

# All Point Bulletin

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## County to review solid waste service on Point

First Page News News March 20, 2018

By Meg Olson

With the county health department assuming oversight of solid waste operations last year, staff members have decided to launch a comprehensive review of garbage and recycling services in Point Roberts.

"We believe health decisions should be community based," said Jeff Hegedus, environmental health supervisor, who attended the May 10 meeting of the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee with other health department staff members. They were there to ask the committee about how to get community input on what they see as the challenges for solid waste operations, provided by Cando Recycling and Disposal.

"We have an understanding of the infrastructure of that task in addition to the complexities of a community like Point Roberts," Hegedus said. "It's really difficult to come up with a solution to give people the services they want at a reasonable cost and to ensure we don't have a turnover of our service provider every six years."

Curbside services were halted in June 2009 after former Point Recycling and Refuse owner Arthur Wilkowski surrendered the company's solid waste certificate claiming county rules made the business unfeasible.

In granting an operating authority to Freedom 2000, which operates Cando Recycling and Disposal, in January, 2010, The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) was sharply critical of the county's solid waste policies.

"The geography and small resident population of Point Roberts, combined with the solid waste collection ordinances established by Whatcom County, make for a problematic service territory for a solid waste collection company," wrote commissioners Jeff Golz and Pat Oshie. They pointed to a small customer base and numerous paths for exemptions to the universal service the county mandates. "The failure of the county to recognize and address the detrimental impacts of its countywide ordinances and policies on solid waste collection in the small community has created a very difficult situation."

Cando owner David Gellatly said when he took over the garbage service in 2010 he told the county public works department, which had oversight of solid waste at the time, to give him five years to work with the system as it exists. "Then it was time to start talking," he said, and the transfer of solid waste responsibilities to the health department offered a good opportunity for renewed dialogue.

With fewer people signed up for curbside services and his costs increasing, Gellatly said eventually he would need to go to the WUTC to review rates if the system was to remain financially feasible. "If I don't see more volume I may have to raise rates," he said, which he hasn't done since taking over the service.

"It's an economy of scale thing," he said, echoing Wilkowski's argument and the WUTC's criticism. "It would be quite beneficial if everybody signed up for curbside pickup. It would be better to have 800 customers instead of 350, rather than having to go to the WUTC to get an increase that will be paid by the people who are supporting the system now."

Gellatly added the cost to the consumer to self-haul a can of garbage was not appreciably less than the cost for garbage pickup. "The bottom line is with the honest people, I'm getting the garbage one way or another," he said.

Dumping has been on the rise, he said, pointing to a large cleanup at the end of Diane Circle the county footed the bill for last year and the growing volume of household garbage that county park staff are seeing in their dumpsters. "My personal feeling is, if we had mandatory collection, we'd see less of that," he said. "It would be cheaper for everyone and we'd have a cleaner community. Other programs like pre-paid tags for occasional pickup also make the system more flexible for part-time residents."

"At some point, we will be doing an analysis of waste management in Point Roberts," Hegedus said. "To do that, we need data and information from the community." PRCAC members agreed town hall meetings were not the most effective way to reach a good cross-

section of community members, including permanent residents, seasonal residents and part-timers. They suggested a well-structured online survey.

"We'll design the outreach program and bring that back to you," Hegedus said.

Gellatly said he felt positive about the process being able to come up with workable solutions without the finger-pointing that marked the collapse of the collection system six-years ago. "I don't want to recreate that bitter taste," he said. "There's a realization something's wrong. Let's have a positive dialogue and find solutions that work for everyone."



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## County conducting waste survey

News - July 22, 2015

Jeff Hegedus with the Whatcom County Health Department is asking the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee for feedback on the first step in their assessment of solid waste service on the Point – a survey asking the community how they think the current system is working.

"We didn't want to presume to have a solution for problems that weren't yet defined," he told PRCAC members at their July 12 meeting. "First we want to look at if there are improvements that need to be made and then what do they need to be."

The survey, still under review, will be available online and will ask a series of questions about how people handle their solid waste, and what they think of the current system. Do they have curbside pickup? And if not, why not?

