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TJ McCarthy
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TO: Bernie Lynch, City Manager
FROM: TJ McCarthy, Asst. City Manager
DATE: April 28, 2008
RE: Solid Waste Report

As the City of Lowell embarks to develop the fiscal years 09 City Budget, it also provides an opportunity to analyze and scrutinize all City operators programs and services in order to identify any means to stretch tax dollars. One such service which has become increasingly burdensome to the City budget is servicing the Solid Waste needs of Lowell residents.

Although the collective total tonnage of city waste has decreased over the last few years, recycling rates have remained extremely low. Given the annual cost increases for delivering solid waste services, additional tax dollars are being diverted from other city services to cover these increased costs. There are very few city services where the delivery cost can be greatly impacted by residents. With increased vigilance, effort and participation residents and tax payers can directly lower costs and save tax dollars spent to deliver solid waste.

The need to reduce cost is very simple; the City of Lowell must increase its recycling rate. Not only must we improve today in order to deal with rising costs, but the City must also improve so that we save precious resources for the generations of tomorrow.

For the reasons above, I am requesting City Council consideration to modify and implement the following steps in an effort to increase the recycling rate in the City of Lowell. The following initiatives include new ordinances, adjustment to fees, increased enforcement and increased education of the benefits to recycling.

Action Item-1

Implement a New Recycling Pilot Program

Several months ago a company called Recycle Bank approached the City with a novel concept to encourage residents to recycle. Participating households are able to acquire points based on the amount of recyclable materials collected. Recycle Bank provides each residence with summary of their account with the accrued point balances and allows these point to be converted to gift certificates at many local and national chain stores.

The Pilot Program would be conducted for 9-12 months and will cover a yet undetermined section of the City. The terms of such an agreement have yet to be completed.

Action Item-2

Proposed Ordinance and Rules and Regulation Changes

Over the past 8 months a review of the current City of Lowell Ordinances have been reviewed. Some of the changes include:

- Fundamentally re-enforcing a ban on disposing of recyclable material in solid waste stream
- Bolsters the prohibition of importation of solid waste and illegal dumping
- Establishes a secondary trash pick-up day for addresses not eligible for curb side trash pick-up
- Changes the basis of curb side pick up from address to parcel
- Attempts to address the issue of litter by re-enforcing the need for receptacles to be covered at all times
- Reduces the number of items eligible for weekly pick-up to 5
- Establishes a “regional fee” for the disposal of certain bulky items (ie; white goods, tires, computers)

A complete list of proposed ordinance changes and corresponding rules and regulations are included in *Appendix A*.

Action Item-3

Increase Residential Trash Fee

- In Fiscal Year 2008 the City expended \$6,544 to facilitate the solid waste and recycling program
- With the current fee of \$100 and various exemptions/reductions, the total fees collected from the 18,119 participating house holds, the total revenue raised was \$2,458,888. This resulted in a deficit of \$3,945,482 which was appropriated from the general fund, funds which could have been utilized in other areas of the City’s operating budget.

In an attempt to close the solid waste program deficit, I feel it is necessary at this time to increase the solid waste and recycling fee to \$175.00 per year. This would increase

- CRT's small \$10.00
- Laptop disposal, DVD players, Games \$5.00
- Tires (non-commercial) \$5.00
- Propane Tanks \$5.00
- Other "bulky" items \$5.00

Action Item-5

Education and Grass Roots Awareness Program

In the last couple of months, through a series of neighborhood meetings facilitated by the City Manager, various city groups gathered in order to solicit feed back on the recycling program. Many ideas and comments were generated

One re-occurring issue identified was the need to strengthen education about recycling. An absolute critical component to increasing the recycling rate will be an effective and sustained education and awareness program. The City Recycling Coordinator has made limited inroads through development of regular newspaper column and regular attendance at neighborhood group meetings. However, the net effect of these initiatives reflexed in flat recycling rates, it is evident that more of a grass-root effort must be developed within the citizenry of Lowell.

In order to increase the awareness to the importance of recycling, I am recommending the creation of a City Manager's Recycling Awareness Committee, whose main mission will be not only to generate ideas and awareness, but also be charged with developing a door-to-door awareness campaign and work with School Department Officials to review, develop and recommend programs to the Lowell School Department. The Committee will also be asked to generate other ideas and awareness programs for the City to implement.

Action Item-6

Enforcement

A new Solid Waste Compliance Inspector was recently hired, however, last week, prior to be beginning service, resigned. Moving forward, the City will not move begin to re-start the application process, but will monitor effectiveness and review if enforcement efforts should be expanded to other inspection service personnel.

In addition to street inspection and education activity it will be imperative this inspector identify properties that are improperly receiving municipal solid waste service.

Action Item-7

Review of City Department's Solid Waste Practices

A comprehensive campaign to reduce solid waste should not be confined to just residential curb-side collection. Although residential collection comprises of a majority of city expenditures, city departments also generate and collect a significant amount of waste.

In the Street and Parks Divisions alone, close to 600 public barrels are serviced throughout the City. Many of those barrels are serviced more than two times per week. On any given day it is easy to see that all to many are being utilized to dispose of household waste.

In the late 1990's the barrels were deployed in neighborhoods and areas where litter issues were chronic. Over the past number of years, the city continued to deploy city barrels, and today it is not uncommon to view several barrels servicing a small area. Not only does the large number of street barrels increase operating cost, but they also provide opportunity for abuse (*Appendix C*).

In the month ahead, the number of barrels will be reduced in areas where over saturation has occurred or where chronic abuse is observed.

It is my goal to have these initiatives implemented immediately so that the importance of recycling can be recognized as one means to stabilize the increasingly expensive cost of delivering this important city service. Although it is necessary, at this time, to increase the fee to deliver the service this year, this is the one direct cost that can be controlled and stabilized by resident participation. It is my sincere hope each resident participates to increase the recycle rate, stabilize costs and preserve our environment.

I hope this information is informative. If you have any questions regarding this, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.