

ITEM #: 31  
DATE: 12-10-24  
DEPT: PW

**COUNCIL ACTION FORM**

**SUBJECT: SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES - STATUS UPDATE**

**BACKGROUND:**

At the June 11, 2024 City Council meeting, staff presented an update regarding potential strategies for solid waste collection and disposal and expansion of the recycling program. At that time, staff was in ongoing discussions with Metro Waste Authority (MWA) regarding the collection and disposal/disposition of municipal solid waste (MSW), recyclables, and yard waste. City Council then directed staff to learn more about the options with MWA for collection, consolidation, and disposal of solid waste and whether organized collection would be a requirement to do business with MWA. Staff was also directed to discuss recycling options with MWA.

In continuing discussions with MWA, a few issues have arisen that may complicate proceeding further. First, it should be emphasized that MWA views its primary responsibility to serve the communities in Polk County which form it. Therefore, importing additional landfilled waste from Story County is viewed by MWA as somewhat of a burden. In light of this, MWA staff would want Ames/Story County to first explore the possibility of siting a sanitary landfill in Story County, and would be open to a partnership after that possibility was exhausted.

Evaluating a new landfill site would involve a very long and intensive process, requiring engaging a consultant, and very possibly leading to the conclusion that siting a new landfill is not feasible. Because of the cooperative agreement for disposal with Boone County expiring at the end of June 2025 (with the potential to extend for two additional years as Ames transitions to a new landfill partner), exploring a Story County landfill site may be challenging to sufficiently pursue with the time available.

After considering this information, staff began exploring additional potential partnerships and engaged in conversations with other solid waste disposal (landfill) facilities.

**POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS:**

Staff began conversations and had site visits with various facilities over the last several months. Several potential partners have been contacted and are either a great distance from Story County, have substantial tipping fees, or are not interested in taking on additional waste. Through these discussions, it has become apparent that the greatest prospective partnership is with Carroll County Solid Waste Management Commission. Carroll County currently has management agreements with Crawford, Guthrie, Sac, and Shelby Counties, as well as parts of Calhoun and Buena Vista Counties, operating as the West Central Iowa Solid Waste Management Association.

Carroll shares the same guiding values with Ames and the Resource Recovery System (RRS) of maximizing recycling and material recovery while landfilling the least possible amount of waste in an environmentally responsible manner. It has been a member of the Iowa DNR's Environmental Management System (EMS) since 2014, which encourages environmental stewardship and continuous improvement for solid waste agencies. All member agencies are required to have an active community recycling program and a Request for Proposals has recently been issued to implement methane capture at the landfill.

Preliminary staff-level discussions with Carroll suggest that a partnership could provide the opportunity for expanded or more efficient programs for both entities such as recycling, yard waste, food waste diversion, and community education.

**NEXT STEPS:**

**Agreement Negotiations** - In order to move forward with development of potential partnership agreement details, the Carroll County Solid Waste Management Commission has asked that the City submit an "Intent to Negotiate" letter. This letter would affirm the intention of Ames (on behalf of the RRS) to enter into good faith negotiations on partnership terms with Carroll, such as tipping fees, agreement length, services covered, and governance. Preliminary conversations with Carroll staff have indicated a desire to develop an agreement of at least a 10-year term or greater. Boone County has indicated the willingness to extend the current disposal agreement for up to two years (June 2027) while the steps to transition to a new partner agency are occurring.

**Ames/RRS Facilities** - Staff continues to look for sites to construct a transfer station. This transfer station will provide a location for haulers to bring solid waste, where it would be consolidated and transferred to the landfill. Opportunities to initiate single-stream curbside recycling continue to be researched. The transfer station would also provide space to bring these recycling materials for consolidation and transfer to market brokers. Other activities/services that staff are looking to include will be an expansion of the customer convenience center with separated recycling and household hazardous material drop-off as well as providing yard waste disposal managed by City personnel.

Staff has assembled a preliminary financial model for transfer station operations, but more detail regarding tipping fees, land costs, and construction costs will need to be received before validating that the operation is financially sound. As the details regarding the landfill agreement are finalized, staff will be seeking a consultant to prepare a facility conceptual design and cost estimates using this information.

In the meantime, staff will also communicate with the partnering RRS member agencies regarding these concepts and pursue amendments to the 28E agreements as necessary. It should be noted that staff met with RRS member agency leaders on October 16, 2024, at a meeting of the Story County Emergency Management Association to provide more details and an update regarding progress in determining new partnerships for solid waste management.

**ALTERNATIVES:**

1. Authorize staff to submit an Intent to Negotiate letter to the Carroll County Solid Waste Management Commission and develop terms for a long-term agreement of at least 10 years.
2. Direct staff to continue looking for potential partnerships with other solid waste management agencies.

**CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

Over the last many months, staff has had conversations and site visits with several solid waste management agencies. Through these discussions, staff believes that the Carroll County Solid Waste Management Commission closely shares the City's values of environmental stewardship and continuous improvement and presents the best possible partnership opportunity.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of the City Manager that the City Council adopt Alternative No. 1, as noted above.