

## "One UA Voice"

[www.uatrash.org](http://www.uatrash.org)

### April 25, 2008- The Dispatch Article

Yesterday, an article in the *Columbus Dispatch* appeared, and this site was brought up in the same context as claims of racism made by the contractor's Project Manager.

How did this happen? Here's how the story unfolded.

As the result of carefully reviewing the city's trash contract, I had uncovered some fairly significant omissions. Among those omissions was a stipulation requiring criminal background checks on the employees who, by having to accept a city-provided trash service, we have given permission to enter onto our property. Particularly for those residents with medical exemptions and premium service, where these employees will have access to garages and back doors, this has a potential security risk.

I issued a press release on this on Monday, April 21, and on Tuesday evening, received a call from a reporter at the *Dispatch*. We talked for over an hour about a variety of subjects, including the process whereby staff/Council inappropriately pushed the ordinance through with the emergency clause, the fact that significant errors had been made in the financial analysis of the bids, and deficiencies in the contract.

The next day, I received a call from a reporter at WOSU. He wanted to interview me, and it started around 11:00. His lead question was, "So, what problems do you have with Inland?" to which I responded, "I don't have problems with Inland, I have problems with our city government." For 30 minutes, he kept pushing me to say something bad about Inland, but that has never been the focus of this site, nor that of those involved in the petition effort. He even asked me if the old solid waste workers were angry, to which I replied that they had received their severance and were getting on with their lives. I couldn't understand why he was asking me these questions.

After the 30 minutes, he asked me about an [incident](#) involving racist letters being left in a resident's recycle bin and asked by the contractor to be documented in a police report. I was shocked, and told him how inappropriate this was, how the issue was NOT about the contractor, but about how our government had conducted itself.

He then brought out a [letter](#) written by the contractor's Project Manager with some very disturbing statements and asked me to respond to several of them. Again, I was shocked. Clearly the purpose of this site and the petition effort had been misunderstood. (Note: We have since learned that this letter was [sent to the city via the "Contact Web Editor"](#) on the uaoh.net website on the evening of April 13, 2008.)

I asked him if I could make copies of the documents, and he obliged.

Click [here](#) to see the written version of the WOSU story.

Here's an audio of the newscast. 

(Note that the Assistant City Manager is now quoting a savings of \$200,000 per year rather than the \$1,000,000 per year told to us just two months ago. In the *Dispatch* article, published the same day, he is claiming \$600,000 per year. Which number is right?)

At 10:00 that evening, I got a call from the *Dispatch* reporter, asking me if I had a copy of the police report. Yes, I did because I had received it from the WOSU reporter. He asked if I could fax a copy to the newsroom. So I did.

As a result of this, the *Dispatch* article was rewritten by the night staff to incorporate this incident. The story's focus went from resident problems with the new service and my objections regarding the contract terms to the claims of racism and the existence of this site.

The situation was made worse by a last-minute change in the title of the article from "Upper Arlington residents not thrilled with private trash pickup," which appeared in the version at 11:23 PM on April 23, to "Racist notes left for U.A.'s trash haulers" in the version at 3:34 AM on April 24. Here's a copy of the [article](#) with both titles as they

appeared on the *Dispatch's* website. It was when reading the article that I found out that the U.A. police had refused the night before to send the Dispatch the report, and so I had been called by the reporter to provide a copy.

The net result is that I spent the next day fielding phone calls - sometimes two lines at a time - and reading emails that were sent to the site. Given the explosive nature of the article, I called the UA police and asked them if they could increase the frequency of driving by my family's house. Which they have done, and for this I thank them. All I could think of was the potential danger in which I had placed my family. I called my husband at work, and sensing how uneasy I was, he came home mid-day. I also considered pulling my children out of their schools just to make sure they were safe, but decided against this because I didn't want to expose them to what was going on in their home.

(Update 4/27/08 - The Dispatch withdrew the "Racist notes"-entitled article from its website. Update 4/29/08 - Now, the "Upper Arlington Residents not thrilled"-entitled article has been withdrawn and the "Racist notes"-entitled article has been restored.)

NBC Channel 4 reported the story later in the evening. Click [here](#) to read a copy of the story.

Out of all of the visitors to the site, I received a dozen or so emails telling me several things. Many were sent anonymously with bogus email addresses. Here is what they said:

1. That following trash trucks around was childish,
2. That I should get a job,
3. That UA residents need to be focusing their time on more important issues, and
4. That I should be actively trying to find out who dropped those papers in the recycle bins.

To answer these points ...

**1.** Uatrash.org is about **recapturing our right to vote**, and because of the way UA government has behaved, it has become confrontational rather than collaborative. Confrontation involves each party documenting facts to support its position. Prior to the change of service, the focus was on documenting the process by which city Council and staff decided upon and passed the change in service. The work involved listening to audio CDs of the Council meetings and compiling resident letters to the *UANews*, all of which were provided on the website.

