

CITY COUNCIL
INFORMATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
Wednesday, January 21, 2009

ALDERMAN PRESENT:

Patti Martinson, Sam Kooiker, Deb Hadcock, Bill Okrepkie, Lloyd LaCroix and Aaron Costello.

STAFF PRESENT:

Jason Green, Robert Ellis, Jerry Wright, John Wagner and Katie LeClair.

(NOTE: For the sake of continuity, the following minutes are not necessarily in chronological order. All referenced documents are on file with the Master Minutes.)

Council President Deb Hadcock opened the Informational Committee Meeting at 12:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers at City Hall, 300 Sixth Street, Rapid City, SD 57701.

TOPIC: 1. Plastic Film Recycling and 2. Water Conservation

Council President Deb Hadcock opened the meeting and welcomed Mayor Alan Hanks who stated that they have been working on the subject of the presentation for a number of months. Mayor Hanks thanked Alderman Martinson stating that she has worked on this for a long time. He also thanked Alderman LaCroix. Mayor Hanks continued by stating that the subject of the presentation compliments the concepts that will be discussed when they are on their trip (to the National League of Cities Green Cities Conference). Mayor Hanks then turned to floor over to Jerry Wright, Solid Waste Manager.

Wright thanked Mayor Hanks and stated that this presentation began with a discussion on paper recycling, and they are looking into that—looking towards the future. Wright stated that the subject of film plastics warrants discussion and community awareness. He discussed what film plastics are: plastic bags from the grocery store, the plastic bags that cover dry-cleaning and the wrapping that products are wrapped in. Wright stated that there is also a commercial and industrial side of plastic films. He stated that many pallets are wrapped in plastic which is valuable.

Wright discussed that good old fashioned garbage which is approximately 1 ton per person per year, roughly 90+ thousand tons per year. He stated that film plastics make up approx 30 –40% of garbage. He stated that film plastics have a value, most are made out of oil while some are made out of natural gas, and have a BTU value. Wright stated that is trying to help business and individuals understand that they can save disposal costs by sending plastics to be recycled.

Wright stated that only 1% of plastic bags are recycled. Wright stated that Rapid City does not send any plastic bags to be recycled because there is not a way to recover and sort it, and because there are issues related to sending out the product. He stated that garbage bags are often contaminated, by food waste, and it is hard to identify the grade.

Wright continued by stating that 30+ years ago, a lot of our waste went into the ocean. Of the waste that is coming to the landfill, a lot of it is plastic. He stated that they are constantly trying

to address the litter problem at the landfill. Wright stated that it is not paper that blows out of the landfill, it is plastic. He stated that it is an issue that he would like to avoid.

Wright stated that many times the impact on the environment is thought of in terms of the ocean. However, it also affects the streams, lakes, ponds, wildlife areas, and so forth. He stated that plastic bags find their way to the sea through sewers; however, they also find their way to our creeks—like Rapid Creek. Wright showed some photos of plastic bags in the environment. He continued by stating that plastic bags account for over 10 percent of the debris that washes up on the United States shore. Wright stated that one thing that can be done is use a cloth shopping bag. He stated that if one out of five people could use cloth bags that would save a trillion bags a year. He also stated that all converts into oil, a ton of plastic is a ton of oil.

Wright asked what can be done. He stated that the city could provide drop off points for recycling in stores, provide cloth bags. Wright listed what other countries and cities are doing to deal with plastic bags. He also stated that there was a corn starch bag that is available. Wright stated that they purchased the corn based bags a couple of years ago, placed them in the compost pile, and within a couple of weeks they were gone.

Wright concluded by stating that there is much that we can and should do to reduce the use of plastic bags coming into the landfill. Wright opened up the floor for questions.

Okrepkie stated that he has the National Geographic movie that Wright referred to in his presentation. He offered to share it with the other council members. Okrepkie stated that they mentioned not using plastic bags in the National Geographic movie and stated that many cities are going to banning plastic bags. He thanked Wright for the presentation and Alderman Martinson for bringing the issue up.

Hadcock asked about the video and Okrepkie stated that it was a link that he could send out.

Wright stated that they would be happy to give the presentation to any other groups the Council would like.

LaCroix discussed the recycling programs that they have in his workplace. He stated that the presentation showed what could be saved by reducing the use of plastic.

