

Middletown to ask congressmen for help on transfer station

By Matt Sheley/Daily News staff,

12/20/06

Middletown will call on the big guns to help keep the town's transfer station where it is.

The Town Council voted unanimously Monday night to ask the state's congressional delegation to help the town secure a long-term lease at the Burma Road property or buy the site from the Navy.

The request came from newly elected Councilman Robert J. Sylvia, who said it was worth exploring every option to save the existing transfer station, while still investigating a plan to institute curbside trash collection.

"The time is right for all of us to jump on this," Sylvia said.

"We're not trying to go behind the Navy's back," Town Council President Paul M. Rodrigues said. "We want to continue to have a good relationship with the Navy, but we need to look at every option that's available."

About a year ago, the Navy told the town it would not renew its lease for the Burma Road site. Since then, Middletown has been trying to determine what to do with its trash. A study by DSM Environmental Services of Ascutney, Vt., found that townwide curbside garbage pickup would save the community \$238,000 a year.

The study was coordinated by the Aquidneck Island Planning Commission and paid for by a grant from the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corp.

In mid-October, the previous Town Council approved a curbside pickup proposal, one that had been supported by a local volunteer committee that studied the idea. Sylvia was not a member of that council.

Middletown can use the existing waterfront transfer station site until Nov. 30, 2007, under an extension granted by the Navy late last month. It was the second time the Navy extended the town's lease.

Town Administrator Gerald S. Kempen has said if the town goes the curbside-pickup route, he'd like to have the program running by Sept. 1, 2007 - the day the current transfer-station passes will expire.

Councilman Louis P. DiPalma said he is concerned the town might be unnecessarily using its political chips with U.S. Rep. Patrick J. Kennedy and U.S. Sen. Jack Reed and Sen.-elect Sheldon Whitehouse, all D-R.I.

"We want to be able to leverage that political capital when major issues come around," DiPalma said.

Resident Antone C. Viveiros agreed, saying the move seemed like a last-ditch effort by the town.

"How many times are we going to go to our delegation and use up some of our political capital?" asked Viveiros, a former council candidate.

The council also asked Kempen to look into a request from Councilwoman M. Theresa Santos to extend the daily hours at the transfer station.

After hearing from Kempen that a proposal to open the facility on Wednesdays (the transfer station also is closed on Sundays) would cost an additional several thousand dollars a month, Santos said she favored studying other possibilities.

Santos said she was looking for ways to relieve some of the pressure at the transfer station on Saturdays.

"If you go there Saturday morning, it's like a zoo," Santos said of the traffic backups. "You're out on Burma Road."

Kempen is expected to report back to the council on the matter during the group's next regular meeting on Jan. 2.