

Residents weigh in on trash hauling plan

Council OKs Bestway proposal on first reading

By Jeanne Davant

After hearing from more than 15 residents, Manitou Springs City Council on Tuesday decided to move forward with a single-hauler trash and recycling program.

Council passed on first reading an ordinance awarding a contract for residential service to Bestway Disposal. The contract does not become final until the ordinance is passed on second reading and there will be further opportunity for people to comment on the program.

Mayor Marc Snyder outlined the process, prescribed by state law, the city was required to follow to bring the program to the city.

The idea for single-hauler trash collection originated as a citizen initiative led by Manitou Springs resident Teri Christman more than two years ago. Last year, the sitting Council decided to pursue it and notified all local trash haulers that it would be seeking bids.

"As we got closer to the request for bids process, we got a lot of input," Mayor Marc Snyder said.

The outlines of the program evolved during that time.

"At one time we had considered bringing this into the city (water) program," Snyder said. "This proposal in no way affects your water if you don't pay your trash and recycling bill, they'll simply stop picking up trash and recycling ... We (also) quickly came to realize this is not going to be a mandatory program. We are not requiring anybody to participate in the program. We also heard from a lot of part-time residents. Likewise, we have amended this proposal so they won't have to pay all year round."

Bestway Disposal and Springs Waste attended a prebid conference in March of this year.

"Both companies expressed some concerns, and we did our best to accommodate them," Snyder said. "Both companies were given an equal and absolutely fair opportunity to bid on this contract."

When bids were solicited, only Bestway

What residents said

Here's a sample at Manitou Springs residents' comments about the single-hauler trash and recycling collection program at Tuesday's Council meeting:

"I don't like the idea of somebody telling me who I have to have and we have no choice." — **Bruce McAlexander**

"If we can get something that works well, that is effective and that saves the city money, I just can't see any objection to it." — **Barbara Bunn**

"I'm not mad at the city, but no one found out the city's going to be creating this ... I wish there had been a way to advertise this to residents." — **Leslie Zak**

It seems to me the issue is the bid procedure. Some things were not exactly right... If you are forcing me to take Bestway at higher prices, I would throw that back on the renters." — **Denise Cohen**

"It's my responsibility, as it is everyone else's, to get involved ... I believe a lot of us in the community believe this is really the beginning of how we need to start thinking about a sustainable future. If any one person has to give up a little bit of personal trash liberty, I'm in favor of that" — **Dinah Mann**

"I guess what I have a problem with is that the city is taking over the trash hauling. I don't want the city to take over the trash hauling ... The government is best which governs least. I don't think this is a program the city of Manitou Springs should be involved in or needs to be involved in." — **Steve Sinn**

"Manitou Springs is a really big customer to any trash company. It seems like you guys should really demand what you want, I'm not sure you're doing that. If you only got one bid, you're really not using that leverage ... I think Springs Waste would have come in with better prices." — **Elizabeth Petropoulos**

submitted a proposal.

"Since that time, we have been working with Bestway Disposal to craft a program. We think this is now ready to present to citizens," Snyder said.

By state statute, the program applies only to single-family residences and multi-family buildings with seven or fewer units.

If Council passes the enabling ordinance on second reading, Bestway customers will automatically be switched into the program. Customers of other trash haulers, or those who do not currently have trash service, will be eligible to participate in the program starting May 1. People who want to join the program will be expected to join by Aug. 1. Pickups will be on Tuesdays.

No one will be required to sign up or change haulers, but residents who don't want to elect service with Bestway will have to dispose of their own trash.

The city has options to renew Bestway's contract annually for five years. Council members could decide to seek alternative bids if they disagreed with any changes, such as rate increases, proposed by Bestway.

The new service can save money for residents, Christman said. Under Bestway's new pricing, which is based on the number and size of trash containers, some customers will pay less than they are currently paying.

Bestway will provide recycling service for all customers, which may also help to cut costs.

"I'm really hoping everyone at least gives (recycling) a try," Christman said. "When I went to it, my trash went down by two-thirds. We had a 95-gallon cart, and we went to one 32-gallon cart." That would result in a lower monthly charge.

Bestway will bill customers directly for at least the first year of the program. But the city's intention is to eventually take over billing, which may result in more savings to customers.

Some of the proceeds from a \$48,000 annual fee Bestway will pay the city will be used to update the Finance Department's 15-year-old billing software. That will produce benefits extending beyond the trash collection program, Councilwoman Ingrid Richter noted.

"We are in desperate need of some 21st century billing software," Richter said. "With the software system we have now, we can't send anyone a postcard. I'd like to find a way to pay for that software."

About 50 people attended Tuesday's meeting, and many who spoke said they were not in favor of the program or had questions about it. Residents' objections mostly focused on lack of choice and information.

Resident Ron Wood said he had heard nothing from the city about the program until he received a letter from Springs Waste that was sent to Manitou Springs residents. That letter was critical of the bid process.

"What is the city getting for this? There is really no benefit to the city. Maybe a better approach would be if you're going to do business in Manitou, you have to have single-stream recycling."

— **Justin Bailey**

"(Bestway) can't get up to where I live ... Whenever you have a single competitor, you should really step back and ask what went wrong with the process."

— **Bill Coleman**

"I think we are getting a really good deal. The city will be receiving up to \$48,000 in revenue from the contract. That money will be put to really good use ... I encourage you to recognize your responsibility to our Climate Action Plan and the state Climate Action Plan ... I feel so strongly that this program is such a benefit to the community that beginning today, my trash and recycling were picked up by Bestway."

— **Coreen Toll**

"To me it's a no-brainer. If you have one truck come up into your neighborhood once a week, you save energy, (reduce) the carbon footprint, wear and tear on the street and gasoline ... I understand some people are unhappy, but this is the right thing to do, and thank you for making it happen."

— **Stephen Snyder**

"I'm pretty much disturbed about the process," Wood said. "This process seems to be a little underhanded ... You need to start doing a better job of doing your jobs. People are watching what you're doing. This is one way to get them even angrier."

Wood's remarks prompted Richter, later in the meeting, to recall the tough decisions Council members had to make on the city's budget.

"Please come to the budget sessions," Richter said. "You'll see how difficult those decisions were ... To be called underhanded is hurtful and insulting."

Councilman Matt Carpenter took issue with the Springs Waste letter and the contention that Manitou Springs residents did not have any way of knowing that the process was going on.

"I would challenge you to find out how many times this has come before you," Carpenter said. "This has been a very transparent process. When that letter came out, I thought it was appropriate that that letter came from a trash company, because that letter was trash."

Bestway owner Phil Kiemel said his company currently has 600 to 700 customers in Manitou and that he would work with customers on special or unusual situations.

"We're certainly going to be as flexible as we can," Kiemel said. "If you guys tell me you want only energy-efficient trucks, we'll make an effort to do that."

Kiemel said customers will be charged an additional fee if they leave out extra bags for pickup. Typically the charge appears on the next bill, but customers usually will receive a call first if the extra charge is above \$5.

Council passed the enabling ordinance Tuesday by a vote of 6-1. Councilman Ed Klingman voted against it. Klingman said that although he supported the goals of the program, "it seems to me we're taking on a lot of extra work.... It seems like the more we find out about the costs, there are a lot of them."

Snyder said residents' comments will be taken into consideration when Council considers the enabling ordinance on second reading at its April 20 meeting.

Residents also will have an opportunity to ask questions and state their views at a public meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday.

Residents also may call Bestway Disposal at 633-8709 for information. Details of the new pricing schedule and other aspects of Bestway's plan are available on the company's Web site, www.bestwaydisposal.com.

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