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It's time for some serious trash talking

Editor Letters

By Meg Olson

Garden

As the war of words continues over the local garbage system, Arthur Wilkowski wants to bring the discussion home.

Wilkowski, owner of Point Recycling and Refuse, said he has booked the community center for a community forum on garbage and recycling issues for August 13 at 7 p.m. and he will invite state and county regulators to attend.

* → ["I'm sending out party invitations," Wilkowski said. "It will be an open forum on garbage and recycling issues mediated by Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen." With his invitations he plans to send copies of a petition, signed by over 250 users of the local dump, in support of keeping his company as the local garbage hauler and asking the county to "work with Point Recycling to create a practical and sustainable solid waste and recycling system that meets the unique needs of Point Roberts."

* → [Since the local garbage company canceled its curbside recycling program in January following an equipment failure, the county has been pressuring the company to resume the service, required under county code. "I will be very clear. That will never happen," Wilkowski wrote to county public works director Frank Abart in May.

* → [Wilkowski has maintained that, with only 17 percent of local households participating in the curbside recycling program, it is not a cost effective way to handle recyclables in Point Roberts. He has instead put in place a free self-haul recycling program for all community members that he claims has doubled the amount of recyclable material collected.

In response to Wilkowski's refusal to resume curbside pickup of recycling the county requested a hearing before the Washington Utility and Transportation Commission(WUTC) to determine whether Wilkowski's certification as the designated garbage hauler for Point

Roberts should be revoked. The pre-hearing proceedings are expected to start in September.

Faced with losing his license, Wilkowski wrote to county and state regulators and asked for a meeting on changes he has insisted are necessary for the garbage system to become sustainable for the community. He said he has asked Abart several times for a meeting about the future of the Point Roberts garbage system. "I get no response," he said. "Every time."

In mailings and handouts to customers, Wilkowski has announced cutbacks to service "as required by the county," which he claims are in response to the county having taken "legal action which could result in the elimination of this company."

Free recycling will be cancelled and recycling will be accepted at five cents a pound. The transfer station will only be open two days a week. Tag service for infrequent pickup will be cancelled.

"The situation is beyond our control," Wilkowski wrote.

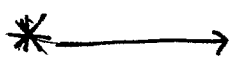
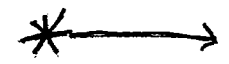
"That's not true," said county executive Pete Kremen. The county has not taken legal action against the company, he explained, only reported it for violating county code. The county does not require Wilkowski to charge for recycling. The county fee schedule only stipulates a five-cent per pound maximum charge.

The county does not limit hours of operation at the dump to four hours a day on Saturday and Sunday, but Wilkowski's lease agreement specifies those operating hours as a minimum. "We just want him to live up to his agreement," Kremen said.

Kremen agreed there needs to be a meeting in Point Roberts with all parties and community members to "see if we can get to yes," but originally thought it should wait until the outcome of the hearing. He added that county council would have to enact legislative changes if the Point needs to have specific rules for a successful garbage service.

"I want Point Roberts to have the most effective and efficient garbage service it can," said county council member Barbara Brenner. "There may need to be a legislative solution. What I'm hoping to get from the WUTC is information we need to evaluate the situation." Like other county contract and agreements, she said, she wanted outside review of the service.

Wilkowski thinks if the matter continues to a hearing on the revocation of his license it will be too late to make changes and has warned customers that "sometime in August or September there could be no garbage collection company and in November there could be no transfer station."



* → [The lease under which Point Recycling and Refuse operates the dump expires in October and Wilkowski feels "because of the county's hostile attitude" it will not be renewed. "I don't have a long term window here," he said.

* → [Kremen said the community could count on the continuation of garbage service. "Whatever the outcome of the hearing there will be garbage pickup," he said. "It may be the existing or a new company but one or more authorized franchises would be appointed by the WUTC."

At Lite Weight Recyclers, David Gellatly said they are prepared to apply to be the designated local waste hauler if the position becomes available, and they would also be interested in leasing and operating the transfer station. "We've made it very clear we would be very interested," he said.

Wilkowski has condemned Lite Weight Recyclers, which collects construction waste and scrap metal and sells it to recyclers in Canada, as "sham recyclers" that undermine the local garbage company by removing material from the waste stream which he claims is not "recycling" because a portion ends up being ground up and purchased from the Canadian recyclers to be used instead of earth as daily cover by the landfill at Burns Bog.

Gellatly said his company provides cost-effective recycling options for the community and hopes to continue to do so. "I'm going to explore commercial recycling because right now there is none, and look at some other recycling options" he said. "There's a niche there and I can provide it."

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