

## **Ready to Talk Trash? So is Bloomington**

*By Mike Hanks*

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After a handful of meetings to consider the city's options, the committee looking at options for organized garbage collection in Bloomington will host an open house to detail where the city is at in the process.

The city has been studying options for organizing residential garbage collection for more than a year. After more than two months of negotiations with representatives of the city's seven licensed haulers, the Bloomington City Council formed the Organized Collection Options Committee, a state-mandated step that is in the process toward organizing garbage collection in the city.

While most sentiment expressed by the council has been toward organizing the collection of garbage, recycleables and organic material, the state requires the city to complete several steps in the process, which began with negotiations between the haulers and city officials in November. The city's plan is to allow each hauler to maintain its market share with the city, but to limit the number of companies serving a neighborhood to one. By organizing garbage collection, it is presumed the cost of service for residential customers will decrease, as will the operating costs of the haulers. Negotiations, however, haven't lowered the proposed rate of the haulers to a level that satisfies the city council, particularly when the council compares the proposed rates for Bloomington to those being paid by residents in cities that have organized collection.

The Organized Collection Options Committee has been meeting bi-weekly for about two months to discuss its options should the council find that the negotiated rate offered collectively by the haulers continues to be unsatisfactory. Options for the council include opening up the city to a competitive bid for the right to haul solid waste from sectors of the city, as well as abandoning the plan, according to Karl Keel, the city's public works director.

The committee is readying its recommendations to the council, should the council and haulers fail to reach an agreement. As part of its process, the five-member committee will host an open house 4-7 p.m. Thursday, April 23, at Public Works, 1700 W. 98th St.

The open house will have stations set up addressing several facets of the city's solid waste management plan. The open house will also provide information about the city's efforts to organize collection and the options that the council may consider, Keel noted.

The open house is not a public hearing. A hearing would be held if the council contemplates approving an organized collection plan.

The open house is intended to be an informational opportunity for residents. While some residents have expressed support for organizing collection for a variety of reasons – such as

reducing truck traffic through neighborhoods and reducing the overall cost of service – others have expressed opposition to the plan, arguing that the ability to choose a service provider through the free market shouldn't be taken away by city government.

“Not everybody has a strong opinion,” Keel noted, adding that the city has received calls from residents with questions, as they have yet to decide if they support the plan, he explained.

The committee's work may be complete when it submits its recommendations to the council, although the committee could be reconvened to review bids if the council opts to seek them. That's a step the committee would rather avoid, according to Keel.

“If things go well we will have an acceptable proposal,” he said.

Mayor Gene Winstead, a member of the committee, said that the committee has taken into consideration several anecdotal concerns expressed by residents opposed to the concept in considering the ramifications of organized collection. Those concerns will be addressed as part of the open house, he noted.

“All of these things have been taken into consideration.”

Additional information about the organized collection process is available through the city's website at [bit.ly/2016trash](http://bit.ly/2016trash).