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Solid Waste Authority to Raise Rates

Moraga more likely to be down in the dumps over garbage rates than Orinda

By Laurie Snyder

"These are pretty exciting times in the world of garbage," said Paul Morrison as he began his talk on behalf of the Contra Costa Solid Waste Authority before the Orinda City Council Dec. 17. A new decade-long franchise agreement could be worth as much as a half billion dollars to haulers. Morrison, the executive director of the CCCSWA which represents Orinda, Lafayette, Moraga, Danville, Walnut Creek, and unincorporated Central Contra Costa County, was on hand to discuss both the new agreement and a likely rate hike coming at the end of the present 20-year contract. Nine proposals for collecting, transferring, landfilling, and/or processing of recyclables and green (yard) waste are under consideration. The challenge ahead will be to meet a new state mandate requiring the increased diversion of waste from 50 to 75 percent of what is being collected.

"You currently have two franchise haulers - Allied Waste that provides your solid waste service and Waste Management that provides your recycling and green waste services," said Rick Simonson, a representative of the firm which performed CCCSWA's rate-setting analyses. The allowable expenses are calculated each year as required by the respective franchise agreements, and then allocated to each member agency. In this final year, Orinda's service costs will increase 2.1 percent. "That's primarily based on labor-related cost increases and increases for disposal fees at the landfill. And that is offset, partially by some decreases in depreciation and interest related to the collection vehicles."

Simonson, who met in November with the two council members serving on the subcommittee charged with oversight of Orinda's solid waste situation - Steve Glazer and Victoria Smith - explained that revenues for year nine were actually higher than expenses. So, CCCSWA only needs to increase collection rates for 2014 by 1.5 percent instead. Commercial service levels will rise by a uniform 1.5 percent with all proposed rate increases effective starting March 1.

In comparison, Moraga is looking at a whopping 9 percent hike.

Customers wanting to cut costs should use smaller collection bins. "Our recommended rate increases range from 51 cents per month for a 20-gallon container up to 94 cents more per month for the larger, 96-gallon containers." Planners anticipate that the new 10-year franchise agreement will start March 1, 2015.

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