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Recycle Smart updates Orinda City Council on recent service issues

By Sora O'Doherty

Recycle Smart Executive Director David Kreuger addressed the Orinda City Council on Oct. 3, promising that new garbage trucks are ordered and on the way to address service issues that have occurred recently. Recycle Smart is a Joint Powers Authority whose contract with the city of Orinda is coming up for renewal. Kreuger said that Recycle Smart has a staff of five people, and tries to make sure that everyone is in compliance with the many laws that govern solid waste disposal. They manage the service contracts with Mt. Diablo Resource Recovery and Republic Services, that actually performs the collection of trash and recycling. Kreuger said that one of the benefits that has improved owing to a renegotiated contract with Republic Services is if bins are collected two days late, consumers can receive a credit for the week by calling Republic Services, whose telephone number is located on the bins.

Tony Mancini, general manager of Republic Services, also addressed the council. He admitted that since 2019 there has been an issue of not being able to consistently collect on the days specified for each neighborhood. "We work as hard as we can to solve the problem," Kreuger noted. He explained that there have been some long-term retractable problems that have contributed to the problem. It can take up to two years to get new garbage trucks and it is also difficult to get qualified technicians to work on the trucks, which are complicated vehicles. Their new plan is to obtain less qualified technicians and train them. Although it is an ongoing process, four people have been promoted in the past year.

Smaller vehicles more capable of dealing with Orinda's narrow, twisting, wooded roads are also more challenging. Although three of these vehicles were ordered in July, Mancini noted that, owing to supply chain issues, they will not arrive until the first quarter of 2024.

Further, Mancini stated that Republic Service's plan includes getting new drivers acclimated and trained. "We've got five new drivers," he noted, "but we need five more." He added that they have brought in managers from our area and other areas, and are working with health care providers to get drivers back at work. During times when the company has been having difficulty with meeting the collection deadlines, Mancini said that they have brought in emergency drivers from other states.

City Council Member Brandyn Iverson complimented the drivers who serve Orinda as really masterfully skilled, talented folks. But Council Member Janet Riley said that the problem of late pickups is not new, but has taken a downturn in recent years. She expressed fears that when bins are left out overnight it may cause difficulty for emergency vehicles in the event that they need to access the street. Sandy Gross, speaking in public comments, also complained that the bins present a fire hazard.

Council Member Latika Malkani had questions about what to put in each bin. For example, she wondered why we can't put compostable cups and cutlery in our green bins. Kreuger said that it comes down to "truth in advertising." While some items are theoretically compostable, not all facilities can handle them. On the other hand, he added that some compost facilities accept the fact that there will be microplastic in the compost, but Recycle Smart decided that that is not a good thing.

In response to a question from this reporter, Kimberly Lam, Municipal Manager with Republic Services, said that the Big Belly Receptacles have been very effective in helping people dispose of their items properly. The bins have pictures showing which items go in which container, and the extra step of having to open the containers, rather than just tossing an item into an open bin, seems to give people a little more time to make the best choice.

To report a missed pickup or other service issue, contact Republic Services at (925) 685-4711. If not satisfied, call RecycleSmart at (925) 906-1801 or email authority@recyclesmart.org.

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