"My number one concern is vendor stability," Hegedus said. "We have over 2,000 water connections and only 300 curbside customers. We need to have solid waste services, curbside and the transfer station, that work for people."

Committeemember Ron Clark, the representative from the Point Roberts Taxpayers Association, said the association had taken a position in favor of true mandatory curbside pickup, rather than allowing households to file for an exemption if they want to take their trash to the dump. Hegedus said while mandatory curbside service without exemption would provide economies of scale that would allow the service provider to thrive and lower rates, it might not fit all users on the Point. Other solutions, such as the prepaid tag service now in place, might be a better fit for seasonal property owners.

Carol Fuegi suggested that garbage service should be part of property taxes.

"I know in Canada that's part of the system but there's no provision in Washington state laws for this," Hegedus said. "I believe it to be legally untenable but if we hear that preference back in the survey we'll definitely research it."

Pat Harper suggested that it would be less convenient for him to have curbside pickup as he lives at the end of a long gravel driveway. "Cando's tariff does have a rate established if they need to come up the road a bit for pickup," Hegedus said.

Other concerns from the public included the unavailability of commercial recycling, the need for public disposal and the decreasing frequency of toxics pickup.

"Right now it's biannually instead of every year so we need to keep these awful things for two years," Fuegi said. "If you don't collect it people will dump it in the woods."

Hegedus said the next toxics collection event was scheduled for this September 24, and they would look at including a question about how the toxics program was working on the survey. "It's really a question of demand and funding," he said.

PRCAC members will send their feedback to Hegedus following a discussion at their August 9 meeting. After some test runs of the finalized survey it will go live online and community members will be encouraged to take it.



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# All Point Bulletin

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## Solid waste division asks for community input

By Dan Neill, News Editor 3/20/18

The Whatcom County Solid Waste Division is launching an online survey as the next step in a review of the Point's solid waste system.

"We want as solid waste system up there that works well and people can be proud of," said Jeff Hegedus, environmental health supervisor with the county health department. That means a system that is affordable, convenient and comprehensive, with a good recycling rate, vendor stability and effective at stopping illegal dumping, Hegedus said.

The survey was developed in collaboration with the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee and results will be presented to the committee followed by an analysis of the system as it exists and strategies to improve it. "We want to know if we have a problem before we try and solve it," Hegedus said.

The survey can be completed online at [goo.gl/forms/uUsVFdVCs81BmnMg2](https://goo.gl/forms/uUsVFdVCs81BmnMg2) and will be open for responses until October 16.



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# All Point Bulletin

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## County pleased with solid waste survey responses

Print Page News Home Saturday, 3/20/18

By Meg Olson

The Whatcom County Health Department has received 165 responses in the first two weeks that its Point Roberts solid waste survey has been online.

"The responses are comprehensive, with lots of great comments," said Jeff Hegedus, environmental health supervisor with the county health department, which manages solid waste in the county. "When the survey is complete, all responses will be presented by charts and bar graphs and all comments will be listed," and presented to the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee.

"We want a solid waste system up there that works well and people can be proud of," Hegedus said. That means a system that is affordable, convenient and comprehensive, he said, with a good recycling rate, vendor stability and effective at stopping illegal dumping.

The survey was developed in collaboration with the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee and results will be presented to the committee followed by an analysis of the system as it exists and strategies to improve it. "We want to know if we have a problem before we try and solve it," Hegedus said.

The survey can be completed online at [bit.ly/2daHvFE](http://bit.ly/2daHvFE) and will be open for responses until October 16.



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## Solid waste survey to guide future plans

POINT ROBERTS NEWS - NEWS - JANUARY 20, 2018

By Meg Olson

A county sponsored survey on the Point's solid waste system drew a sturdy response and will help both Cando Recycling and Disposal and the county plan for the future.

At the January 10 meeting of the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee (PRCAC) Jeff Hegedus from the Whatcom County Health Department presented the results of the survey, which drew 344 responses, though 31 of those were from one person.

More than half of the survey respondents were full time Point Roberts residents, but the survey also drew a strong response from seasonal residents. Most of the respondents had an association with Point Roberts longer than a decade, "indicating a strong commitment and sense of community," Hegedus said.

