

Trash service is one of the most essential services a local government can provide. These past several weeks have demonstrated just how important this function really is. The City Council and staff have received calls and comments from ~~several~~ ^{many} citizens concerned about their residential trash service. Some of these calls have been citizens that are merely resistant to change, but others have expressed genuine concerns, presented ideas and stated their appreciation for the current system of trash collection.

The current trash service in Gainesville is simple and convenient for its residents, but it has problems. The City's solid waste fees have quadrupled since 2000. However, even with the increased user fees, solid waste continues to be reliant on revenue from the general fund. To solve these issues, the City Council asked our staff to evaluate the City's trash service. The staff was to provide a recommendation that would neither require the use of general funds to supplement the service, nor cause an increase in user fees. After months of evaluation, the staff presented an option for the Council to consider. This is the proposal that is currently before City Council.

The public has perceived that City Council is seeking to make a change to the trash service without their input. That simply is not the case. A public hearing was held to seek input and council members are always receptive to your phone calls and e-mails. Considering the comments that have been received, and in discussion with some of my council members, we would like to propose that we modify the current course of action.

It has been suggested by our citizens that the City evaluate reducing the current trash collection system to once a week. Therefore, beginning Monday, April 19th the solid waste department will begin a pilot project to evaluate this scenario. During the pilot project, residents can continue to place garbage where they always have and trash will be collected once a week. The pilot project will continue for an eight-week period, ending Thursday, June 10th. Recycling will not be affected during this process, so continue your existing routine with your recyclables. Please be aware that there may be a disruption in your trash collection throughout the pilot project. However, we feel this process is necessary to effectively evaluate this as an option.

Over the coming weeks, the staff will continue to evaluate the solid waste program. The evaluation will consider the results of the pilot project, the proposal most recently presented to City Council and the comments that have been received from our citizens. At the end of this process, we will have two public information meetings. These meetings will review the current solid waste program, present the results of the pilot project, discuss alternatives and allow for feedback from residents. The meetings are scheduled for 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 15th at the Georgia Mountains Center and 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 22nd at the Gainesville Civic Center. We invite everyone that is concerned about solid waste to attend these meetings.

We appreciate your support throughout this process. I am positive that the City of Gainesville will find a solution for our solid waste that continues to serve our residents in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.