this? They appear to be avoiding a dialogue, conversation or debate with any who may disagree with their green political agenda.

There is so much more that needs to be said and if no one else possesses the time, knowledge and determination than I will take it upon myself to hopefully save the citizen taxpayers millions of dollars rather than the current 'try it and see what happens' approach.

***Credibility issues. For instance CDM spokesman Thomas Parker was not aware of the 1.2

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million dollars the city of Albuquerque was annually subsidizing for the processing of recyclables, according to Albuquerque director of waste management Jill Holbert. Those subsidies were not included in waste disposal bills nor were the quota penalty subsidies paid to Friedman Recycling. This is a major problem with most green projects as well as many government projects, the hidden costs which are never reported to taxpayers. The heavily subsidized solar panel industry's checkered history of fraud and corruption is a good example. How many unintended costs of curbside recycling will Gallup encounter, particularly when Friedman Recycling experiences revenue problems? CDM and the Recycling Council were also not aware of the decline of curbside recycling programs nationally from 9,700 in 2001 to over a thousand less in 2011 due to unsustainability. The lack of diversity and knowledge displayed by the Recycling Council and Sustainable Gallup Board is a credibility concern.

***Mr. Parker often cited Seattle's 27 year curbside recycling program as the national model of efficiency. It is so efficient their disposal rates have doubled over the past decade. That was after curbside went from voluntary to mandatory due to the decrease in recycling participation, which commonly occurs with curbside programs. In 1991 Seattle's cost per household per month for curbside was \$1.71 and their monthly garbage rate \$10.60. Today Seattle's average residential solid waste bill for a family of four has risen to \$43.00 a month for a recycling bin plus a small waste bin and locked in to rise another \$10.00 over the next 5 years to \$53.00. That's way above the \$15.00 national average. Efficiency means little unless in context of costs and Seattle's lofty status in the green culture becomes a study in blind faith. In fact it can be argued Seattle should be the poster child for curbside failure. When asked of Seattle's fees Mr. Parker could only guess at \$25.00/month. That gives CDM serious credibility issues. In Gallup we currently pay \$15.00 a month and that should be lower considering our location. EPA bureaucrats claim the revenues received for processed commodities offset program costs however the evidence shows the costs of curbside are far greater than the revenue generated. The cost of living in Seattle is bad enough for those of low income without piling on more costs. Recycling regulations have become so intrusive in Seattle citizens have described their curbside program as eco-fascist, garbage nazis and green tyranny - rules, rules, rules. And that's not all, one recycling plant in Washington State produces more toxic emissions than any other factory in the region. And the next three biggest polluters in the area? Yeah, they're also recycling plants. In fact, almost all new superfund sites are not landfills, but recycling plants.... New York City found their waste disposal costs doubled with curbside and every one of their mayors has attempted to eliminate it since it was begun in 1989 only to succumb to the demands of green activists. Bear in mind metropolitan areas are the places that are supposed to most likely reduce costs and generate revenue as compared to small communities like ours. In Seattle recycling is a sacred cow. As the Seattle Times concludes "recycling is almost a religion in Seattle" however it sounds more like an OCD neurosis to me.... That is CDM's utopian model. Does anybody really believe the only cost increases Gallup households will experience are \$2.80 per month? That's what the curbside supporters keep telling us. That's what the Gallup Independent tells us, those bastions of objectivity and credibility. Would the media lie? That's also likely what was told to Seattle's citizens in 1988.

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***Initial meetings with CDM brought a total of 54 people attending two meetings and 146 responses on an online survey. CDM characterized this as a high level of support for curbside recycling. In a district meeting 20 people raised their hands in support. There are about 5,000 people in each district, so there is actually very little support by just a small handful of activists. Even the Gallup Independent concedes "a small minority cannot be allowed to dictate policy". At those district meetings rather than raising questions of a scientific, historical or economic nature I mostly heard repetitive stories by the same attendees concerning their own recycling experiences and their concerns of our spiritual responsibility as stewards of the earth. When I offered my knowledge I was asked by a Recycling Board member to provide on-the-spot proof, something which they themselves have none to offer. Another green activist proclaimed to all that I do not care about America's environment after I expressed concern for China's cancer villages.

***Landfills! The national average of waste which still goes to the landfill in curbside programs is 75% even with many programs recycling glass. So once we invest more and get businesses and apartments on board, since glass will not be recycled all of our added curbside costs will likely reduce waste which goes to the landfill by 15 to 20%..... Contrary to what Al Gore has claimed modern landfills create absolutely no environmental harm. Landfill space is abundant nationally, requiring far less space than green activists would have us believe, far less space than the supposedly 'green' solar energy farms. Even the EPA admits it and CDM acknowledges that fact as well. However no matter how many times you remind eco-activists of the facts they will always return to the 'landfills are bad' fallacy.... Since recyclables are not compacted it costs more to transport them from neighborhoods, as well as the increased emissions of transporting equal amounts compared to waste. In a place like Gallup with so much open land, clay soil, dry climate, minimal leaching and the relative space required for landfills so small it's absolutely mindboggling that we send our trash all the way to Thoreau or even pay someone a landfill cost. Once again it appears the federal government's land hoarding and an out-of-control EPA staffed with radical green activists are obstacles to our community's progress with over-the-top ridiculous regulations, which actually result in increased pollution. Considering the large amount of our waste - likely 80% or more - which will still go to the landfill, it may be wise for us to focus more on lowering the cost of disposal by finding landfill space nearby and reduce emissions at the same time.

