



The Chairman's Corner

by

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SOLID WASTE WORKGROUP

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During preparations for this year's Columbia County budget, discussion arose about the future of solid waste and recyclables disposal. In that light, I established the Solid Waste Workgroup, tasked with examining the pros and cons of the county operating its own solid waste and recyclable collection service by way of the Solid Waste Department.

Heading the workgroup is Stuyvesant Town Supervisor and Chairman of Public Works Ron Knott, joined by Director of Solid Waste Wendy Madsen, Controller Jim Breig, and Commissioner of Public Works Ray Jurkowski. The workgroup held its first meeting on February 4.

By way of explanation, said Supervisor Knott, the county "has always run the solid waste department as an enterprise fund, meaning that tax dollars should never have to be added to it. In other words, that revenues should cover its expenses. When the county has its major audit done by an outside firm, they identify that as a weakness because they look at it as, 'you're losing money here.'"

Currently, just short of \$1 million in taxpayer dollars are used toward funding the county Solid Waste Department. "We're trying to get better at this," said Controller Breig.

Over time, informally, some on the county Board of Supervisors have expressed a desire to turn the entire solid waste department over to a private interest or interests, while others are of the thought that its operation should be funded entirely through taxpayer dollars and the services made free to all county residents.

To some, it is a taxpayer fairness issue, in that those who reside in the City of Hudson are already paying the city for garbage collection.

One of the options, as I hinted at earlier, would be outsourcing/partnering with someone who could help us with the process. However, owing to the fact that the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation license is in the county's name, we would be in the position of managing the vendor. Further, the six county landfills – Copake, Hillsdale, Gallatin, Hudson, Ancram, Claverack -- under DEC consent would continue to require management and supervision.

"It makes sense to look at this and review everything. There's only so much we can do with the rules and regulations that set forth for our department," said Director Madsen. "We [Solid Waste Department] are always trying to be more efficient. I appreciate that – I live here and pay taxes here."

"There are a lot of moving parts with the Solid Waste Department," she continued. "For one, New York State is going down a path where, in the next decade or so, we won't be able to ship garbage out of state without huge tax burdens. In Columbia County, a small county, we don't incinerate our garbage, we don't have a commercial compost facility, we don't have a landfill."

Whether the Solid Waste Department continues as is or winds up in a partnership with a private company remains up in the air. In the meantime, the Solid Waste Workgroup will go about its work and we'll see what ensues as a result of its study.