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## Fitchburg eyes new waste-removal system

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FITCHBURG -- Lowell's automated trash removal system has been a financial success and reduced garbage put through the waste stream since it was implemented in March 2009, said Solid Waste and Recycling Coordinator Gunther Wellenstein.

"In the two years since implementation we've gone from 45,000 tons of waste collected to 29,000 tons of waste collected per year," he said Thursday.

Lowell, which has about 106,500 residents in about 37,000 households, saved about \$1.5 million in disposal costs its first year, Wellenstein said.

The Fitchburg Board of Health is proposing a similar program in which Waste Management would distribute 64-gallon trash barrels and 96-gallon recycling barrels to households. Lowell distributed 68-gallon barrels for trash but did not distribute the recycling barrels.

"It was Lowell that convinced me it can work," said Public Health Director Stephen Curry said.

The proposal is ready for a third and final reading before a vote but the council Tuesday sent it back to the Council as a Whole to give the public another chance to comment on it.

The proposed ordinance will save the city money on trash collection and clean the streets, Curry said Thursday.

Curbside collection is budgeted to cost \$1.05 million in the next fiscal budget but if the ordinance is passed, the city's cost would fall to \$876,000, he said.

Much of the savings will be in labor because the trash trucks reach out and pick up the garbage

so Waste Management would not need to hire a second person for the trucks.

"The purpose of the program is to reduce the tonnage of trash," Curry said. "If we allow people to go over 64 gallons and put bulk items out it doesn't reduce tonnage."

Under the current system, the city provides free trash collection without limits so households and apartments can leave unsightly trash bags on the curb that allow loose pieces to blow around, Curry said. It also encourages landlords with property in other communities to dump their trash on Fitchburg's streets, he said.

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There are about 13,500 households with trash collection so Waste Management is buying 27,000 barrels. To protect its investment, Waste Management is asking for a \$300,000 commitment from the city and that its contract be extended from its expiration in June 2012 to 2018.

The state Department of Environmental Protection has approved a \$105,000 grant to cover

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costs of enacting the program and an in-kind grant for 80 hours of help implementing the program and teaching residents about it.

To help recoup the cost and encourage recycling, multifamily units with three to eight apartments will be charged a fee for collection. A fee has not been set but Curry is considering \$100.

Owners who live in their multifamily housing will not have to pay the fee but will have to pay for the tenants.

Residents who create more trash than the 64-gallon barrels can handle would have to take their excess trash to the Fitchburg Westminster Sanitary Landfill on Route 31.

Access to the landfill is \$35 annually for homeowners; or for commercial users there is a \$50 fee plus tonnage.

Residents will be required to dispose of bulk items such as sofas. There would be a \$50 violation for the first offense and climb in \$50 increments up to \$250 for ensuing violations, Curry said.

Lowell does not use the large recycling barrels but does use recycling bins and has noticed a 20 percent increase in recycled bottles and cans; and a 23-25 percent increase in mixed paper, Wellenstein said.

Yard waste collection has increased 14 percent.

The proposed Fitchburg ordinance also says the barrels cannot be put out for collection more than 12 hours early and must be removed within 12 hours of collection, instead of the current 24 hours before and after collection.

Curry said the threat of illegal dumping is not enough to stop the program.

"We have free collection now and we have illegal dumping," Curry said. "So there will be illegal dumping."

If enacted, Board of Health officials will patrol the streets during evening and daytime hours to look for violations and educate residents.

Curry gave the committee a one-hour presentation April 26 but it was a late meeting and that portion was not televised. City Councilors such as Rosemary Reynolds insisted at Tuesday's meeting the public deserves the opportunity to comment.

Council Chairman Stephan Cq Hay said he has not scheduled a meeting for the Council as a whole to review the proposal but it could be done as early as today.

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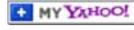
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