Martinson stated that she liked the idea of containers to return plastic bags in the store. She stated that she would like to see the city do something to encourage stores to have the plastic bag return reciprocals. Wright stated that the number one thing that we can do is educate the public, for which there is no cost.

LaCroix stated that on his trips to the Landfill he has seen people picking through the waste pulling out the metal and hauling it to the appropriate location. LaCroix stated that he wanted to express his appreciation and stated that he was impressed with that effort. Wright stated that they receive three to four tons a day in what they call shredder metal. He stated that it takes up a huge amount of space. Wright continued by stating that the landfill ships out approximately twenty-two tons of shredder metal every other week.

Costello asked what Rapid City does now to recycle the plastic. Wright stated that Rapid City currently does not have a program in place to recycle film plastics; however, it is something worth looking into. Costello asked what Wright sees as a possibility with the shrink wrap. Wright responded that the shrink-wrap is valuable and that it is something that should be looked into. Costello asked if it is something that could be placed in the curbside recycling bin. Wright stated that it is more on the industrial side, which is where a lot of the shrink wrap is at, and that we need to work with them. He stated that it is going to take time, however, it is a program that needs to be expanded.

Alderman Hadcock stated that a positive is that some of the council and staff will be going to a conference about going green. Alderman Hadcock introduced the presentation on water conservation. Robert Ellis, Public Works Director took the floor.

Ellis stated that there are things that the city can do to reduce the impact on the aquifer and on Rapid Creek. Ellis asked the question "How can the city conserve water?" Ellis stated that the city can reduce water loss in the system, water rates, conservation ordinances, low-flow-toilet rebate, high-efficiency-washer rebate, and water conservation kits.

Ellis discussed reducing water loss, which is water that is wasted by going back into the creek or into the ground. He stated that the national average is ten percent and that Rapid City is below the nation average in water leaks at 6.5% in 2008. Ellis stated that while that is good, it is still a lot of water. He stated that Rapid City's low percentage of water loss can be attributed to staff going out and doing repairs and the council supporting capital improvement programs to replace aging infrastructure. Ellis stated that he would like to see the water loss below five percent.

Ellis continued, stating that another tool to conserve water are the water rates that were recently implemented. He stated that the city has moved from a three tier billing structure to a four tier structure, the more water that is used the more expensive it is. Ellis stated that anything over seventy-five units is the most expensive as the usage is usually due to over watering.

Ellis discussed conservation ordinances that Rapid City has in place regarding water. During the summer months there is no watering between 9 am and 6 pm, to prevent the water from evaporating.

Hadcock asked how full the Pactola Reservoir is at, Ellis replied 92.2 percent.

Ellis stated that Rapid City has watering and Pactola restrictions. Ellis discussed what the restrictions entail. When Pactola is below certain levels the restrictions increases and fees would increase at certain points. When Pactola is below 50 percent full there is an alert status.

Ellis stated that Rapid City is looking into implementing a low-flow-toilet rebate. Which consists of: \$75.00 for first, \$60.00 for second and \$50.00 for each additional. Ellis discussed the number of gallons of water different toilets use. Ellis stated that customers would have to purchase the toilet(s) from a local vendor; the city would require a proof of purchase and would inspect the

toilet. The program would only be effective for residential customers with city accounts and would only be applicable for existing home—not new construction or additions. Ellis stated that there would be a savings to the customer and a benefit to the city as there would be less wear and tear on equipment.

Ellis continued, discussing a potential low-flow-clothes-washer rebate program which would have similar requirements to the low-flow-toilet rebate program: \$125.00 rebate. Ellis stated that a low-flow-clothes-washer could potentially save a household 7,000 gallons of water per year. He stated that he was very involved in the program in Sioux Falls and that it was very popular.

Ellis discussed the packet that was handed out, a water conservation kit. The kit consisted of: a toilet leak detection packet, a garden hose attachment—low flow, trigger activated with a number of features, a low flow showerhead and a low flow kitchen faucet attachment. The kit could potentially save 7000 gallons a year per household. The conservation kit was \$7.00 - \$6.50 to purchase and by installing all of the items in the kit a household could save 18,000 gallons of water, \$50.00 per year. Ellis proposed that the kit be delivered free to Rapid City water customers.

