

Trash Talk

By Brittany Macias

Two years into a decade-long contract between the City of San Angelo and Republic Trash Services—one year into the implementation of said contract—trash talk continues to be a hot button, garbage issue.



During the June 7th City Council meeting, consideration was made for the approval of an amendment to the City's contract with Republic, moving bulk pick-up from quarterly to monthly, and moving recycling collection from weekly to every other week. After a vibrant discussion, District 5 representative, Elizabeth Grindstaff, moved to table the issue with a 4-3 outcome in favor of tabling.

Each Council Member began by expressing they have received multiple calls, many in favor of more frequent bulk pick-up, yet many against any additional changes after only a year of getting used to the new changes of services.

Council Member, Charlotte Farmer, vocalized her view of the issue by stating, "Change. That's the word right there... I can attest to the number of phone calls that I receive on trash, they don't like change. Period. That's what it boils down to, they don't like change."

While Council Member, Lucy Gonzales countered with a declaration regarding calls to remove bulk items more regularly, Grindstaff echoed Farmer's concern, "We got used to a very easy system that allowed us to put anything on the curb and it would go away... that wasn't going to continue at the same rate, but still, change is difficult." She also states that most of her constituents are upset they weren't part of the design of a new trash service from the beginning and expressed concern over a survey that was only completed by less than 10% of those affected.

Concerns were also raised regarding less often recycling collection with the proposed plan, but this was thwarted by Operations Director, Shane Kelton, stating that heavy recyclers could receive a second recycle bin, free of charge, within the first 6 months of the proposed change taking place. Kelton also confirmed with CRN that this does not mean a charge will be issued after 6

months' time, it simply means citizens have 6 months to request a bin in order for it to be obtained without a charge.

Though all the Council Members and Mayor Morrison appeared to be in favor of more frequent bulk pick-up, the reasoning behind tabling the agenda item for further discussion stemmed from a majority desire to see all changes enacted at one time, rather than "piecemealing," as Farmer put it. "I think there's some other changes that need to be made and I think we should do all the changes at one time," Council Member, Marty Self stated.

Though not on the agenda, the need for other changes to be addressed directed the conversation. "The primary reason people are not happy with it (trash services) is because of where it's being picked up... that's the primary reason the alley is there, is to pick up trash, I believe," Self says. Council Member Bill Richardson expressed a desire to see likeminded change, "I'd like to see those trash cans off the streets. I believe it's a hazard." In addition, "This has changed the whole appearance of our neighborhoods," Grindstaff states, "roughly 20% of your street is now some garbage apparatus."

Council Member, Harry Thomas, vocalized his support of more frequent bulk collection, though he desires to see what systems other cities of San Angelo's size utilize. According to a 2015 census, the closest Texas cities to San Angelo's population are Tyler, TX, and League City, TX. Both cities have intricate, albeit potentially confusing, plans well worth looking into.

Mayor Morrison, unhappy with the decision to table the bulk pick-up proposal, brought up practical issues when speaking with CRN. "I truly believe that we have a health concern in our community with the 100's, if not 1000's of wet, moldy, decaying, mosquito-laden bags of lawn clippings and someone is going to have to show responsibility and dispose of them. Republic offered, on their dime, and we refused. Now, I am afraid that the taxpayer is going to be forced to pick up the tab."

Kelton made note in the City Council meeting of increase in costs as well, noting that in the proposed plan, no fees would change. As far as the alleyway collection being revisited and other possible changes, Kelton had this to say, "I want to let Council know, anything can be done, but it's at what cost are you willing to have anything done?"

While taxpayer cost is always a factor, Charlotte Farmer tells CRN one size does not fit all and mentions, "Everyone is forgetting that in the beginning of (the) contract the public let us know they didn't mind a small increase (in fee) as long as they could have recycling... There are gives and takes to getting things done and still keeping the lowest rate for residential customers." She went on to say, "But if there are some other changes needed, let's get them done all at the same

time and let's have more citizen input this time and not just nine percent of our customer base speaking for the 100%.”

After a citizen's claim that alleyway pickup is entirely possible, at least for bulk items, CRN spoke with David Harwell, Operations Manager of Republic Services, to find out for certain if moving at least some trash collection back to the alleyways would increase costs and hiring. “That's the question I can't answer,” he said. “We cannot collect in the alleys with the current system. There are too many dominoes that have to fall.” He stated that if City decides to have trash pick-up moved back to the alleys, changes to the system will definitely have to be addressed.

The slinging of trash talk may be continuing for a while...

Until Next Time...

Brit

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