



Resident Services / City Services

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Solid Waste Services Message From Council President

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The following message from City Council President Donald B. Leach, Jr. was presented at the Monday, February 25, 2008 Council Meeting. It also is scheduled to appear in the February 27, 2008 edition of the Upper Arlington News.

I wanted to take this opportunity to speak to the issues surrounding City Council's decision late last year to change our solid waste services. City Council's decision came after more than two years of study, analysis and input. Our goal was and is to continue to provide exceptional, responsive, cost effective and environmentally friendly solid waste services for the community.

A number of questions have been raised about the decision, so let me address the ones we have heard most frequently.

Our Process. The solid waste review process was carefully planned and provided numerous opportunities for input, including:

- The public call for residents to serve on a Solid Waste Advisory Group;
- Three sets of three Town Meetings in the fall of 2006, spring of 2007 and summer of 2007;
- More than a dozen Council meetings and conference sessions.

All those were undertaken with an accompanying community awareness campaign that included advertisements, newspaper articles, Web site updates, and more. In addition, since it is hard for many people to take the time to participate in meetings, we specifically included the issue in the 2006 Community Survey. That survey was sent to randomly selected households for statistical validity and was open to the entire community online. Significantly, 60 percent of respondents favored taking their refuse to the curb if it would keep their costs down.

Advisory Group Report. The Solid Waste Advisory Group worked hard and we very much appreciate that effort. Unfortunately when we considered those recommendations in detail, we learned that they were cost prohibitive - approaching \$4 million for the first year alone. I am pleased to note, however, that our final decision did include a number of their recommendations, including instituting an annual service fee and maintaining the "pay as you throw" approach to continue the incentive to recycle.

Cost. The cost per household for our current solid waste removal service is the highest in Franklin County - 46 percent higher than in Hilliard, 32 percent higher than in Dublin and Bexley and 11 percent higher than in Worthington. While we recognize that those communities do not have exactly the same service as we have had, the fact remains that UA had a substantially more expensive system that was becoming a significant burden on our residents. Privatizing and moving pick up to the curb will reduce our cost per household to be comparable to that in Hilliard.

If we translate cost considerations to sticker prices, in order to maintain the current service the City was projecting sticker fees would have to move from \$3.10 to about \$3.78 this year and to approximately \$4.69 by 2012. Keep in mind what I noted above - in our last Community Survey 60 percent of respondents favored taking their refuse to the curb if it would keep their costs down.

The average household uses 54 stickers per year, meaning that the 2007 average household cost for waste disposal was

\$167.40. Under the current system that average cost would have gone up to approximately \$253.26 by 2012. Under the privatized/at-the-curb approach (without Premium Service), we expect the sticker price to hold steady at \$2.40 for five years (assuming no unforeseen cost increases outside the control of the City and our contractor). Adding in the new \$30 annual service fee, the average household will pay \$159.60 per year each year through 2012. While the savings would be only \$7.80 for 2007 and \$44.52 for 2008, by 2012 it will be \$93.66, with a total savings for the five years of \$351.12. Although we cannot guarantee savings for everyone, we have tried to act in the best interest of the community as a whole.

Emergency Clause. On December 21, 2007 by a 7-0 vote City Council approved legislation creating the new system. That legislation contained an emergency clause, meaning that it took effect immediately and that the City Manager could execute the contract to privatize our waste disposal services. An emergency clause is appropriate when the Council believes that legislation should take effect upon passage for the "immediate preservation of the public health, peace or public safety." No one can argue that trash pickup does not relate to the public's health and safety. The Council vote was unanimous as it was crucial to (1) allow our contractor, Inland Service Corporation, to promptly begin purchasing equipment and preparing to take over service in a timely and efficient manner, (2) provide sufficient time for a public information campaign and smooth transition in services, (3) provide the City Manager authority to take any necessary action to guarantee a smooth transition and (4) maximize the opportunity to save money.

It is a challenge to properly educate all citizens about any change in a core City service and to make sure that the change is implemented efficiently and effectively. Including the emergency clause allows us the best opportunity to accomplish that in the available time.

Safety. We are grateful for the hard work of our dedicated solid waste employees and recognize that over the years a number of special relationships have formed between them and our residents. Inland has invited our existing employees to apply to work for them, and I hope they do so. Whether Inland employs them or others, however, **Inland is obligated to conduct thorough background checks, to extensively screen and train all applicants, and to maintain the highest levels of performance and professionalism. Inland and the City recognize that service and safety are of highest priority and not only does our contract require both, but also you can expect the City to diligently monitor Inland's performance.**

The good news is that Inland has an excellent performance record in other communities they serve. Our initial interaction and cooperation during this transition period have done nothing but confirm our belief that the selection of Inland was the right one.

The Big Picture. City Council members take seriously our role as stewards of your community. In fulfilling that responsibility, we must balance complex financial considerations, service needs, issues and new opportunities for providing residents with innovative and responsive local government services. Be it Council's decision to privatize and streamline services or another issue, no one size fits all.

With these changes to our solid waste system, however, we believe we have succeeded in meeting a majority of our goals for assuring exceptional, cost effective solid waste delivery. Of highest priority, the City and most of our residents will save money, the baseline costs for solid waste services will be more equitably spread across the community through the annual service fee and we have retained the incentive to recycle through our pay as you throw approach. Plus, by contracting with Inland, we can realize the benefits of new solid waste technologies quickly and easily since the company specializes in this field.

I thank everyone who has been involved in this complicated, long and detailed process. I believe we have made good decisions regarding how to proceed in providing this vital service, and that the appropriateness of those decisions will become more evident to the community as the actual transition begins in early April.

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