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## Rural survey: Fees not wanted

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Residents value convenience centers for solid waste

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CHAPEL HILL -- A survey of rural residents on solid waste services suggests that convenience centers remain the most efficient form of disposal for rural neighborhoods and indicates opposition to new services when faced with mandatory fees, according to a presentation by Orange County Voice to the Solid Waste Work Group on Tuesday.

Orange County Voice, a nonprofit citizen group with a 501c3 pending, conducted its Talkin' Trash Survey from Oct. 8 to Oct. 30, collecting only one response per household and accepting submissions only from the rural community. After eliminating forms with duplicate addresses, no address or town addresses, the group had 881 valid responses.

"We've made a dent into some of the thinking on how the rural community wants its garbage and recycling done," said Bonnie Hauser of Orange County Voice. "We're trying to make a dent that says, 'How do we bring informed community input into the county's process?'"

The survey results came in from every corner of the rural community, and Orange County Voice employed the help of a professional demographer and a statistical analyst to avoid bias and accurately assess the results.

"I was terribly impressed by how professionally it was all done," said Mark Chilton, Carrboro mayor and a member of the Solid Waste Work Group. "I expected to take it with a grain of salt because it would have some immaturish bias, but they got with some experts."

In general, the survey results show that people value the convenience centers and oppose any additional services for a fee, Hauser said.

"You can see throughout the survey even if there's an interest in the service, any time a fee came up people just shut down, they didn't want it," she said. "On the other hand, there's widespread support for the convenience centers."

The issue of the convenience centers took center stage in the survey in light of the Board of Orange County Commissioners' upcoming decision on the fate of the Bradshaw Quarry Convenience Center.

However, Chilton said he believes the survey put that question to rest since results showed most people -- 35 percent -- used convenience centers on Fridays. Only 5 percent went weekday evenings between 5 and 7 p.m., and only 10 percent went weekdays between noon and 5 p.m.

"The work group recommended that hours be adjusted at various convenience center sites so we can still operate the Bradshaw Quarry site two days a week and have a slightly less service at other sites," Chilton said.

Another major issue addressed both in the survey and at the work group meeting centered on the expansion of curbside recycling services in the rural community. Only 23 percent of respondents support expansion of curbside recycling. In general, respondents opposed the mandatory fee attached to curbside recycling, even among those households that currently use the service.

"It clearly showed that rural residents are not particularly interested in having improved services above and beyond where we are," Chilton said. "Especially not if it means paying for it."

Despite the survey results, Blair Pollock, solid waste manager, said that the Solid Waste Department has received many phone calls requesting curbside recycling.

"The work group as a whole was fairly clear in their recommendation to the board that over the next couple of years there would be expansion," he said.

Other results of the survey say that 85 percent of respondents recycle, most at convenience centers. Respondents generally opposed the concept of franchising private garbage haulers, and they disagreed with pay-as-you-throw, gate fees or yearly access fees to the convenience centers. Rather, 76 percent of the rural resident respondents support the current system in which all residents pay for the convenience centers.

"Many people think of them like libraries and schools, which not everybody uses, but these are things that make the community a better place," Hauser said.

The work group's next step involves a referral of comments back to a consultant who will hammer out a rural recycling and trash management system, a small segment of the larger solid waste plan for Orange County. Pollock said the work group brought the rural issues to the forefront in light of the convenience center debate, but the plan involves much more.

"Developing a solid waste plan that meets the county's waste reduction goals -- and does it at a cost effective and environmentally sound way -- is a major part of what the work group has strived for in the last couple of years," he said. "It's a fluid and dynamic process. It's not fixed."

Orange County Voice, in the meantime, will spread the word about its survey results and await the work group's decision, which may be announced Dec. 15 at the County Commission's last meeting of 2009.

"What we've done is we've added another piece into the dialogue," Hauser said. "Now we're trying to add the community into the conversation. We're not sure how that's going to go."