“Reducing and Managing Costs of Houston’s Solid Waste Management Operation”

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Overview

• Houston’s Problem
• The Task Force
• Implementation
• Savings
Houston’s Problem

- SWMD operates without a garbage fee.
- No city-owned landfill.
- Expensive and restrictive waste disposal contracts.
- Political rusty-knife fight to make changes to programs.
- Constituents spoiled and flush with services.
The Task Force

- Appointed by then Mayor Bill White in 2004 to review Houston’s rich, yet poorly funded solid waste programs.
- Chaired by current Mayor and then Controller Annise Parker.
- Compared Houston’s Solid Waste System with other Texas cities and large national cities seeking opportunities for best standards.
- “Recycling and yard waste programs need to be greatly increased to benefit the environment and conserve valuable landfill airspace.”
Task Force Report

- SWMD operates without a garbage fee.
- No citywide recycling program.
- No city-owned landfill.
- 40 cubic yards per home per month of heavy trash.
- Unlimited yard waste disposal.
- Expensive and restrictive waste disposal contracts.
- Political rusty-knife fight to make changes to programs.
- Constituents spoiled and flush with services.
- City leaders must make changes to reduce waste volumes and create a resource recovery tilted operation.
Landfill Disposal Savings

• Disposal contracts were highly unfavorable for efficient city SWMD operations.
• Cost city additional dollars to meet contract terms.
• Renegotiated terms saved city more than $320 million over previous terms.
• New agreements leveraged city’s fleet logistics and owned transfer stations.
• New terms created an environment for enhanced and expanded recycling programs.
Implementation – Tree Waste

- The department collected approximately 300,000 tons annually of heavy trash.
- Estimated that up to 40% of the volume is clean tree waste.
- Department gained council approval for following changes:
  - Amount per home per collection.
  - Annual schedule amended to 6 green waste and 6 junk waste.
  - Stricter enforcement of private businesses operating at city expense.
  - Gained disposal savings of approx. $3.0 million.
Implementation – Yard Waste

- City was annually collecting approx. 60,000 tons of yard waste in petroleum bags.
- More than 90% collected went directly to landfill.
- An expensive and labor intensive process to dispose of “water”.
- Department gained approval to require biodegradable bags only for yard trimmings.
- Private partner LETCO, pays department for all yard waste collected. 10 locations gained incremental logistical savings.
- Savings totaled more nearly $3.0 million annually.
Electronics Recycling Partnership

- SWMD has partnered with Compucycle, LLC to conduct monthly collection events in select locations.
- The Partnership replaces city staff and equipment, all the while gaining additional revenue to expand recycling services city wide.
- Estimated savings for SWMD is approximately $350,000 annually.
Community Service Workers

- Community Service is an integral part of SWMD operations:
  - Environmental Centers.
  - Community Clean-up events.
  - Facilities maintenance operations.
  - Container recovery and management.
Savings

- Recycling Tree Waste saves more than 50% ton.
- Recycling Yard Waste avoids all disposal costs and gains revenue.
- Grass-cycling and composting is exactly what occurs naturally, saving on watering and fertilizing.
- Houston saves between $6 - $8 million annually by recycling green “commodities”.
- Waste contract savings of more than $14 million annually.
Questions