

Middletown council embraces curbside trash pickup

By Matt Sheley/Daily News staff 10/20/06

Contracted curbside trash pickup is the way to go.

That was the unanimous decision Thursday night by the Middletown Town Council. What the operation will look like, who will pay for it and when it will start are a few of the unanswered questions.

The council asked Town Administrator Gerald S. Kempen to negotiate with the Navy for a 12-month extension on the town's Burma Road transfer station lease because of the amount of time it will take to get a curbside pickup program in place. The Navy informed the town late last year that its lease of the Burma Road land, which overlooks the East Passage of Narragansett Bay, would not be renewed.

In the meantime, a volunteer committee studying rubbish removal was asked to return in the coming weeks with ideas about curbside pickup, so the town could put together bid requests for a contract.

Last summer, the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission, with the help of a Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corp. grant, brought in DSM Environmental Services to review alternatives to Middletown and Portsmouth's trash situation.

In a report to the council last month, the Ascutney, Vt., firm said curbside trash pickup could save Middletown \$238,000 a year. The company's study found that about one-third of Middletown's residents drop their garbage at the transfer station. The town pays about \$300,000 a year to run the transfer station.

If the town went with a new transfer station, the report said it would cost millions to build and take years to put in place, mainly because of the permitting required and the difficulty finding a suitable site.

Council members - minus President Paul M. Rodrigues, who did not attend Thursday's meeting - said curbside pickup makes sense.

Residents would buy bags or trash bins and use those to get rid of their trash, according to the early details of the pay-as-you-throw concept. Recyclables and yard-waste pickup would likely be removed for free.

DSM Environmental officials said people would be more likely to recycle and get those grass clippings and branches out of their trash if they didn't have to pay to dispose of those materials separately. In the process, Middletown would boost its recycling rate - increasing the prospect of state grant funding - and save space in the Johnston landfill.

DSM Environmental also encouraged the town to see if it could work out an agreement with Portsmouth to drop off bulky goods and yard waste at its transfer station. That, or having the Hedly Street site serve as a trash drop-off point for haulers to improve Middletown's chances of getting a more competitive collection contract.