More than half the survey respondents currently have curbside collection, either through regular service or by buying prepaid tags for irregular pickup. A solid majority said they were satisfied with the service.

Why then, Hegedus wondered, are only 300 homes signed up for curbside service, out of 2300? Without a sufficient customer base, he said, prices (which require state approval) are higher for the existing customers and the garbage service struggles to be economically viable. "We can't have a turnover every six years," he said. Six years ago Cando replaced Point Recycling and Refuse as the Point's garbage service. "With no garbage service, things get bad. Fast."

Hegedus speculated better customer education would go a long way to getting more people on board. "Some people say it's too expensive but actually it's cheap," compared to other locations in the county, Hegedus said.

Cando's price for a 32-gallon can plus recycling every other week is \$16.33. Nooksack Valley Disposal charges \$17.80 for the same service, while Sanitary Services Company charges \$11.98. In the San Juan Islands, San Juan Sanitation charges \$27.43.

"When you know how much it costs to keep trucks running, pay people, and get it where it needs to go, really, it's cheap," Hegedus said.

Twenty-one percent of survey respondents who did not have curbside service cited the cost of service as the reason, 12 percent said curbside services were inconvenient while 38 percent said they preferred taking it to the transfer station for other reasons.

Cando owner David Gellatly said, "it's as much of a community issue as a garbage issue." With a limited customer base he can offer only very part-time work to his employees, which he then has difficulty retaining. "If I had even half as many customers as there are water connections I would have the truck out at least four days a week," he said. "I could afford to hire regular personnel and give them a real job."

Several survey respondents and audience members said all developed properties should be required to pay for curbside service. Hegedus said that, while under county code solid waste and recycling collection are mandatory, "even though it's required it's sort of not required."

Exemptions are available for property owners who establish they are disposing of their trash "in an environmentally sound way."

In addition, the county does not actively enforce the requirement, leaving it up to the garbage hauler to request legal action be taken against those that don't comply. "That's going to be part of our analysis," Hegedus said.

Hegedus encouraged the community to review the survey results on the health department website ([whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/25142](http://whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/25142)). The document also contains all of the comments received, from complaints about the transfer station cleanliness and requests for more recycling options to praise for employees.

Hegedus will be back at the March PRCAC meeting with further analysis of the results and to collect public comment. He said they would try and identify what changes or improvements would have the most positive impact, from customer education to transfer station improvements. "If there's a problem we want to have it well defined before we try and solve it," he said.



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## Solid waste taxing district considered

Features News - March 27, 2018

The Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee (PRCAC) has unanimously endorsed a motion asking the county to look into a taxing district that would support solid waste management on the Point.

At their March 14 meeting commissioners heard from Whatcom County Health Department environmental health supervisor Jeff Hegedus and environmental health manager John Wolpers. They came to "continue the conversation" about how the community wanted to tackle the challenges of maintaining a sustainable and effective solid waste system given the small size and remote location of Point Roberts.

"Where we go from here is, we want to come down in altitude, working towards any recommendations the community may have but we want to do it slow," Hegedus said.

Working with the results of a recent community survey he said they were looking at five areas: good service, reduced illegal dumping, increased recycling, vendor stability and affordable collection services. "All these moving parts are connected," he said. "If you do one thing here, it changes what goes on over there. Every time you change something it has to be technically feasible, economically viable, politically palatable. You have to be able to manage it, and there's friction between all these moving parts. It's not so much what you do but how you do it. We want to resist the temptation to come up with solutions before we find problems."



From the audience Arthur Reber suggested the most salient problem was that garbage collection was effectively optional on the Point, whereas it was mandatory elsewhere in the county. Hegedus agreed the county had an ordinance under which everyone must have curbside collection services, but that same law also has provisions for property owners to apply for an exemption. "They made additional language for Point Roberts that said people who lived here seasonally would be encouraged to have curbside collection but didn't have to," he said. "In Point Roberts, if you're seasonal you don't even need to get an exemption." The result is that while Cando Recycling and Disposal only has 300 customers, the company is nevertheless required to provide the service, and the state regulates what it can charge.

