

Recycling study gets council approval

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The city council voted to approve a \$4,000 contribution to a countywide recycling study Wednesday evening.

Claremont County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio spoke to the council and fielded their questions regarding the study, which created significant debate among council members.

"Our goal is to take a regional approach to recycling," said Gil de Rubio. "We want to take a proactive approach."

The study is a combined effort on the part of Antioch of New England's Waste Action Collaborative for Sullivan County, and a business plan aimed at forecasting the feasibility of a regional materials recovery facility authored by Resource Recycling Systems Inc. of Michigan.

The project's total cost is \$16,500. The county was seeking the \$4,000 contribution from Claremont in addition to an equal contribution from the town of Newport, \$6,000 from Antioch and \$3,000 from the county's general fund.

The proposal required a two-thirds vote, and although it eventually passed 6 to 3, some had their doubts.

"Do we put our existing plans (regarding possible solutions to recycling) on hold while we wait for this study to be completed?" asked Assistant Mayor Christopher Irish.

Irish added that he doesn't think it's a good idea for the city, or money well spent. "I guarantee we end up being the odd man out ... We've already seen what can happen when we get ourselves into a position like this," he said.

Councilman James Neilsen IV agreed with Irish, saying, "Let's be careful about getting involved in a Wheelabrator by another name," referring to the tenuous relationship Wheelabrator's advanced recycling program has with the city.

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Neilsen added that a "14- or 15-town deal just isn't realistic."

But Councilor Deborah Cutts said she's "disgusted that nothing has been done. I sat here a year ago and said I didn't want to see any more 'studies.' We always look at these things, but that's all, we just look at it, and we never do anything."

Mayor Scott Pope admitted that "this is the first study I've seen that actually sets out to accomplish something. This is a real business plan, not just another 'philosophical statement.'"

Despite relative unanimity that the issue of recycling must be dealt with, others on the council remained wary.

"I'm not for joining any effort that leaves us without total control. We've been down that road, and we paid the price. We had doors shut in our representative's faces and we were shut out of meetings, so I don't support being potentially messed with that hard again," said Councilor Heather Bopp.

City Manager Guy Santagate simply advised the council to "be careful who you crawl in bed with," and added he would endorse contributing to the study as long as it carries no long-term obligations for participation, an assurance provided immediately afterward by Gil de Rubio.

"Zero communities have lobbied against these studies once they were in place," said Cutts. "I'm not happy about yet another study either, but I support this one because it's on the sort of grand scale we've been waiting for."

Councilman Michael Prozzo ultimately supported the deal, based on his feeling that "we're getting a \$17,000 study for \$4,000."

Also from Wednesday evening's meeting, the council voted not to approve H. Clay and Christine Hawkins' of Windsor Road, request for an easement on their property taxes. The request relates to the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance's effort to create tax incentives to "help save old New Hampshire barns," according to the organization's Web site.

"Approving this (tax easement) won't bankrupt us. I'm not afraid of doing it. Every community is doing it. I think we should do this to recognize the value of this to the people in our city, as well as the cultural

history of it," said Cutts, comparing the barn to an historic bridge, or the mill district.

But Bopp disagreed, saying "the bridge, I'll be walking on. The mill district, I can eat in. This barn, I can only look at from the road. If I put vinyl siding on my house I now want a tax break because it makes the city of Claremont prettier, but that's not going to happen."

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