

## **Council learns a lot about trash collection**

**By Jeanne Davant**

The Manitou Springs City Council and a chamber full of citizens heard a report Tuesday night on the city of Lafayette's trash collection and recycling service.

The Manitou Council is considering a similar program, and Lafayette Public Works Director Doug Short described in detail the process his city went through to institute the service in 2007.

Short said Lafayette negotiated a contract with Western Disposal Services for a pay-as-you-throw program. The idea behind pay-as-you-throw is to encourage recycling. A single-contract trash collection program also can cut down on truck traffic and wear and tear on the streets and can result in lower prices for residents.

Western offered three sizes of waste collection carts from 32 to 96 gallons, priced from \$6 to \$18 a month. Lafayette residents also received a city-owned recycling cart. Short said he contracted with Toter, Inc. to produce the recycling carts, for which residents pay an extra \$1 per month.

"We wanted to own the recycling carts," Short said. "We didn't have the money for the carts, but we got a lease-purchase with Boulder County. We are paying them a monthly mortgage on the carts." The carts cost about \$57 each. They were designed to Short's specifications and sport a Lafayette city logo.

Trash is picked up weekly, and recycling is hauled every other week. The program serves about 5,600 customers.

Residents also get one free bulk pick-up per quarter and can schedule extra bulk pickups for an additional charge. If a customer needs extra service on a particular day, he or she can purchase a \$3 sticker from the city to place on a trash bag.

Short said homeowners associations were exempted from the program because many of them already had negotiated trash collection contracts in place. Apartment buildings with eight or more units are exempt by state law. Otherwise, all residents are required to have the service, which is charged to residents as a line item on their water bills.

"You need a velvet hammer," Short said. Failure to pay for the service could generate shutoff of a resident's water service, but Short said that has not been necessary.

He said the contract also provides a "velvet hammer" in the form of disincentives to the company for poor customer service. Western handles all customer service phone calls and provides a monthly customer service report, as well as a report on the tonnage that goes to landfills and recycling centers.

For the past 17 months, the program has accomplished a 28.8 percent rate diversion of trash from landfills into recycling, Short said.

Lafayette will consider adding neighborhoods with homeowners associations to the program when it renews its five-year contract with Western Disposal. Lafayette also wants to add another container for organic materials that will be turned into compost when the contract comes up for renewal.

Short said it cost the city about \$15,000 to start up the program, including mailings, hiring a translator to get information to the city's sizable Spanish-speaking population and programming the utility billing system.

The city receives a small amount of revenue from recycling, which it will use for other conservation projects. Short said other cities that have collection and recycling programs, such as Boulder, have instituted taxes to fund environmental projects. In Lewisville, which also has a single-collector system, the hauler bills customers directly and also provides carts for trash, recycling and organic wastes.

Short and another employee worked full time for six months to get Lafayette's program going.

There were lots of initial questions and some objections from residents, and he spent two months answering about 40 phone calls a day when the program began. Since December, however, the calls have dwindled to a few per month.

"We got a very good deal for our citizens," he said.

If Manitou decides to go ahead with a similar program, "you will have a lot of people rise up in arms against you, and a lot of people in favor," he said. "Once people saw how simple this was, the objections just evaporated."

Mayor Eric Drummond said any program Manitou creates would be customized to the city's needs.

"Lafayette is doing some very progressive things," Drummond said. "The overall flavor and tenor of what they're doing are very consistent with what we would like to do."

Three waste collection companies currently serve Manitou Springs, said Teri Christman, who has extensively researched a citywide trash and recycling program.

"Each company offers a different recycling program," she said. "Two companies charge for it, which is a deterrent. I would like to see recycling built into the prices."

Christman sent requests from letters of interest to 24 local companies and received responses from Springs Waste Systems and Bestway Disposal.

The next step for Manitou would be placing a public notice that the city intends to institute a trash collection and recycling service at least six months from the date of the notice. During that time, the city would work out the details of the service and solicit bids.

"If Council decides to go ahead with the six-month process, that is not a commitment to actually undertake this," Mayor Pro Tern Liz Feder said. "We can stop at any point."

Councilwoman Aimee Cox said she was concerned about demands on city staff at a time when "we're running a little short."

Deputy City Administrator Mike Leslie was asked to evaluate what staff and/or volunteer resources would be needed to develop the program.

Council will discuss action on the six-month notice at its March 17 meeting.

In a related discussion Tuesday night, Feder responded to a letter from Kari and Chris Kilroy asking Council to reconsider a decision not to place a recycling container behind City Hall near Mansions Park. Christman had told Council that grant funds and volunteer monitors would be available for a recycling bin if a location could be found.

"We're not comfortable with that as a spot," Feder said. She noted that there would be only a temporary need for a bin if the city goes ahead with a collection and recycling program.

Councilman Marc Snyder said he was not willing to consider a recycling bin unless problems that plagued previous recycling centers could be addressed.

Blowing trash and unauthorized dumping were the biggest issues, Christman said. She suggested fencing that could be made attractive with art made of recycled materials and said volunteers could monitor the site for problems. She also suggested revisiting the farmer's market

as a temporary site. A recycling bin there last summer was little used. It was believed that was because few people knew about it.

"We have asked staff to look for other spots," Feder said. "I think that's where we are."

## **In other business, Council...**

- Met in a special session and approved unanimously a proposal for Nolte Associates, Inc. to develop an application for \$4.4 million in federal incentive funds for a water project at the east end of town. The city will pay Nolte \$12,500 to generate the complex application, which must be submitted by March 23.
- Decided to revisit the traffic situation on El Paso Boulevard. In response to complaints from a resident last year, several calming solutions were tried, including installation of stop signs. The stop signs generated a lot of controversy from residents and later were removed. The speed limit was raised after many tickets were issued. Staff will submit a report, which may include an informal survey of residents.

[Return to Article Index](#)