"Find a way to make it obligatory," Reber said, which would by economy of scale allow it to be more affordable. "That way everybody pays for it and if you don't want to use it, don't use it." This could be through property taxes or through a process similar to the water system where connection to the system is mandatory for developed properties, and they must pay a monthly minimum fee regardless of whether they use water or not.

"What we have found is the exemption process is absolutely not working," Hegedus said. "I have drawers full of exemption paperwork. It's a failure."

In Vancouver, Hegedus said, they have a hybrid system where a base cost for the service is included in property taxes and there are additional fees for additional volume. "The less trash you produce the more money you save," he said. Other cities also had a combination of tax-supported solid waste systems, flat fees and user fees. "If we could do that would we want to?" Hegedus asked, also requiring what combination would work for Point Roberts. "I can't see us going backwards to no curbside collection. I don't think that's what people want."

The current system, lacking economy of scale, leads to vendor instability and higher prices. "Kudos to Cando for holding the line," Hegedus said. The company has raised disposal costs by only a penny a pound in eight years. "With more customers Cando could have even lower prices and improve service." With more income to improve services, the hauler could offer more options that would be practical for seasonal residents, which might lead to a decrease in illegal dumping.

PRCAC member and seasonal resident Jeff Christopher pointed out that Canadians with vacation properties north of the line expected to pay for garbage through their taxes just like they did at home. "If I'm in the Gulf Islands it doesn't matter if I'm there once a year, I have to pay," he said. "So why shouldn't we have to pay here?" He suggested part of the review of the Point Roberts Special District PRCAC is proposing to undertake could be to include mandatory curbside pickup either through regulation, taxes or as a hybrid system. "I think it's very sellable," he said.

"We need to understand, from the community, what you want," Hegedus said. "The product we want is a series of options ranging from the no action alternative, what the consequences would be, to duplicating the city of Vancouver's highly sophisticated system and successful model to options in between."

One option he suggested could be investigated was the formation of a public utility district, through which elected commissioners would set a tax levy rate applied to all properties and the funds raised could fund all or part of the garbage collection system. "We already have a water utility. Couldn't garbage be part of the water bill?" suggested P.J. Minter.

PRCAC members voted unanimously to request the county solid waste division investigate the possibility of a public utility and other options for solid waste in the community.

"Once we have figured out what the model looks like it's a small matter for us to take an ordinance and go talk to council, but council needs to see there is support for it before they're going to vote to approve it," Hegedus said. "In my mind, you have to have curbside collection services – the question is how. How do we keep those levels of service where we want them, costs where we want them? We are a consumer society and if we don't manage what that society produces, it impacts all aspects of our lives."



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## Fee for required trash collection may be coming

By Meg Olson

After more than a year studying the Point Roberts solid waste system, gathering public input and researching options, Whatcom County Health Department environmental health supervisor Jeff Hegedus thinks he may have an answer.

Hegedus met with applause and thanks from committee members when he attended the June 13 meeting of the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee (PRCAC). "I am incredibly confident you are representing our community's interests," said committee member Jeff Christopher.

Hegedus was reporting back to the committee following a unanimous motion at their March meeting to look at a form of taxing district to support the solid waste system and ensure everyone creating waste contributes to disposing of it properly.

"What we continue to hear is that mandatory collection is supported here," he said, while it is now effectively optional.

The county already has a special waste collection district, established in 1996, under which everyone must have curbside collection services. However, that same law also has provisions for property owners to apply for an exemption. "Then in the ordinance that talks about service levels they made additional language for Point Roberts that said people who lived here seasonally would be encouraged to have curbside collection but didn't have to," he said. "In Point Roberts, if you're seasonal you don't even need to get an exemption." The result is that while Cando Recycling and Disposal only has 300 customers out of the Point's 2300 developed properties, he is nevertheless required to provide the service, and the state regulates what he can charge.

Hegedus said he investigated the possibility of creating a public utility district, but it was not an option for solid waste, and was too complicated for what should be a simple solution. Creating a special purpose district to manage solid waste would be a bad fit, he said, effectively like using a zoning ordinance to enforce speed limits.

