

Council told: Curbside trash pickup best option

Consultants say the town could save \$250,000 compared to current costs.

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MIDDLETOWN -- Solid waste consultants say curbside trash pickup is the cheapest option for taxpayers.

DSM Environmental Services Inc., a Vermont-based consulting group, said it would cost about \$1.7 million, around \$400,000 less than building a new transfer station.

"Clearly the transfer station is a solution that takes multiple years at the highest cost," said Councilman Louis DiPalma.

Looking at a Dec. 31 deadline, when the lease on land housing the town's transfer station expires, officials are looking at all of the options, including building a new transfer station, moving to curbside pickup with a private contractor, instituting a combination of the two, and sharing waste responsibilities and costs with Portsmouth.

"The reality is this is one of the biggest decisions that the town's going to make," said Town Administrator Gerald Kempen.

DSM consultants Ted Siegler and Natalie Starr presented the information after looking at trash costs, surveying residents at the town's transfer station on Burma Road and holding focus groups.

Contracting a private hauler would bring a net savings of \$250,000 over the current system if made available to the 5,230 single-family households in buildings with up to four units. Siegler said those costs can be subsidized through user fees for residents. Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation provides grants for communities that institute user fees, which often reduce waste and increase recycling rates, he said.

Resource Recovery also gives grants to municipalities that recycle 20 percent of their waste. Recycling around 18 percent of its trash last year, Middletown was just shy of reaching that rate, said Michael Mesolella, a recycling coordinator for the state agency.

Steve Mutter, a solid waste coordinator for East Providence, said his city received a \$40,000 recycling grant last year.

"With the growing pains that Middletown is experiencing now, I think you need to step into the 20th century and go to curbside collection," he said.

Siegler said it would cost roughly \$1.4 million, plus \$150,000 for new equipment and annual maintenance costs, to build a new transfer station.

And that's after waiting up to three years to buy the land, which would cost another \$500,000 to \$1 million, Siegler said. Of the six possible sites provided by the town, Siegler said the most feasible options were the former Drive-In property owned by the School Department, and Tank Farms 4

and 5, two Navy-owned properties which previously housed military vehicles.

Siegler said Tank Farm 5, viewed by Navy officials as a prime property for the Navy's expansion, is probably not available to the town, and that Portsmouth owns Tank Farm 4. Both sites have been identified by the federal government as hazardous-waste sites and must meet extensive cleanup requirements before they can be transferred.

Roughly one-third of the town's 7,000 households -- about 2,500 -- use the town's transfer station. The town's other 4,500 households use a private subscription service.

For more than 20 years, the town had paid the Navy \$2,500 a year to use the one-acre parcel, where residents take residential and recyclable trash. Kempen said the council may ask the Navy for an extension of the lease after determining a long-term plan.

DSM will present a separate trash study on Portsmouth and return to the Middletown Town Council with more accurate numbers next month.

DiPalma said he needs to look at the details before making a decision, but one thing is clear.

"No matter what step we take, we need to work to increase recycling and reduce waste," he said.