CHANGING THE STATUS QUO OF SOLID WASTE COLLECTION & RECYCLING

Dealing with Organized Opposition

22nd Annual Colorado Summit for Recycling
Breckenridge, CO
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Introduction

• Evaluation of the status quo is the responsibility of any good program manager – whether private or public

• Some CO communities want to evaluate their existing collection systems to assess adequacy against other options

• Goals for improvement may include
  • Improving efficiencies & reducing costs
  • Reducing environmental & infrastructure impacts
  • Improving access to recycling

• Evaluation may or may not lead to program change
Over the last 2-3 years, Colorado has witnessed organized opposition to local governments’ ability to evaluate the status quo of their collection systems.

Concern is not opposing comments and input.

Concern is not what type of collection system changes is implemented (or not).

Concern is

- Hijacking of local governments’ ability to openly & fairly evaluate their systems
- Use of aggressive, misleading & unethical tactics
- Failure to potentially improve systems
- Failure to help public understand the true pros & cons of system choices.
• Common statements made by opponents:
  • All alternatives will increase prices across the board
  • PAYT will increase rates more than 100%
  • The city wasn’t going to tell you anything about this
  • There are no markets for plastics (glass)
  • Most recyclables are being shipped to China
  • Fossil fuel consumption is not a bad thing
  • Trash trucks don’t damage roads
  • The city wants to take away citizen’s right to choose & eliminate small (hauling) businesses
  • We have fought this fight in other cities (& we’ll help you fight it here)
• Fort Collins – failed districting pilot
• Arvada – truncated collection study
• Broomfield – diluted hauler reporting policy
• Westminster – slowed collection study
• Wheat Ridge – opposed city’s move to contract collection
• Other solid waste & sustainability projects
Agenda & Speakers

• Solid Waste Collection Systems - Options & Answers
  Preston Loos, E.D.S.Waste Solutions, Inc.

• Recycling is Alive & Well in Colorado
  Brent Hildebrand, Altogether Recycling

• Fort Collins – An Example in Persistence
  Kelly Ohlson, City of Fort Collins

• How to Manage a Volatile Public Process
  Jody Erikson – The Keystone Project

• Moderator – Laurie Batchelder Adams, LBA Associates, Inc.
EDS Waste Solutions And The City of Golden’s PAYT Program
One Hauler’s Perspective

What Makes Single Hauler PAYT Programs So Attractive

- Efficiencies created
- Savings for residents
- Environmental impact
- Safer neighborhoods
- Waste diversion
- Additional services available
PAYT Challenges You’ve Probably Heard And Some You May Not Have

Issues of concern to Haulers and the Public

- Loss of competitive options for residents
- Can force haulers out of a market and potentially out of business
- Start up costs are high
- Hauler now has two customers instead of one
- From public process to implementation is time consuming
- Highly competitive pricing leaves smaller margins for haulers.
Important Points To Help Create a Successful Program

- Clearly defined goals for the program
- City and hauler must work together closely
- Make sure there is enough time to implement
- Clear channels of communications and clear roles for all that are involved
- The initial address list is critical
- Technology is no longer an option
Recycling is Alive & Well in CO

Brent Hildebrand
Vice President, Recycling
Alpine Waste & Recycling / Altogether Recycling
Email, bhildebrand@alpinewaste.com
Phone, 303-744-9881 x 315
Recycling is Alive & Well in CO

• Evolving Industry

• Costly Industry

• Growing Industry (Colorado Opportunities)
Recycling is Alive & Well in CO

- Does recycling make economic sense?
- Markets are good
- Competition
Recycling is Alive & Well in CO

• State Recycling Funding Opportunities

  • Recycling Rebates Program
    • Glass Recycling
    • Drop off Sites

  • RREO
    • Recycling Resources Economic Opportunity Fund

• These funds wouldn’t be available if recycling didn’t make sense
Recycling is Alive & Well in CO