Ellis reviewed that all of the water saving methods he discussed have benefits. The water savings methods reduce demand on the waste water treatment plant. Less water going in one end means less water that needs to come out of the end. Ellis stated that water conservation would allow for the aquifer and creek resources to last longer. Ellis continued, stated that water conservation would also put less stress on the cold water fisheries, allows Pactola to maintain recreation levels, and saves account holders money.

Ellis discussed that conservation does work. He stated that Rapid City experienced its highest single day usage in 1988 when 36,000,000 gallons of water was delivered to 14,500 customer accounts. Ellis stated that in 2007 the highest day usage was 26,000,000 with 20,000 account holders. Ellis stated that some of the efforts that are already in place have worked, and that we can improve even further.

Kookier thanked Ellis for the presentation and stated that he has heard the even odd watering policy described as organized wasting and asked if that was a fair statement and if there were alternatives. Ellis stated that you need to allow people to irrigate their yards. He stated that there is a “water cop” who tries to reduce arrogant wasting of water, however, he does not know if we want to have one in every neighborhood. Ellis stated that he equated it to a commercial he saw once that had a Public Works Director standing on a sidewalk that was being watered by an irrigation head that was pointed to the street and sidewalk. The Public Works Director stated that, no matter how much you water it, it just won’t grow. Ellis stated that those are the type of situations that need to be addressed. Ellis discussed reaching out to the community.

Kooiker asked if there are any alternatives to Kentucky blue grass that requires less water. Ellis discussed zero-scaping as an alternative to landscaping. He also discussed that buffalo grass uses less water, however, Kentucky blue grass provides the greenest looking yard and that is what people want.

Kooiker asked if the landscaping ordinance discussed rain sensors on sprinklers. Ellis stated he did not believe so, however, he was not completely familiar with the landscaping ordinance.

Costello asked how the water loss it tracked. Ellis stated that they track the water accounts, so that they know how much water they are selling. They also track how much water leaves the water treatment plant and the wells. The difference is considered water loss. He stated that a lot of the water is lost on private service lines, not just city lines. Costello stated that it is good to know that there is hard data. Costello stated that he thinks that the toilet and washer rebates are great programs and asked if they were currently implemented. Ellis stated that they are not, he is proposing them today. Costello asked how inspection would work. Ellis discussed the process. A form would be filled out, once installation took place a person from Public Works would go out and insure that the toilet was installed. Costello asked what the thought process in excluding new construction from the rebate process was. Ellis stated that a vacant lot does not have an account yet, and that low flow toilets should be installed by the home builder in new construction, as part of a standard business practice. Costello agreed and stated that the city should see what it can do to encourage the installation of low flow toilets in new construction. Costello asked what could be done to encourage residents to capture rainwater runoff. Ellis discussed what that would entail; he also stated that it would be most effectively adapted into new construction. Costello discussed large plastic tanks set up on a gravity feed and stated that he would like to see the city encourage that.

LaCroix stated that he would like to thank Martinson for bringing up the issue of recycling and Wright for coming and making the presentation. He stated that this why he asked Ellis if he could give the presentation on conservation. LaCroix stated that he thought that the rebates and kits were a good idea and he would like to see them move forward. LaCroix discussed water sensors on sprinklers and asked if there was some way that the city could experiment with them. LaCroix asked how do we move forward from here as far as finding the funding.

John Wagner took the floor to discuss the rain interrupters. He stated that several years ago they purchased between 50 and 75 devices and hooked them up in the parks department. He stated that the Parks Department really likes the devices.

Ellis stated that he is not asking for additional FTE's or additional money in the budget. Ellis stated that he and Wagner feel so strongly about it that they will make it work with the resources they currently have. Ellis stated that he would like and endorsement and for the council to be supportive of the program.

Hadcock discussed having this added to Public Works to move forward. Mayor Hanks stated that Ellis has been working on the program to make sure it is ready by the spring. Mayor Hanks stated that the goal is to hand out the water conservation packets at the home show. He also stated that there is enough internal funding to fund it internally this year without a supplement.

Hadcock thanked Ellis for the presentation. She stated that she is impressed and thanked LaCroix for brining this issue forward. She thanked Lloyd for brining up the subject on water conservation and Martinson for bring up the subject of recycling.

Martinson stated that in the past there may have been question of if low-flow-toilets worked as well as standard toilets. She stated that while that may have been an issue at one time, the quality has improved since they were first introduced.

Motion to adjourn was seconded, meeting adjourned.