

No increase in landfill rates for next year

CC Solid Waste Authority adopts \$7.4 million budget

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McELHATTAN - Not only has the Clinton County Solid Waste Authority balanced its budget for 2009, but it has done so without having to raise the rates for municipal waste coming into the Wayne Township Landfill.

General Manager Jay Alexander credits that success to plain old smart business practices - the landfill staff's ability to work efficiently and the authority's decision to be ready for a potentially bleak economic future.

"We've diversified ourselves very well with hauling, methane gas sales, mulch sales, that kind of stuff. We've tried to prepare ourselves for a downturn in the economy. We've seen the daily tonnage numbers go down because of the economy, but internally, we've been able to control or cut costs with efficiencies in the way our staff handles things," Alexander said.

Thanks to this forward thinking, the rates charged to commercial haulers and cash customers will stay right where they are.

- Commercial haulers - \$49 per ton.

- Cash customers - \$18 for a standard-sized pickup truck load, \$30 for an oversized pickup truck load or a pickup truck with a trailer, or \$3.50 per bag.

The lack of rate increases will probably come as a pleasant surprise to haulers who've been bringing their trash to the landfill for any significant amount of time, Alexander said. "The last couple years, we've raised them mildly to try to offset some of our expenses."

The general manager was also quick to note there have been no layoffs.

"Our staff has met all the challenges it needed to do a budget and not have to raise rates," Alexander said.

The landfill has also increased its financial stability by receiving income from a range of different sources.

"We're a lot more than just garbage here," said Marci A. Williams, accountant. In fact, waste disposal only comprised 47 percent of the landfill's year-to-date income by the end of October.

Eighteen percent of the landfill's income so far this year has come from its own trash-hauling services, while 10 percent has come from methane gas sales. Revenues from Clinton County residents paying \$30 for curbside recycling collection and selling collected recyclables has provided 12 percent of the landfill's income to date this year. The remaining 13 percent of income has come from interest and dividends, sales of equipment and other miscellaneous sources.

The 2009 budget shows \$7.455 million in revenue and includes a surplus of \$43,187. In this year's budget, revenue was listed at \$6.783 million with a surplus of \$30,125.

That boost in the surplus was also made possible by a drop in capital expenditures, from \$1,732,500 to \$1,497,000.

Employee overhead and operating expenses are projected to rise from \$2,252,815 in 2008 to \$2,611,832 in 2009, and \$2,635,150 to \$3,157,650, respectively.

In addition to the surplus, the larger general budget shows a \$12,920 increase in the contingency fund - \$145,329 compared to \$132,409 in 2008 - thanks to the authority's self-imposed rule that 2 percent of the general budget must be set aside for that fund.

The good news at the authority's meeting last night kept coming, even after the budget with a surplus was unanimously approved. Alexander reported \$90,525 in methane gas sales to Jersey Shore Steel in the month of October, a new record.

"We had our best month ever with Jersey Shore Steel," said Alexander.

But that's when the bad news crept in.

"However, they also told us that the brakes have clearly come on in their operations," he continued. "They're going to shut down for the week of Thanksgiving, the week after Thanksgiving and probably the week after that."

That would mean no methane gas sales for two to three weeks, putting quite a damper on the landfill's numbers for November and December. Alexander explained the plant typically shuts down every year for the week after Thanksgiving to do heavy maintenance, and the landfill also uses that time to shut compressors down and do other routine maintenance to its equipment that processes and sends the methane gas to Jersey Shore Steel. Any shutdown lasting longer than that expected week would have a negative impact on the landfill's business during that time.

Among the new capital items budgeted for 2009 are a \$15,000 automatic onsite fuel station for the administration building; a \$188,000 963 machine, \$10,000 in laser equipment, \$3,500 for tracks for the Bobcat T300, and \$12,000 for tires for the 980 machine in the field; \$21,000 in roof renovations and a \$130,000 cardboard collection truck for the recycling center; and a \$4,000 diesel pump, \$10,000 air pumps and a \$15,000 update to the Polaris for the plant and gas divisions.