

# 'PCB Recycles Same Trashy Idea'

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The Panama City Beach City Council believes in recycling. Unfortunately, it believes in recycling bad ideas. Take the mandatory single trash-hauler proposal — please!

Before Mike Thomas was a Bay County commissioner he was a PCB city councilman. His attempt to foist this bad idea on residents in the late 1990s was rejected by people who value consumer choice and free market competition. Now PCB Mayor Gayle Oberst is promoting a franchise system that would give one company exclusive rights to pick up everyone's trash.

The problem is that most of her constituents don't want it. At least that's what they've said recently on my morning radio show.

Currently, residents are able to hire one of three private trash haulers. Ninety percent of residents do just that, and most are happy with their service. But one caller to my show explained the ostensible problem that has pushed this issue to the fore: "When you leave it to the people, too many won't get trash service." Indeed, some people are irresponsible and dump trash illegally. It's a serious enough problem that everyone agrees something needs to be done.

The caller's fear of "leaving it to the people" precisely is what threatens principles of freedom everywhere. The question is: Does robbing people of choice and running trash companies out of town best address the problem of illegal dumping?

A consultant has presented three options to the city council: 1) Keep the current system but make participation verifiably mandatory; 2) create a municipal trash service; 3) contract with one private trash company, which Mayor Oberst endorses.

My listeners overwhelmingly favor the first suggestion. But methinks constituents are going to get hosed. For whatever reason, the City Council is determined to push through the last option. I'm left wondering who's behind this boondoggle. If we followed the money, where would it lead us?

Because some people are dumping trash illegally is no justification to establish a monopoly trash service. Though not a traditional monopoly, the key effect would be that competition would be excluded, threatening customer satisfaction.

Once established, the trash company or city officials could cut service from twice per week to once per week. Some say that's not likely, but it has already happened in other municipalities. Try calling and complaining when you have nowhere else to turn.

It's not uncommon for companies to push for change after winning a contract with a city. The trash collectors for PCB recently requested more money for their services. Coastal Parasail Incorporated asked the Tourist Development Council for an additional \$41,000 annually to cover maintenance, fuel and operation expenses. This comes after the corporation was awarded another five-year contract.

Switching to a single-hauler system is unethical because it would put good people out of work. Awarding one trash company the exclusive contract would send the others packing. "I've grown and built what I have by working hard," said Wanda Beason, the owner of Parker Sanitation on Panama City Beach. "And now all of a sudden, they don't need me anymore. That hurts." All three trash companies have earned their business fairly, and should not be forced out of town.

Neither should satisfied customers be forced to discontinue their current service. Voluntary exchanges in the marketplace are more likely to lead to satisfactory business arrangements than government enforced monopolies.

One concerned resident sent me an email asking what she and others could do to protect their rights to choose their own trash service. I recommend two approaches: First, make your voices heard in no uncertain terms — write letters to the editor and call my show. Second, contact City Council members directly to express your concerns in a concise and cogent manner.

Why didn't the City Council ask their constituents for solutions to the illegal dumping problem rather than paying a consultant? Ken Nelson, the lone city councilman who consistently respects principles of freedom, recommends placing Dumpsters in strategic places to mitigate illegal dumping. Listeners agreed with him that government encroachment into the trash business is unwarranted and wrongheaded. In the end, how much will the City Council value the wishes of its constituents?

The City Council should not recycle this bad idea whose time has passed. It should dump the single-hauler idea and enforce the code against illegal dumping.