

Newton County Solid Waste Management Authority
Newton County Historic Courthouse, Commissioners' Boardroom
1124 Clark Street, Covington, Georgia 30014
Wednesday, March 18, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

The Newton County Solid Waste Management Authority (SWMA) held a Regular Meeting on Wednesday, March 18, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. in the Commissioners' Boardroom on the Third Floor of the Newton County Historic Courthouse.

The following SWMA members were present:

Kent Campbell, Jr., SWMA Chairman
Jack (Buddy) Morgan
Phillip Wise
Marcello Banes, Chairman, Newton County Board of Commissioners (BOC)
Stan Edwards, District 1 Commissioner
Ronnie Cowan, District 5 Commissioner, SWMA Vice Chairman

Also present were:

Laurie Riley, Secretary
Sam VanVolkenburgh, Attorney
Kevin Walter, Solid Waste Manager

Call to Order

Chairman Kent Campbell called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Moment of Silence/Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Campbell led everyone in observing a moment of silence and then in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Adoption

Commissioner Ronnie Cowan moved to amend the agenda to add Item #6A. Discussion of Rate/Fee Structure Changes effective July 1, 2021 and re-number Item #6 as Item #6B. BOC Chairman Marcello Banes moved to approve the agenda as amended. Commissioner Stan Edwards seconded the motion. All voted in favor, except Mr. Phillip Wise who voted in opposition.

Citizen Comments on Agenda Items

None were offered.

Approval of Minutes from SWMA Regular Meeting on 2/24/21

BOC Chairman Banes moved to approve the minutes. Mr. Buddy Morgan seconded the motion. All voted in favor, except Commissioner Edwards who abstained because he was not present at the 2/24/21 meeting.

Discussion of Rate/Fee Structure Changes effective July 1, 2021

Commissioner Cowan asked to review the rate changes. He said he is more comfortable with hang tag fees staying the same instead of increasing. However, he also said he is okay with the landfill fees increasing.

Mr. Walter said that the SWMA approved an increase in hang tag fees from \$155 to \$165 effective July 1 and an increase of \$5 per hangtag (for the next 5 years) every July in order to come closer to reaching the “break-even” point for Convenience Centers.

Mr. Reynolds said that pro forma estimates are based on sales of 5000 hang tags each year. Mr. Walter said the increase in hang tag fees would result in about \$150,000 in revenue over the next five years.

Commissioner Cowan said that fees had been increased three times since he became a Commissioner. He asked whether it would be possible to keep the fees steady for another year. He said a rate increase causes more citizen complaints.

Mr. Wise said that originally, hang tag fees were \$50 for a portion of the year. Then the SWMA voted to sell them for \$145 for an entire year. Later the SWMA increased the price to \$155 per year. Mr. Wise said that he did not think the SWMA lost any customers after the price increase a couple of years ago. He said that he views the process as only one real price increase—from \$145 to \$155, since the fees covered a whole year. He said he does not think a small increase in cost will deter customers. Hang tag sales are projected to reach 6000 tags by the end of the fiscal year. Mr. Wise recommended keeping the increase.

BOC Chairman Banes said that he received a call from a citizen on Saturday about bins being full at the Stone Road Convenience Center. He said the person also complained about the rates going up and said the service should be better. He recommended keeping hang tag fees the same.

Commissioner Edwards said he does not get complaints about hang tags. He said people tell him that they are glad to have the Convenience Centers. He asked and received clarification from Mr. Walter and Mr. Reynolds that hang tag fees would need to be \$190 per tag in order to approach “break-even” status for the Centers. He said with inflation figured in, the cost may be approaching \$230 per tag by the end of five years. He said he was indifferent to the increase because most of his complaint calls are about trash on roadsides rather than fees.

Commissioner Cowan asked what would happen if the hang tag fee remained the same. Mr. Walter said that if the fee increase was not implemented for one year, about \$50,000 in revenue would be lost.

Mr. Walter said that he wants to continue to improve the quality of services that the Convenience Centers provide. He said that attendants spot check to prevent sharing of hang tags and that most people follow the rules. Some landlords let multiple people use the same tag, but that is against the law. Mr. Walter said that there was a problem in the past with people forging hang tags, but that is no longer happening.

Commissioner Cowan said that he agreed that a plan for an annual increase in the hang tag fee is good.