Once the new service started, the focus shifted to documenting the degree to which the advertised level of service, the "seamless transition" that we were being told was the reason for passing the ordinance as an "emergency," was materializing. And that required that we see for ourselves what was going on. This is called "Quality Assurance," and is best done by a third party rather than by the city or contractor itself.

After 3 weeks, we now know that the new system is not providing residents the quality of service the city and the contractor told us would exist. The fact that 1000 complaints, or 8.25% of all households, were filed in the first week (this, according to the Assistant City Manager) documents that more than a few bumps have been encountered. At the end of the third week, the terms of the contract still are not being met.

This is the result of a poorly thought out contract, inadequate efforts by the city to enforce contract provisions during the transition period, as well as the amount of resources being allocated to a system that is unwieldy and resource-intensive.

- Just prior to the change in service, the city published its "iNSIGHT" magazine, and outlined procedures for recyclables that had not been incorporated in the contract.
- In the contract, the contractor outlined a pre-start plan that was not enforced by the city.
- Communication from the city to residents prior to the change was inadequate. Letters that the city told us were to come from the contractor were never sent.
- The contract did not contain provisions for services that had been provided by the city service personnel.
- The contract did not specify that persons with "medical exemptions" were to have their recyclables and yard waste picked up at the curb.
- Verbal promises from the contractor in its pre-award meeting with council were not built into the contract.

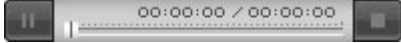
And these are just the problems that we've uncovered within the first couple of weeks. Undoubtedly there are more.

All of this calls into question the integrity of the system that's being implemented, and whether it is realistic given the

budget targeted by the city. While there has been improvement, there is a point where the learning curve levels off, and without additional personnel and equipment, it is difficult (if not impossible) to accomplish what needs to be done given the current business model. It is highly likely that the contractor will need to spend far more than it anticipated, and will come back to the city for more money. If the city does comply with that request, the financial savings which was the cornerstone for justifying the change will disappear. And all of this will have been for naught.

In addition to chronic lateness, we have found:

- A contractor who intentionally mixed used motor oil with trash instead of recycling it.
- A contract that has NO PROVISIONS requiring criminal background checks on the contractor's personnel. The contractor indicated they could do them (listen below), but it was omitted in the contract itself.



- A contractor who is chronically out past the 5PM curfew. If a commercial garbage truck is still working after 7PM, it's a violation of Codified Ordinance 517.15.
- An accident on Tremont Road. Click [here](#) for the police report.
- UA City employees themselves picking up missed recyclables for those with medical exemptions.

We will continue to report violations to document the inadequacy of the current system on the website as "Roaming Reporters" call them in.

**2.** This IS my job. I just don't get paid for it. Over the last several months, I have spent over 500 hours of time and \$1700 supporting this effort. Others have spent literally thousands of hours -- all volunteer -- to press city government on this. We are always in need of help, and if you'd like to make a difference, please email me ([uapetition@aol.com](mailto:uapetition@aol.com)).

Without persons who scrutinize what's going on in our government, we would be the subjects of a system with no accountability ... one that treats us as an unending source of funds, and that merely taxes us more when it runs into financial problems. Money is a drug to such an entity, and the more we give it, the more it wants. We have been complacent and have only enabled this addiction. I would suggest that the city look at itself as a business and make sound decisions based on robust data, looking introspectively to see where money is being squandered before holding out its hand for more, and display transparency in communicating the underlying data to its taxpayer/investors.

Supposed financial benefits also underlie the Tremont Rezoning issue, and there are questions whether the numbers being maintained by the city are really valid. Indeed, the city's track record on its Economic Incentive handouts is questionable at best, so there is just reason to scrutinize those being presented in this rezoning issue as well.

**3.** While I can't speak for the volunteer efforts of other UA residents, in addition to this work, I also am a volunteer on the National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Education Taskforce. I assist in identifying and developing strategies for working with children who have been prenatally exposed to alcohol. This is a real problem, and one that is totally soluable. It's also one that no one talks about.

**4.** It would be inappropriate for me to do this. That is for the UA Police Department, and they can do a far better job than I ever could. What I can do through the website is encourage anyone who knows anything to contact them directly. Indeed, this behavior is deplorable, and there should be consequences. But it is not within my jurisdiction to perform the investigation myself. I look forward to hearing of the progress that the UA Police Department makes in tracking down the perpetrators.

Now that this storm has passed, **it's time to get back to the fundamentals** of what this effort is all about.

1. UA residents were denied the right to vote.
2. We want it back.
3. We've got a petition effort to place this vote on the ballot in November.
4. If you agree with this basic right, then you can help us by signing the petition, circulating one yourself, and/or contributing the effort.

**Period.**