

Rural Residents Can Influence County Solid Waste Plans

Dear Editor

The controversy surrounding the decision to close Bradshaw Quarry underscores the urgency for rural residents to get involved in the county's long term solid waste plan. Right now, the county is looking into curbside trash pickup for rural residents and major investments in convenience centers. Curbside services would add about \$300 to the typical annual family budget. Improved convenience centers include fees for everything and may be as high as \$2.50 for each bag of trash. This is in addition to existing fees for curbside recycling and bulky items like mattresses.

First the facts on the Bradshaw Quarry Convenience Center (BQCC) closing. The \$140,000 savings reported by the county is combined savings **from the reduced hours at four centers** plus the BQCC closing. The savings from closing BQCC are less than \$50,000 this year and at least half of that could be saved by keeping the center open only a couple of days a week.

BQCC has been an efficient local service for trash and recycling for 1500 households in Southwest Orange County for years. Depending on who you ask, it costs somewhere between \$25 and \$40 per year per family to operate BQCC and it's funded by taxes and the base 3R fee (\$37 per year per household). If BQCC closes, residents will have to drive 20 to 35 miles to take their trash, incurring substantial individual fuel costs

In the near future, the county envisions expanding their curbside recycling program and franchising private vendors for curbside trash collection which would cost rural households about \$300 per year. In addition there are recommendations to institute "pay to throw" fees for each bag of garbage brought to a convenience center.

It's not just costs. The county seems unaware that curbside services are impractical for rural households with long gravel driveways and narrow private roads. Rather than keep BQCC open, the county suggested accelerating curbside recycling for BQCC users and an additional \$38 3R fee on tax bills in 2010 (for a total \$75 3R fee).

Underlying the confusion is the "Solid Waste Work Group Plan" – a project that's been ongoing for years and is targeted to be complete in October. County staff has been using tenets from the plan to justify a host of actions – including closing BQCC-- although the plan has not yet been evaluated or approved by anyone.

Last Tuesday, after realizing that they were misinformed about the savings and impact of closing Bradshaw Quarry, the BoCC voted to delay a decision on closing until December 15. It was a gracious gesture to the community and it allows the board to revisit their decision when the workgroup plan is completed.

The problem now is that the plan is about to be released and rural residents have no idea about what's in it. When they previewed the plan earlier this month, the Solid

Waste Advisory Board (SWAB) rightly questioned its fit for rural residents. SWAB also questioned the proposed spending to modernize the convenience centers given our current fiscal climate.

The timing couldn't be worse. As the county ponders discretionary new services and ways to introduce new waste handling fees, the new waste transfer station and the loss of landfill revenues looms large. Landfill revenues are already shrinking as the county diverts non-contracted waste streams in order to prolong the life of the landfill. No one knows how much the new waste transfer station will cost or how the county plans to pay for it. Rather than planning new services that we can't afford (and eliminating existing and inexpensive ones that work well), shouldn't the county redirect its effort to prepare for the impact of this pending change to the solid waste infrastructure and economics?

Regardless of what makes sense, the plan is underway and there's little time left to have an impact. Rural residents need to weigh in before it's too late. Without the rural input, the county is poised to institute a cascade of inappropriate services and substantial fees at every turn. While all citizens need to "reduce, reuse, recycle," we can't afford misdirected solid waste planning and mismatched solutions.

Orange County Voice is mobilizing quickly to survey rural residents in the northern and southwestern parts of the county. We hope that the News of Orange will help us spread the word and encourage residents to participate. We will provide results to the community and the BoCC in late October or early November.

This is an extraordinary opportunity to demonstrate that "one size does not fit all" and to help the county evolve their service plans for rural communities. For more information, visit www.OrangeCountyVoice.org.