

Comments, City Council Meeting, March 19, 2007

My name is Art Stigile, and I live at 312 West Edmonston Drive.

A few weeks ago, you reviewed an application for a hotel in the Falls Grove development and clearly were not impressed with the proposal. You described the building as unimaginative, not distinctive, and certainly not the kind that would cause people to say proudly that that's a Rockville building.

I'd like turn that mirror around on you, in the context of the tentative decisions you made last Monday about the trash proposal. Is the Rockville City Council proud to have chosen the most expensive, least environmentally responsible, and least fair trash removal system? Or, are you willing to have a little more discussion about less draconian ways to reduce the cost and the environmental impact, and to allocate costs fairly to users?

The staff proposal to align prices with the level of services is fundamentally sound. Think about this for a second. We are a Nation of shoppers. We all brag about finding a bargain. Someone asks – new shirt? New shoes? -- and we answer, yes, and I got it for a steal, 40% off! Well, that's the beauty of the staff proposal. It would turn each of us into shoppers for the most cost effective and environmentally sensitive trash service, taking into account our own needs and the relative cost of the service.

The public purpose clearly is not served by the current system, which fails to link prices with service. Trash removal is not like schools, where everyone is taxed to pay for the education of all students. Tax-funded education furthers the public purpose of providing equal opportunity for all kids to get a quality education no matter what their family circumstances. Without tax-funded education, many kids would get an inferior education simply because they were born to poorer or larger families. It is our civic and our moral responsibility to tax the community to provide a quality education to all kids.

Trash removal has none of these characteristics. Instead, it's like water, gas, electricity, swimming at the pool, or playing golf at a public golf course, where we pay for what we consume. Taxing some residents to subsidize the trash service for other residents does nothing to further the public purpose.

The problem with the staff proposal is that it was too much and too fast. Volume pricing is too new and different, and we need time to think about it. It's like a

piece of tough steak that you have to chew on for awhile before you are ready to swallow it. That's why the Council was so right to delay and give people time to comment.

You have the opportunity to take a more incremental step towards linking prices with the level of service. I'm referring to voluntary, once-per-week pickup at a reduced fee. It's regrettable that a majority of the Council tentatively rejected this idea, and I would urge you to reconsider it. Given the potential savings in cost and the environmental benefits, shouldn't we explore this option and see if it works? Can't we give residents a chance to vote with their trash?

Let's try it for a year and have staff report back on the impact, with firm data that is available to everyone.

If we do that, then I think we have decision that all of us can be proud to be part of.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.