

CHEYENNE HERALD

THE LOCAL ADVOCACY JOURNAL

December 1, 2009 – Issue No. 183 – Next Issue, December 15, 2009

est. January 30, 2002

Mayor: Leave the recycling program alone!

The line goes, "A camel is a horse built by a committee."

It could just as accurately be, "A camel is a horse built by government." And Cheyenne city government has built more camels than R.J. Reynolds.

After instituting a mandatory recycling program for the south half of the city, after testing it in Sun Valley for a lengthy period, they just can't seem to get it right.

As strong as a single reed in the Wyoming wind, the city governing body has gone this way then that. To make a decision and stick with it simply isn't in their make-up.

And the new city attorney continues to fabricate "grace periods" and "suspensions" in an effort to aid the uncertain new mayor.

Recycling, mandatory recycling, should have been instituted a decade ago. It is embarrassing that we're arguing over an issue that should have been resolved at the beginning of this century.

Those in city government who thought they had the answer - dig another hole - didn't. And, in spite of a group of reasonably competent people who were appointed to a Landfill Advisory Committee and came up with some options as to where a new landfill could be sited, they were ignored and a newly-installed mayor and two new buddies he had just made - two guys who disrespected him in the 2000 campaign and felt he was incapable of being mayor - determined that the LAC was unfit to make that recommendation and decided the new landfill should be sited on the Belvoir Ranch.

Once the three guys decided buying the Belvoir Ranch was exciting and meeting the guy they thought owned the Colorado Rockies baseball team was even more exciting, the die was cast. The LAC was disbanded without so much as a free lunch and the issue of a new landfill location has been stagnant every since.

Whether a new landfill had been sited or not - anywhere - recycling would have helped relieve the necessary size and even the timing of when a new landfill would have been required. Instead, the three guys who only months earlier couldn't stand the sight of each other, announced to residents that the Belvoir would be the location for a new landfill.

About eight years later, the City is no closer to solving the long-term needs for disposal of Cheyenne's municipal trash than they were when Felix Pino was director of the Sanitation Department.

The prevalent attitude was to dig more holes but the mayor and his new friends ran afoul of Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and it wasn't going to be easy to gain permit approval for a new site - anywhere. The city had been told that it was a bad idea to once again plan to put their trash on top of their water. Undeterred, they continued to promise locals that a new landfill would be only one of the otherworldly uses for the new Belvoir Ranch. Several years later, nothing has been accomplished with the land.

Had recycling been started when it should have been, the continuing saga of what was next for a Cheyenne landfill would have been less urgent and less severe.

Recycling is not difficult. It is not new. It is not challenging. And, had it been done properly, it would not have been at a much higher cost than not doing it.

No sooner had 9,000 blue lid containers been delivered to homes south of Pershing than the mayor once again retreated. Surrendered. Without even having the Tribune-Eagle on his backside yet, Rick feared the minimal criticism coming his way from a handful of residents. Some of those residents hadn't even gotten the blue lid containers in Phase 1 of a recycling plan long overdue.

Those not in the area south of Pershing began to complain right away - obviously just on the "principle" of the thing. And, of course, almost always without identifying themselves.

I have had a handful of people contact me and a couple had legitimate issues about taking on a new container - whether from a handicapped resident or from one who lives in a town home with limited storage area and with subdivision restrictive covenants prohibiting the recycling container being kept outside in the front. I'm not sure a restrictive covenant can trump local ordinance and there may be nothing neighbors or an absentee developer can do when the City requires these containers be used and the resident has no place except outside in the front to keep it.

Once again, the mayor ducked the issue of implementing recycling at a fee by

circulating the word publicly that fees associated with the program would be "suspended." The new mayor and his headnodding city attorney can't quite grasp the concept of the roles of a mayor in our form of government and the role of a city council.

Let me try to help: The "governing body" which is the city council AND the mayor collectively are the legislative arm of city government. That is all they are. The mayor by himself is responsible for the executive and administrative decisions of the City - most times without involvement or interference from the city council. For example, the city council cannot interfere with the mayor's sole decision to declare a "snow day" and grant city employees the day off with pay, etc.

And the mayor cannot arbitrarily subvert the decisions of the governing body on ordinances as he has done twice in recent weeks - with the legally approved and published cell phone ban and again with the legally approved and published start of mandatory recycling and the attendant billing fee for that service.

The daily newspaper waffles on recycling - not quite sure whether a majority of the affected residents favor it or not and whether a majority of those affected agree or disagree that a \$5.00 monthly charge for the program is reasonable and warranted. They have no way of knowing. So they guess that a majority is opposed.

It's kind of comical that the daily newspaper pretends to care what residents think. Where were they during the use of public funds to remodel and give away the depot and then pave and give over the west parking lot, with all revenues generated from the finished parking lot? And where were they when the unwise and underused downtown parking garage was being illegally authorized?

It is probably indicative of whom the readers of the Tribune-Eagle are - compared to the readers of the Cheyenne Herald - but I'm not hearing from many who oppose the implementation of a long overdue recycling program. And most understand and accept, even if the \$5.00 is an unwelcome new expense in their household, that it would have been much more costly if the City had gone forward with any of their previously announced plans to dispose of municipal trash. The only solution that might have kept the cost down would have been to expand the

current landfill out on Happy Jack. But, both the former and current mayor refuse to make application for expansion and force the WDEQ's hand on rejection.

Considerable time and effort were wasted as the inexperienced former mayor and city council members bought into several scams - everything from trash-to-ethanol, then trash-to-diesel and, finally, trash-to-pellets schemes from groups without two nickels to rub together. No money. No office. And, no clue. Each time the mayor threw up a trial balloon without having done any due diligence, the Cheyenne Herald, hell, even the Tribune-Eagle in one case, shot down their harebrained schemes.

We are where we are in terms of hauling most trash to Ault, Colorado and recyclable trash to Denver because of those mistakes.

Some may think that because a recycling business will pay for recyclables from Cheyenne that the program should be offered without cost. But, they never suggest Ault should take our other garbage off our hands and be so grateful for it that they'd pay Cheyenne to bring it down.

The mayor is backtracking again and offering smaller containers for those who don't want to have another 95 gallon container to contend with OR don't want to pay \$5.00 for the service OR just don't support recycling at any cost or even free.

If a smaller container at a lower fee is going to be an option, that is fine. But to not have any criteria would be foolish. For example, when they get the blue lid containers in Bar X, no one there should be given an opportunity to "stiff" the program by demanding a smaller container and the lower monthly charge.

Seniors and singles who have little trash and those who have limited income should be able to request the alternative program. Others should not. To allow Jack Spiker to opt out of the recycling program because he doesn't believe in recycling cannot be allowed.

Note: In our first bi-weekly cycle at Chateau Herald, when we had both containers picked up with two weeks trash (we missed the Veteran's Day pickup that fell on our day) in each, we had an equal amount of recyclable and non-recyclable trash. We took no special effort to accomplish that - it just worked out that way.

WWW.CHEYENNEHERALD.COM