



News



The Exploration of Public Collection in Ramsey and Washington Counties

A Potential Framework for Public Collection Executive Summary

Ramsey and Washington Counties are exploring whether changing how waste is collected could help reach our communities' environmental, health and safety goals, which are currently not being met. Public collection, when a city, township or county arranges for the collection of solid waste through private haulers, is one option being explored.

No decision has been made on this issue, and the most important part of exploring public collection is to gather input from citizens, businesses, haulers, city officials and others to aid in the decision-making process. From September through December 2001, the Counties collected input from these key groups. Based on this input, the Counties have created a framework to describe in more detail how public collection might work. The Counties are using this framework to gather additional input through March 15.

The following pages describe why public collection is being explored and the potential framework. To submit your comments about the framework please call, write or e-mail:

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What is the problem?

We are losing ground in protecting our environment, health and safety with our current method of solid waste collection and management. Landfilling has increased, recycling is stagnant or decreasing, resources are being wasted, and too much waste is being generated. For example:

- ✓ From 1996 through 2000 the amount of waste produced in the two counties grew by more than 18 percent, while the population grew by 5 percent.
- ✓ Most of the growth in solid waste has been managed by landfilling.
- ✓ There are huge potential resources in what is thrown away in our trash; in fact, about 70 percent could be recycled or composted.

What is causing the problem?

Large private companies, which control most of the collection market, are driving decisions about what happens to waste after it is collected. These decisions are focused on maximizing profits. Therefore, because it is usually cheapest to put waste in a landfill, more waste has been disposed of in this manner. Changing the collection system may be a way to ensure that more waste is recycled, composted and converted to energy.

Why should we care about how waste is disposed?

In the early 1980s Minnesota discovered that landfills were major polluters, and legislators put state laws in place to prevent future problems. There are 102 closed landfills in Minnesota that have to be dealt with — forever. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has estimated that handling these old sites will cost the citizens and businesses of Minnesota almost \$500,000,000 over the next 30 years. The Environmental Protection Agency has found that the barriers that line today's landfills, although designed to protect the environment from contaminants, deteriorate over time.

As a result, the State has required the Counties to make sure that we get as much value out of waste as we can, and try to keep landfilling to a minimum.

What is the answer?

To ensure that waste is managed properly to protect our environment, health and safety, we must make sure the market has incentives to reduce, reuse, recycle and compost; convert remaining trash to energy; and judiciously use landfills. We know the current system of waste collection does not do this.

At the same time, we must ensure that residents and businesses are receiving top-quality waste collection services at a competitive price. With your help, Ramsey and Washington Counties are in the process of evaluating whether public collection would help us accomplish these goals.

What have you heard so far?

The Counties have been talking with residents, cities and townships, Saint Paul district councils, businesses, and waste haulers. As with any proposed change, there is a wide variety of opinions. Some people have said that they are “for” or “against”

public collection based on what they already know. Other people have asked for more information. Below is a summary of what we have heard.

- ✓ Maintain competition. Do not allow one or two large companies to control the market.
- ✓ Ensure that local/independent haulers stay in business.
- ✓ The ability of a customer to choose a waste hauler is a strongly held value among some people.
- ✓ Cost and service are important factors.
- ✓ The system should be designed to protect the environment, as well as promote recycling and composting.
- ✓ The system should address neighborhood concerns such as too many trucks on the street and illegal dumping.

How would public collection affect me if it was implemented?

The direct impact could be as much or as little as your community decides. Every community would have the ability to design a system that improves the environment and is consumer friendly. Your community could decide to have several haulers or very few. Some communities have the desire to reduce truck traffic and noise; others want to ensure that there are several haulers from which to choose.

An advantage is that the public will have the opportunity to decide where the waste at your residence or place of work goes and is handled so that we can protect the environment and our health and safety. In fact, Minnesota law states that it is the counties that are responsible for protecting the environment, health and safety of their residents.

What would public collection look like?

A framework for public collection has been developed based on the input the Counties have received so far. The framework will continue to be revised and evaluated based on further public input.

Based on the input received, seven components were created that would guide how public collection would be implemented.

- ✓ Protect the environment, health and safety of the community by managing the waste stream and using waste as a resource.
- ✓ Individual communities retain the power to design their own system.
- ✓ Healthy competition between haulers is maintained.
- ✓ Local/independent haulers can stay/remain in business.
- ✓ Offer a choice of haulers where the community desires it; fewer haulers on the street where the community desires it.
- ✓ Fair and competitive prices.
- ✓ Top-quality service.

The framework envisions a structure with these parts:

- ✓ The public collection system would address mixed municipal solid waste (what most people call “garbage” or “trash”), recyclables, yard waste, brush, bulky wastes (such as furniture), compostable wastes, and household hazardous wastes.
- ✓ The Counties would establish service standards to assure that waste is handled according to the County’s specifications.
- ✓ In those cities/townships where the community already has contracts in place for service, the Counties will partner with those communities.
- ✓ The Counties would contract with private haulers to provide service for residential, commercial and multifamily housing.
- ✓ The Counties would create service zones for residential garbage and recycling services, generally along the lines of cities/townships and planning districts in Saint Paul, in which services would be provided.
- ✓ The Counties would create service zones that are countywide for commercial services. Multiple haulers would offer service on a competitive basis in these large zones.
- ✓ One or more haulers could provide residential service in a zone, depending on community preference.
- ✓ The Counties could use a variety of methods, depending on community preference, to determine the most appropriate hauler or haulers.
- ✓ There are different funding mechanisms available.
- ✓ Some residential services would be countywide, such as household hazardous waste collection sites, certain community clean-up events, and yard waste drop-off site.