***Plastics! The many negatives of recycling plastics was not covered by CDM. Plastics recycling has always been an unstable market due to cheap petroleum and China's 'green fence' which now prohibits contaminated as well as certain types of plastics. 70% of the world's and 60% of the US plastics has been sent to China with a resulting devastating environmental impact due to China's lack of processing technology. There's even a term in China, "cancer villages", wherever plastics and solar panel minerals are processed. There are over 400 cancer villages in China with skyrocketing mortality rates. Here again CDM was totally unaware of these facts. Recycling plastic and paper is an extremely dirty business requiring greater amounts of toxic chemicals than manufacturing virgin plastic and paper. A third of recycled

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paper ends up as a toxic sludge which must be carefully disposed of. Clean and green sounds pretty however the massive footprint of green projects is pretty ugly and far larger than any damage from carbon dioxide... How many miles is it to China? If you think transporting waste to the landfill produces emissions, how about sending 60% or more of America's recyclables half way around the world? Seriously? And then 30% of that ends up in Chinese landfills. Mister John Q Public is likely ignorant of those facts. To them once the recyclables are picked up it's out-of-sight out-of-mind.... Despite the efforts of the Obama administration and eco-activists to raise the price of oil as well as energy costs, thanks to advanced technologies the increased availability of petroleum will likely keep the demand for plastics down with the result of it ending up in landfills - of which there are no shortages of space nor danger to the environment. Currently it is cheaper to buy virgin plastic than recycled plastic and since oil prices dropped European recyclers are going bankrupt. If Friedman Recycling goes belly up Gallup's large investment is jeopardized. There are many more negative complexities about plastics recycling such as contamination by uncleaned and incompatible recyclables.

***Paper comes from renewable forests. There is no shortage. There is an abundance of timber grown by forest product companies. World biomass is at record high levels. Glass is made from the most common mineral on earth, silica sand. Processing recycled glass is also more detrimental than creating virgin glass. There is very little demand for recycled glass but plenty of cheap landfill space.

PART 3

***All in one recycling like the method proposed for Gallup has drawbacks, like the costly technology of the \$20 million Friedman Recycling facility in Albuquerque. That technology focuses on quantity over quality which creates contamination issues so common with recycling.

***We already have successful recycling in Gallup. It is free market environmentalism and it's all voluntary. Citizens get paid for their recyclables also. Thanks to advanced technology the free market, particularly big industry, has been the leader in ecology for the past century – ironic,

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isn't it. Mandatory recycling is an authoritarian imposition of morality on society, however it is a false morality contrary to reality.

***Winners and losers: Despite what bureaucrats and activists claim, science and economics tell us that landfills are not an environmental issue, resources are not in danger, more energy is used by curbside recycling, more emissions are created and social benefit is zero. So who stands to gain and who stands to lose, not just with curbside recycling but with most green schemes such as renewable energy? The profiteers include: 1. Big business interests such as CDM Smith. 2. Crony green corporate giants such as General Electric. 3. Politicians and EPA bureaucrats seeking to expand their power. 4. Public servants and their labor unions. 5. Eco-activists supported by the crony billionaire's club led by the likes of progressive statist Tom Steyer and George Soros. 6. The missionaries of the earth worshipper cult seeking to validate their religion.... Many special interests stand to gain from curbside however the losers, the pawns in this game, are the unwitting taxpayers (particularly those with low incomes), the economy and ironically even the environment. There's an economic reason why so many communities have opted out of their curbside and any notion that the environment benefits more than it is harmed is scientifically proven to be erroneous.

***Finally, what I take issue with more than anything are the green activists on the Recycling Council and Sustainable Energy Board, who made it quite clear at district meetings as well as their formal monthly meetings that curbside recycling is just the beginning of their green makeover plans as stewards of the earth (with humans of secondary concern), thus opening the door to even bigger projects. Those projects are of an anti-affordable energy nature such as anti-fracking in the county, apparently one of the next targets of the SGB – apparently using Hollywood as their primary source of data rather than the Dept of Energy, USGS or even the radical greens in the EPA who have been forced to give fracking their safety stamp of approval due to the inconvenient truths of science. Then the green crusade will move onward to pro-renewable energy which is erroneously labeled clean energy. They are the next overreaching schemes to scare away industry and chase off prospective businesses by sending our utility rates skyrocketing, as Europeans have learned the hard way from wind and solar unsustainability with their devastating epidemic of fuel poverty, while at the same time wreaking havoc on China's humanity and ecosystems.

In conclusion, separation of church and state is a big deal for some, however I am more concerned about the separation of good empirical science from junk science, political special interests and bad religion now recognized as the secular faith of 'sustainability'. Despite early good intentions green activism has evolved into a religion of bullies, hogging the pulpit in a one sided debate and dismissing opposition as heretics - deniers! I am in favor of opening a diverse dialogue regarding green schemes and starting a diverse conversation beyond the current political correctness of the Gallup Establishment.

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I hope the City Council and management will make informed decisions about green projects based on science and intellect rather than emotional reactions of a politically correct nature. I will be providing the SGB with copies of my analysis as well.

You have now been forewarned of the risks and unintended consequences of not only curbside recycling but of the many pie-in-the-sky schemes which lie ahead as Gallup and McKinley County stumble thru the green gauntlet. Ignorance will not be an excuse for failure. As I have made quite clear in the past, with my considerable knowledge of navigation thru the environmentalist miasma I will always be available as a resource. My door is always open.

Joe Schaller