The simplest way he found was to use the existing solid waste ordinances, which already provide for the collection of excise taxes to support hazardous waste programs in the county, and the complicated tariff structures Cando files with the state.

"The level of service ordinance needs to be updated and can be amended to shape what we want," Hegedus said.

Cando's tariff with the state could also be modified to establish a base fee for solid waste collection that would be collected with property taxes for all improved parcels, such as the cost of one mini-can every other week with recycling. Properties who wanted more service would be invoiced for that by the service provider directly.

"Now we have to start modeling this," Hegedus said, starting with a meeting with the county treasurer to see if the plan is feasible both practically and legally.

Hegedus will also be meeting with Cando owner David Gellatly to see how his operations and costs would change if he was serving a customer base of 2,300 rather than 300 properties. "If more people use this service prices will go down and service levels go up."

Gellatly said to serve 2,300 homes he predicted he would collect garbage and recycling in four zones on different days. "The benefit of having that economy of scale is it would allow me to improve my staffing level. I would be able to have more full-time staff," he said.

An area of public dissatisfaction highlighted by a community survey Hegedus and his staff conducted last year was the condition of the transfer station and limited hours. "He's not making enough money to hire people or improve that facility," Hegedus said. Longer transfer station hours, he suggested, could decrease illegal dumping, another important community concern that was raised.

There were no dissenting voices in the audience when it came to the need for mandatory garbage service. "Basic service really belongs in property taxes," said taxpayers' association president Mark Robbins, stating that his association had long supported the concept.

PRCAC members unanimously endorsed the concept of including a fee for basic garbage and recycling services on property tax bills, with Gellatly abstaining. "It will be a similar process to that of moving the character plan into section 20.72," said committee chair Joel Lantz, with staff crafting the language that would then be reviewed by the county solid waste advisory committee and ultimately approved by county council.

Hegedus said he would come back to the committee with a written report on progress for their July 11 meeting.



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## PRCAC, county to model mandatory trash collection

By Meg Olson

With the blessing of the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee (PRCAC), the county health department and the local garbage company will begin modeling what a mandatory garbage pickup system will look like with a goal of having the system in place by 2019.

"The direction we wanted to go was where everyone in Point Roberts has a solid waste system they're happy with and proud of," said Jeff Hegedus with the county health department, which oversees solid waste in the county, at the August 8 PRCAC meeting. "Places where they don't have good solid waste management, it impacts quality of life."

The health department started their review of the local garbage situation in fall 2016 with a survey to gauge community priorities, Hegedus said. Results identified five areas that needed to be addressed in designing a system that's right for the Point: reasonable cost of service, level of service, curbing illegal dumping, system stability and a healthy recycling rate.

"In 2001, people were having the same discussions," Hegedus said. "What we are now trying to do is find solutions." Through a series of five meetings with PRCAC, Hegedus said they had seen growing support for mandatory garbage collection.

As they looked closer at how that kind of system might work, PRCAC and the health department identified the county's property tax role as a good way to charge every improved lot for garbage service. "We found out from the county treasurer it is feasible to do it, not as a property tax but as a fee," that would appear on property tax bills, Hegedus said.

"What if there was a minimum service level everyone had to pay?" he suggested. "Instead of 300 people paying for the garbage collection system you'd have everybody. Maybe you could even decrease costs with better economy of scale and improve levels of service."

One suggestion from the audience and committeemembers for better service was a biannual curbside junk pickup such as the one that exists in South Delta. "It's a logistics problem," said David Gellatly, committeemember and owner of CanDo recycling and disposal. "They have 15 garbage trucks." With more customers, it is possible the company would have enough business to have sufficient trucks to make such a program feasible.

Hegedus said the system would be based on a minimum level of service, a 20-gallon can and recycling pickup every other week, for example, which currently costs \$10.99 per month. "It occurs to me that's not onerous," Hegedus said.

The fee would appear as a line item on annual property tax bills. Customers who wanted additional service would be billed for that directly by the company.

Committeemember Keith Glading said that garbage was a utility like the water system and that everyone should be paying to support it. "Like your water bill, if you aren't there for six months you still have a bill to pay," he said.