Commissioner Edwards asked about the possibility of transitioning to use of a window sticker instead of a hang tag. Mr. Walter said he believes that going to a sticker system could be easily done. He said that he looked into the use of scanners and card readers, but that process requires the attendant to check licenses and match addresses. He said he felt that would create ill will with customers.

Members discussed whether to sell one sticker or two (for another vehicle) for each household. Mr. Wise said he felt the SWMA should sell just one sticker per household to cut down on "sharing".

Mr. Wise said he was concerned about the situation at Stone Road with full bins. He said that there needs to be consistency in service at Convenience Centers and that no one should be turned away due to full bins during regular operating hours. Mr. Walter said that the attendants had been instructed not to close the Centers for full bins. He said the problem of full bins had been mostly eliminated, and now occurs only when two drivers are absent at the same time.

BOC Chairman Banes said that he believed stickers were not very expensive and gave examples of menus at restaurants using QR (Quick Response) codes. Mr. Walter agreed, but he said that attendants would still have to check drivers' licenses and compare addresses. He said that lines would be ten cars deep and that the attendants cannot check everyone but that they can spot check. Commissioner Edwards agreed that the attendants do not have time to scan. He recommended having the SWMA ask Mr. Walter to come to the next meeting with a plan for one sticker for each household for \$155 per year.

Chairman Campbell asked whether opening an unmanned Center was still an option. Mr. Walter said it was. Mr. Walter said he included funding for an unmanned Center in the draft proposed budget for the next fiscal year. Mr. Walter said he is recommending using the Cook Road Convenience Center site to open an automated Center with extended hours. The Center would not require a tag or sticker but would accept cash.

Mr. Campbell said he was concerned that if the price of the hang tag was not increased, the SWMA would be having the same discussion next year. Mr. Wise agreed.

Mr. Walter recommended sticking with fee increases already approved. He said that he would research and find options for a sticker system. He also said that he agreed that citizens should never be turned away from Centers due to full bins and said that he would stress that matter again with attendants.

BOC Chairman Banes said that he favors a sticker system that can be scanned because it eliminates the problem of lost hang tags and having to buy replacements. Mr. Walter said he would give a report on the pros and cons of a sticker system at the next meeting.

Commissioner Cowan moved to direct the Solid Waste Manager to prepare a revised resolution eliminating the annual increase in Convenience Center (hang tag) fees. The motion failed in a 3-3 tie, with BOC Chairman Banes, Commissioner Cowan, and Mr. Morgan voting in favor and Chairman Campbell, Commissioner Edwards, and Mr. Wise voting in opposition.

Commissioner Edwards moved to direct the Solid Waste Manager to prepare a plan for switching to a windshield sticker or bar code system instead of a hang tag for the upcoming fiscal year. All voted in favor.

February Landfill Tonnage Report

Mr. Walter explained the report. (See attached.) He said that paid volume coming into the landfill has averaged 313.35 tons per day for the month of January. Unpaid tonnage from Convenience Centers averaged 33.5 tons per day. With the budget based on 230 tons per day, tonnage remains consistent month to month despite daily fluctuations. Mr. Walter said he believes that high tonnage will continue. He said the landfill staff is turning away many people coming from other counties. Commissioner Edwards said that the landfill needs to stay vigilant in turning away out-of-county waste and staying away from accepting regional waste.

Financial Status Report for Solid Waste for Month 8 of FY2021

Mr. Walter referred members to the attached report. He said that revenues continue to be higher than projected because of high tonnage coming into the landfill. Net income is at \$1,954,786. Equity in pooled cash is \$4,469,694.90 and projected to go up to \$6 million by the end of the year. Expenses are below projections.

Approval of Changes to Task Budgets for Professional Engineering Services—FY 2021

Mr. Walter directed attention to a letter in meeting packets from Harbin Engineering dated 3-16-2021 detailing requests for adjustments to the budget for engineering services. He asked Mr. Reynolds of Harbin Engineering to explain requests for the Authority.

Mr. Reynolds said he is asking for a \$45,000 budget increase. This increase is to cover costs for the Phase 1 and 2 Closure and Construction Quality Assurance Projects, which were extended through May due to the pandemic, wet conditions, and rocky soil. He said that the liner for the closure turf is being installed now and will be completed in May. He also said that the budget was reduced for tasks related to the Waste Excavation Project, which was temporarily halted to focus on the Closure Project.

