

Dear residents of Santa Fe County,

At the June 30th meeting of the Board of County Commissioners, there was a public hearing for a proposed solid-waste ordinance that would create three rural-residential collection districts in Santa Fe County, as well as setting out some ground rules for how those districts would be managed. There was quite a bit of opposition from people in two areas that are in the proposed northern collection district. So at the last meeting on July 14th, Commissioner Roybal asked that we consider possible changes to the ordinance, including alternatives to collection districts. I also asked that staff bring other options forward that we could consider and discuss. Nevertheless, all Commissioners agree that more recycling should be our main goal, and I will set out why this is so in more detail below.

In this e-mail, I want to pass along some information as to the history of how the BCC came to ask for the ordinance to be drafted. I also want to correct some misconceptions that are floating around in several of the neighborhoods that expressed strong opposition.

The proposed ordinance was drafted to solve some outstanding problems in the County's solid-waste service. Much thought went into putting it together, and there was considerable study about what actually works in other parts of the state and country.

Several years ago, members of the BCC became concerned about the fact that there is very little recycling going on in the County, especially given feedback from environmentally concerned citizens. For some years, we estimate that the County-wide recycling rate has been only 11 to 15%. In the Eldorado area, a group called Eldorado/285 Recycles has as their mission to significantly increase the rate of recycling; their hard work in educating the public has paid off: the recycling rate is 25%, double the rate in the rest of the County.

A second concern of the BCC was making the County's Caja del Rio landfill last as long as possible. By the time our landfill has been used up, it will be almost impossible to find another site. There was significant opposition to the current site from people who live nearby, and that dynamic will only become worse with time. Clearly, diverting recyclables from trash that goes to the landfill will lengthen the landfill's lifetime. Moreover, hauling our solid waste far away would only increase costs even more: trash is heavy, and we throw away a lot of it. In Seattle and Portland, landfill costs are so high that draconian measures have been adopted to force people to pay for (and therefore think about) what they throw away, resulting in a 90% recycling rate. Contrast that with Eldorado's 25% or Santa Fe County's even worse overall rate. We also need to keep firmly in mind that trash disposal is not free: our landfill is not just "a hole in the ground"; it requires lots of money to keep toxic materials safely separated from our fresh air and clean groundwater.

A third concern of the BCC is that our transfer stations have been costing more and more money over the years, mainly due to increased capabilities that those facilities provide. In principle, solid waste services are supposed to be self-supporting, but right now about \$1 million from the General Fund is needed to subsidize the transfer stations. What this means is that Santa Fe City residents, as well as people outside the City who pay for private solid-waste pick-up service, are actually subsidizing County transfer stations. As a community, we may decide that this is an

appropriate taxpayer subsidy, but I wanted you to have all the facts as we think about a future solid-waste ordinance.

To deal with our growing solid-waste problems, the BCC convened a Solid Waste Task Force that included five people representing each of the five commission districts in Santa Fe County, as well as two Commissioners and several staff members whose jobs are related to solid-waste services. The charge to the Task Force was to look at operations and determine how we could increase recycling, as well as make our services more efficient and self-supporting — that is, less costly to the taxpayers. About a year after the Task Force was convened, the County was also able to take advantage of a contract that the Solid Waste Management Authority and the City of Santa Fe had with nationally knowledgeable consultants on solid-waste systems, who were hired to analyze local operations and make suggestions as to how they could be better run.

Working together, the Task Force and the consultants suggested creating solid-waste districts in the Sustainable Development Areas 1 and 2 (labeled SDA1 and SDA2) of Santa Fe County. (SDA1 is the area in the County that is currently being developed; SDA2 is slated for more significant development 10 years from now. By the way, Santa Fe County's Sustainable Growth Management Plan calls for mandatory solid-waste collection service in SDA1 immediately, and for the service to eventually begin in SDA2, once it starts becoming more developed.)

The solid-waste districts were meant to encourage recycling and lower the cost of private solid-waste pick-up services. (Keep in mind that *we have not yet passed the ordinance* that creates these districts, nor have we chosen in advance specific haulers who would get each district's franchise.) All service providers in the County would be required by ordinance to include free pick-up of recyclables. (Right now, some of the private haulers in the County charge extra to pick up recyclables.) Therefore, many people are "incentivized" to do the *wrong* thing, namely, to not separate out their recyclables, but just put them in with their regular trash. We are also considering using bin size to incentivize more recycling — issuing larger bins for free recyclables and a smaller bin for trash to be landfilled, and then charging extra if a homeowner would like to have more than one of the small "landfill" bins. It is also important to emphasize, once again, that encouraging robust recycling will save our taxpayers money in the long run by extending the lifetime of our landfill.

The County also has no intention of creating a monopoly for a single solid-waste pick-up service. In fact, it would be preferable to encourage private haulers to work together. Our staff envisions structuring the Request for Proposal (RFP) process to give priority scoring to proposals that create a team to cover the district more efficiently. For example, a large- or medium-sized hauler could use larger trucks in areas that have paved roads, but in the areas with narrow or unpaved roads, a smaller hauler could provide the service for the team. In fact, our intention is to work out a system that will achieve our goals, including encouragement of small local businesses; creative teamwork would be considered a "plus."

Right now, as you know, we have multiple private haulers in each area. But if we were to guarantee a single private hauler or a team of private haulers a contiguous geographic district, they would be able to cover it more efficiently, and their fuel and labor costs per customer would be lower. Saving fuel is also a good idea if one cares about the environment. By creating a more

efficient hauling service, we envision the potential of saving money for those who use private haulers.

For those who are elderly or those who need help, there would be the option of paying an extra (small) fee for the haulers to go to their house (or garage or wherever else is specified) to pick up the bins. Anybody would be able to have this extra service as an option if they were willing to pay for it. We can't expect one-size-fits-all in our complicated county.

There is one other advantage to franchised service in districts that could potentially save money for County taxpayers. With fewer haulers, there would be fewer heavy trash trucks using any given County road, and road maintenance costs are a large part of the County budget — we never have enough money, so anything we can do to take better care of our roads is in everybody's best interests.

So here is the status of the solid-waste pick-up ordinance at this point in time: We voted to table the ordinance until the early November meeting; in the meantime, our staff will do more research on other possible options to achieve our goal of more recycling, as well as making an effort to estimate costs under a variety of scenarios. This will be a continuing topic of discussion for the Commissioners at upcoming BCC meetings.

The people of Santa Fe County generally agree on certain principles when it comes to dealing with solid waste, namely, we should significantly increase our recycling rate, while providing for more efficient service.

I will keep you all informed and will certainly welcome any helpful suggestions.

Sincerely,
-Kathy