- Technologies Advancing
  - Optical Sorting
  - Better Screening
  - Better understanding of material management
Recycling is Alive & Well in CO

- Why Recycle?
- Education is Key
- Why Not Recycle?
Fort Collins: An Example in Persistence

Kelly Ohlson
Mayor Pro Tem
City of Fort Collins
Brief History and Context of Trash Issues in Fort Collins

- 1950s: Trash hauling privatized
- 1992: Required curbside recycling by haulers (fee-based, then later changed to free)
- 1995: Pay as you throw (PAYT) first implemented, with later refinements
- 1998: First City of Fort Collins trash districting report
- 2009-10: Second trash districting report and a pilot district proposed
Outcome of proposed pilot district (2009-2010)

- Council gave staff direction to pursue RFP process for pilot program
  - 1/6 of City
  - Few HOAs in area

- RFP proposals
  - Local hauler and City did not reach agreement
  - National company and City did then reach tentative agreement

- City Council voted in 2010 not to proceed with pilot program
Why district trash collection?

- Improve efficiency
- Reduce street wear
- Finite resources (oil, gas)
- Air quality
- Noise
- Aesthetics
- Safety
- Lower costs to consumer
- Improve recycling
• What happened?
• What did we learn?
• What could we have been done better?
• What positive came from it?
What happened?

• The status quo is very powerful and easy to defend
• Change is often difficult for people
• Fear is easy to exploit
What happened?

- Sound bites are hard to overcome with facts and data (especially sound bites that are inaccurate, exaggerated or untrue)
  - If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.
  - It’s a solution in search of a problem.
  - It’s anti-business; job killer; regulation is bad.
  - Costs will go up; service will decline.
  - Don’t trash your choice.
  - City is trying to take over trash collection.
What happened?

• Unfair fight
  • Very organized opposition with lots of $$$
  • No organized support
  • Aggressive and questionable tactics
• Perceived need for change had decreased
  • 5-6 companies down to 3
  • Many areas have HOA agreements with 1 trash hauler
• Timing – zenith of anti-government/Tea Party activity locally
• Support decreased when national company likely to be chosen
  • Contradicted Fort Collins big ‘Buy Local’ campaign
What we could have done better

- Better define problem and what we are trying to fix
- Better messaging to the public
  - Offer easy to understand benefits and why districting is a good idea
- Better, wider, and earlier outreach
- Help organize grassroots support
- Better timing
- Do a better job countering misinformation and inaccuracies early and often
- Process should not have been as lengthy
What was gained?

- Improved PAYT ordinance
- Larger recycling bins have increased recycling
- Increased transparency of trash costs
- Recycling rates continue to increase
- HOA residents must receive PAYT benefits
- More data reporting from haulers
- Raised truck license fee
How to Manage a Volatile Public Process

• Change the conversation from adversarial to collaborative
• Start talking about interest not positions – talk about values and concerns, not about favorite solutions
  • Hire a third-party neutral to help change the conversation, listen and mediate
• Use a standing stakeholder group throughout to learn, evolve and discuss the tough trade-offs
Final Thoughts

- Actions Needed
  - Alert local govts about alternatives for managing the opposition
  - Provide strategies & information for a reasonable public process
- Actions Taken to Date
  - Established policy by both CAFR & SWANA - local government is ultimately responsible for sound solid waste management
  - CAFR has dedicated a web page to local government resources at [www.cafr.org/resources/government.php](http://www.cafr.org/resources/government.php)
    - “Arguments & Answers” - to “debunk” mistruths about collection & recycling
    - Case studies from govts who have studied/changed collection practices
Thank you for your time!

- Contact information:
  - Preston Loos  ploos@edswaste.com
  - Brent Hildebrand bhildebrand@alpinewaste.com
  - Kelly Ohlson  orangwoman@hotmail.com
  - Jody Erikson  jerikson@keystone.org
  - Laurie Batchelder Adams laurie@lbaassoc.com