Mr. Walter said that he felt that Harbin Engineering has provided excellent service and that the Closure Project was more complicated than anticipated because the dirt was not good quality.

BOC Chairman Banes said that he could not support an additional \$45,000.

Chairman Campbell asked whether the Waste Excavation contract will need to be extended. Mr. Reynolds said that he anticipates that it will.

Authority Attorney Sam VanVolkenburgh asked whether the increase would push the monthly maximum invoice total over \$100,000. Mr. Reynolds said it would not.

Chairman Campbell called for a motion. Mr. Wise moved to approve the changes, and Mr. Morgan seconded the motion. The motion failed in a 3-3 tie with Chairman Campbell, Mr. Wise, and Mr. Morgan voting in favor and BOC Chairman Banes, Commissioner Cowan, and Commissioner Edwards voting in opposition.

Discussion of Implementing Interest Charges for Landfill Accounts due over 30 days

Mr. Walter said that the County has never charged interest on overdue bills. He said several landfill customers are over 30 days past due with payments and are sometimes 60 days overdue. He said that the problem has increased with some commercial haulers who are overdue in amounts between \$50,000 and \$100,000.

Mr. VanVolkenburgh said that the Authority was allowed two options. It can impose a flat late fee or it can charge interest at the rate of 1.5% for invoices 30 or more days past due. He said that any late fee collected is not intended to be greater than 1.5% interest per month.

Mr. Walter recommended enacting a 1.5% interest fee for invoices over 30 days past due beginning July 1.

Mr. Morgan said that since amounts due are so large, it might prove difficult to collect past 60 days. He asked whether it would be possible to “cut off” past due customers after 45 days (not let them use the landfill).

Mr. Walter agreed that Mr. Morgan’s suggestion would be a good option. He said he would not recommend turning away any municipalities but would suggest the practice for commercial users. He said that he could work out any problems with the cities.

Mr. Walter said he believes the Newton County Finance Department tracks accounts for 30 and 60 days past due, not 45, but it could be an option. Mr. Wise said he thought that cutting off customers at 60 days past due would be very effective. Mr. Walter said that if any municipality was nearing 90 days past due on payment of its account, he would come before the Authority to discuss the matter.

Mr. Wise said he felt it would be fair to charge 1.5% interest after 30 days and cut off service to customers at 60 days past due. Mr. Walter said he felt it was generous and more than many utilities offer.

Mr. Morgan moved to direct the Solid Waste Manager to charge 1.5% interest after 30 days and deny landfill entry after 60 days for past-due accounts, effective July 1, 2021, and to provide notice to potentially impacted customers of this policy. Mr. Wise seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Citizen Comments

- Denise Williams
155 Long Creek Drive
Covington, GA 30016

Ms. Williams asked whether it was true that BOC is paying \$200,000 for trash pickup, with no contributions from the SWMA for the purpose. She asked why SWMA meetings could not be viewed electronically during the pandemic. She also reported that there are two sets of box springs on Highway 162 that need to be removed.

Mr. Campbell said that, at this time, the SWMA does not have the technology to provide digital access to meeting.

Mr. Walter explained that he had met with County leaders about how to fund trash pickup, and that, with current financial constraints on the landfill, they had decided that Public Works would fund the effort for now. He said it is possible that the SWMA could contribute funding for the project in the future. He said that Public Works and the SWMA often work together and that the

SWMA is contributing orange trash bags and is disposing of the collected trash in the landfill at no charge. He said that the landfill staff keeps the area around the landfill clean and litter free and assists Public Works in picking up illegally dumped items.

Mr. Wise said that he knows where the box springs are on Highway 162, and he will assist with making a report to Public Works and asking for them to be removed.

Executive Session (Personnel Matters)

Executive Session was not necessary.

Remarks from Authority Members

None were offered.

Adjourn

With a motion to adjourn from Commissioner Edwards and a second from Commissioner Cowan, all voted to approve, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Attachments:

- February 2021 Daily Tonnage Report
- February 2021 Financial Reports
- 3-16-21 Letter from Harbin Engineering (FY 2021 Budget Adjustment)

Attest:



Laurie Riley,
Secretary



Kent Campbell,
Chairman