Since they began considering a mandatory system Hegedus said they had received three comments, one from a part time resident who didn't want to leave a can of garbage at the curb if they weren't there for pickup week. "There is a fee for carry out," in the existing tariff, Hegedus said, adding that customers should call the company if they had a special circumstance and chances are there was already a solution.

The committee directed Hegedus to begin modeling what the system would look like and working with regulators to make it happen.

"None of this is set in stone. We're trying to picture what it might look like. We want to set a level of service that's not onerous," Hegedus said. "It feels like we're getting somewhere. The ingredients seem to be there."

The county treasurer needs to have the roll of properties to be charged by November of each year and Hegedus said there were "too many moving parts" to get the system underway by this November. "If this is where you want to go, we can come back to you with the feasibility of making next November."

In other PRCAC business, chair Joel Lantz reported on a July 15 special meeting at which the committee took a "very high-level look" at how it wanted to model the review of local zoning and land use as outlined in 20.72 of Whatcom County code. "What we talked about is let's look at economic development as part of that. One of the things we talked about is if we want to change the footprint of our commercial zone."

Gellatly said the Port of Bellingham had indicated it could help fund an update of the 1998 Point Roberts Economic Development Plan. "Businesses aren't rushing to come to Point Roberts," he said. "We still have the same businesses doing the same thing: gas, cheese, parcels. We need the county to start doing something positive."



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## PRCAC meeting proposes new waste collection plan

Point Roberts News Bulletin - October 10, 2017



*The Whatcom County Health Department's analysis suggested minimum service levels for a new waste collection regime during the PRCAC meeting on October 10.*

By Pat Grubb

If all goes according to plan, a mandatory waste collection regime will begin in January 2019. This is according to a critical path analysis presented to the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee at their regular meeting on October 10. The analysis was prepared and presented by Jeff Hegedus and John Wolpers from the Whatcom County Health Department.

"It was very interesting to take a step back and look at where we are," said Hegedus, who had been asked by the committee the month before to prepare the analysis. He listed the various steps that had already been taken such as conducting the community survey, determining what the customer base would be and setting minimum service levels.

"The primary one we'd like to look at tonight is minimum service levels," he said, adding, "It's very critical that we have a system that works for the seasonal residents." Continuing, Hegedus gave an overview of the potential customer base. "There are over 4,600 tax parcels on the Point," he pointed out, 2,600 of which have a water meter. Whether or not all of these properties are in use and generating waste isn't known. Hegedus said the best data source is the health department's permitted septic system users which total approximately 2,300; all of which are charged a \$19 operating fee by the department.

After some back and forth with committee members, it was agreed to use that data source as the customer base for solid waste fee collection.

Turning to minimum service levels, Hegedus and Wolpers suggested that twice-monthly 32-gallon trash pickup and recycling service would be workable and provide sufficient economy of scale to ensure a successful and sustainable sanitation system. The current charge for that level of service is \$16 a month.

However, as that tariff hasn't been changed in 10 years, it is possible that the cost could change in a tariff review by the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC), the agency responsible for setting trash hauling rates. The current cost is in line with what other local haulers charge their customers in Whatcom County. Instituting the new system will require review by the UTC.

After agreeing to the minimum service levels, the committee turned its attention to how the community would respond to the new system. "Marketing is going to be very critical so people will know what's coming up," said Jeff Christopher, the taxpayer association representative for PRCAC. Fellow committee member David Gellatly agreed, suggesting that the manner in which changes to the character plan had been communicated to the public left much to be desired. Gellatly, the chamber of commerce representative, is also the owner of Cando, the company that currently provides solid waste services on the Point.



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THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF POINT ROBERTS, WASHINGTON

## Mandatory garbage pickup moves ahead

Home Page News News Tuesday, 12/20/18



Jeff Hegedus speaking at the PRCAC meeting on February 13

Photo by Pat Grubb

By Pat Grubb

Aiming for a January 1, 2019 implementation date, county health department staffers Jeff Hegedus and John Wolpers updated the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee (PRCAC) members on the latest steps being taken to establish a mandatory trash collection system for the Point.

