

VBH BOT FYI HSE

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Sent: Tuesday, May 18, 2010 8:00 AM
To: Dolores Trandel
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Subject: VBH BOT FYI HS&E

Rolling Meadows mulls privatizing garbage pickup By Peter McGrain | Daily Herald Staff
Published: 5/17/2010 4:51 PM

When it comes to garbage collection, Rolling Meadows could be considered old-fashioned.

The city is one of only five North and Northwest suburbs that still uses its public works department for refuse collection, instead of outsourcing it to a private company.

But with city resources dwindling, aldermen will talk at Tuesday's committee of the whole meeting about the possibility of outsourcing.

Rolling Meadows' garbage service is projected to operate at a deficit of \$124,941 this year, leaving \$72,356 in the refuse fund at the end of the year. The service operated at a deficit in 2008 and 2009 also.

Rolling Meadows public works employees, fearful for their jobs, have been passing out fliers to residents, and talking to them about the downside of going to private garbage collection.

Terri Loden of Rolling Meadows said she talked with one of the employees handing out fliers.

"He said it was important to come to the meeting because people might lose jobs and the quality of garbage service would go down," said Loden.

Mayor Ken Nelson said City Hall has been getting a lot of phone calls about Tuesday's meeting.

"I've gotten about 12 to 15 calls, and all of them have been in support of the current service," he said.

Alderman Brad Judd placed the waste discussion on the agenda. In March, he made a similar suggestion that the city investigate the pros and cons of privatizing part of the fire service.

The negative reaction to that idea was so strong it was abandoned before the investigation began.

Judd could not be reached Monday to discuss his latest proposal.

Rolling Meadows employs five people in the refuse division of Public Works.

Public Works provides curbside refuse collection for almost 6,000 residences year round, and provides yard waste pickup from April to December for no additional charge.

Recycling is currently outsourced to Groot Industries.

Compared to many private contractors, Rolling Meadows is very lenient with its garbage collection policy - they will pick up large items like refrigerators or drywall without any special pickup fees.

It is unclear at present how privatization would change residential rates. City officials estimate that general pickup rates could go down, but residents may end up paying more when they need more specialized waste removal.

In 1996, the city last discussed the same topic, and decided to keep Public Works on the job. One of the main arguments made at the time was the high

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quality of service, which residents have also expressed to Mayor Nelson in the last few days.

Nelson emphasized that this is only a discussion, and no decisions will be made. The council wants to see whether the public is open to a change, or if they are happy with their current service.

Besides Rolling Meadows, the cities of Evanston, Glencoe, Skokie and Winnetka run their own city garbage services, although Evanston is in the process of privatizing their garbage services, officials said.