



NEWS

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Montco Commissioners Recommend Phasing Out The Waste System Authority of Eastern Montgomery County

Norristown, PA (April 4, 2014) – The Montgomery County Commissioners Thursday voted unanimously to direct the board of the Waste System Authority of Eastern Montgomery County to begin preparations to phase out the authority.

The Waste Authority represents 22 municipalities in the eastern end of the county that are contracted to have their trash disposed of at the privately-owned 1,200-ton-per-day trash-to-steam plant in Plymouth Township.

The 22 municipalities that are members of the Waste System are: Abington, Ambler, Bryn Athyn, Cheltenham, Conshohocken, East Norriton, Hatboro, Horsham, Jenkintown, Lower Merion, Lower Moreland, Narberth, Norristown, Plymouth, Rockledge, Springfield, Upper Dublin, Upper Merion, Upper Moreland, West Conshohocken, Whitmarsh, and Whippen.

Later Thursday, the Waste Authority board executed the commissioners' directive and sent a letter to the 22 municipalities telling them that the Authority would be disbanding.

Josh Shapiro, chair of the county commissioners, explained that the decision to disband the authority came after an exhaustive period of investigation of the ramifications.

“In Montgomery County, after trash is removed from one’s residence or business, it needs to be properly disposed,” Shapiro said. “We essentially have two systems of disposal in our county. The 22 municipalities in the eastern end of the county, purchase disposal services as a consortium working through the Waste System Authority of Eastern Montgomery County. For the other 40 municipalities in Montgomery County, disposal services are contracted on a municipality-by-municipality basis.

“This year presents an opportunity point for the Authority. That is because at the end of the year, the \$107 million borrowed in May 1989 to build the trash to energy plant in Plymouth will have been fully repaid; the Authority will have no debt; the existing disposal contract for the 22 municipalities will expire; and, the Inter Municipal Agreement which brings together the participating municipalities expires in one year.”

Shapiro said this is an opportunity to ask the fundamental question his administration has asked since it took office: “What is a core function of government?” He said he believes that waste disposal might be a core function of local government, but not of county government.

Commissioners Leslie Richards and Bruce L. Castor, Jr. concurred. “Today, the commissioners voted for free enterprise,” Castor said. “Free enterprise is what the country is based on, what Pennsylvania is based (on), and what Montgomery County should also be based on.”

Richards said she totally supported the action, but wanted to make sure that the needs and concerns of the 22 municipalities were considered as the process moved forward.

Shapiro pointed out that when the trash-to-steam plant was built and the Waste Authority created, there was a shortage of available capacity for trash. That is not the case today. “The most recent ten-year plan assembled by Montgomery County in 2005 identified adequate disposal capacity in and around the County through 2015,” Shapiro said. “While the amount of waste tonnage for disposal has decreased in the last few years due in large part to the increases in recycling, capacity has increased with the advent of new landfills. I have every expectation that the Municipal Waste Advisory Committee currently revising the County’s ten year Municipal Waste Management Plan will again identify sufficient disposal capacity for waste generated within the County.”

“It is clear to me that 40 of our municipalities in Montgomery County who do not participate in the consortium have managed to figure out a cost effective approach to the disposal of their waste,” he said. “Given that, I see no reason why the other 22 could not find a sensible solution for their residents.”

Shapiro said that as a result of his analysis he has concluded that continuing the Authority in its current form and maintaining this county mandated consortium is not a core function of county government and, additionally, it is not good business practice.

On Thursday afternoon, the Waste Authority board instructed its staff to carry out the following:

1. The Authority should not issue an RFP for a new contract for the provision of disposal services;
2. The Authority should identify the steps necessary to wind down its operations including fulfilling all of its fiduciary responsibilities;
3. The Authority should develop a communications plan with each of its 22 participating municipalities, including individual meetings with the leadership of each municipality as needed, to ensure that they are aware of the intent of the Authority to wind down, and the responsibilities that will revert to the municipalities;
4. The Authority should provide all reasonable and appropriate support to the participating municipalities to ensure a smooth transition from the Authority to municipal control of disposal services.