At the committee's regular meeting on February 13, Hegedus said, "I've looked at the All Point Bulletin as far back as 2001 and we're still talking about the same problems [of handling solid waste]." Referring to development in Tsawwassen and in Point Roberts itself, Hegedus said it made sense to implement such a system before development actually occurs.

Hegedus reiterated to the audience that the current system of allowing residents exemptions from garbage pickup needed to be repealed. "In Whatcom County, it is the law that people must have curbside collection. What we're proposing to do is to eliminate the exemption," he said. Dropping the exemption will increase the number of customers to create a viable system in the long run, he stated. The increased customer base "... would provide significantly improved economy of scale, support cost structures, enable higher service levels and reduce illegal dumping," according to the health department's proposed recommendation to Whatcom County Council shared by Hegedus at the PRCAC meeting.

The health department projects that the customer base would increase from 300 to almost 2,300 customers. All properties that are currently assessed an onsite septic system permit fee on their annual property tax bill would be required to participate; that number currently stands at 2,254.

All properties would be charged for a minimum service level of every other week, 32-gallon container plus recycling collection. That level of service now costs \$17.18 a month (\$206.16 annually) as per the approved Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) tariff. Customers who require higher levels of service would be charged directly by Cando Recycling and Disposal, as they do presently.

Hegedus pointed out that Cando has not had an increase in rates for eight years and could expect to see its customer base decline should the UTC grant an increase in the future. The company expects to request an increase as part of the system restructuring as it will need to hire more employees and purchase new equipment and infrastructure to handle increased business. "I'm looking at putting out a couple of hundred thousand dollars in expenditures," said Cando owner David Gellatly, adding he would need at least three months' head start in gearing up.

According to an analysis provided to the *All Point Bulletin* by Gellatly, a rate review based upon increases in the Consumer Price Index since 2010 would result in a monthly rate of \$19.81 for the minimum service level. While the UTC uses a variety of measures to determine rates, that figure would fall in line with what other solid waste handlers in Whatcom County and elsewhere currently charge.

Addressing the issue of summer and part-time residents being required to pay for year-round service, Hegedus pointed out that people aren't being charged by the can, they're being charged an annual fee for a service. For that fee, "they get all of the benefits of having a stable system." People should consider the service analogous to the water district in that they pay for it even if they're not here, he suggested. "That applies to lots of services: police, water and schools." He also pointed out that people north of the border pay for garbage collection through their taxes and continue to pay for it even when they aren't home.

Dropping the exemption for trash pickup requires changing Whatcom County Code Title 8, Chapter 11 which deals with solid waste districts. The change would come before county council who would hold a public hearing before voting on it. PRCAC members spent a good amount of time discussing the need to ensure the public was aware of the proposal and given ample opportunity to comment. A public hearing would not occur until the summer at the earliest.

Under other business, Jeff Christopher was elected chair, Joel Lantz vice-chair, Linda Hughes secretary for 2018.



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# All Point Bulletin

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## Advisory committee talks proposed solid waste pickup changes

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By Meg Olson

The Whatcom County Health Department (WCHD) and the Point Roberts Community Advisory Committee (PRCAC) are moving ahead with educating the public about proposed changes to the solid waste system.

"This is for the people that for the last two years haven't been following these meetings or the All Point Bulletin coverage," said WCHD representative Jeff Hegedus at the March 14 PRCAC meeting.

Hegedus presented committee members with a letter and FAQ sheet that will be sent to the approximately 2,300 property owners who will need to pay for mandatory garbage collection if proposed changes are approved. The information will also be added to the solid waste division website which already features a section specifically addressing Point Roberts solid waste issues.

Under the proposal, the current system of allowing property owners to apply for an exemption from curbside pickup will be repealed. All developed properties, as determined by which ones have a septic permit, will need to pay for monthly pickup of garbage and recycling.

PRCAC members agreed to hold a town hall meeting on Saturday, April 14 to answer further questions the public has before proposed changes go before county council later that month for a public hearing and possible approval. If they are approved, Hegedus said, CanDo Recycling and Disposal Services will apply to the state for a new tariff. The target date for rollout of universal collection is January 2019.



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