

City will ban cardboard at landfill

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Bill Arnold drops off his recyclables on Friday near Seacrest Field. "We recycle more than we throw out. My wife and I barely have a single sack for the garbage man each week," he said.

Mary Reifschneider, 89, drops off her recyclables on Friday near Seacrest Field in east Lincoln. "These bins are overflowing," she said.

Lincoln will begin banning cardboard from the city landfill in April 2018, under a new ordinance that is expected to be approved by the City Council next month.

Banning just cardboard from the landfill could increase the amount of material recycled in Lincoln by 40 percent, said Councilwoman Jane Raybould, who has been active in promoting recycling.

“This is a giant step forward,” said Mayor Chris Beutler, who was surrounded by recycling supporters at the Friday morning news conference on the proposed recycling ordinance. Currently the city buries about 19,000 tons of cardboard in the landfill every year, he said.

The ban will not directly mandate that people recycle, but Lincoln residents will have to either sign up for curbside recycling with a hauler or take their cardboard to the city’s free recycling sites once the ban begins.

The cardboard ban is part of the compromises worked out among City Council members and the mayor over the past three weeks.

Other compromise issues deal with the city budget process, including changes that will give the council more time and information on the budget. The council will also get money to hire its own research staff.

The compromise recycling ordinance will require the city’s private trash haulers to offer curbside recycling, which most already do, and to report recycling numbers to the city each year.

The city will be adding 17 more containers for cardboard at the city sites to handle the increased recycling, said Gene Hanlon, recycling coordinator.

“That will more than double the capacity we currently have and we hope that is enough to handle the demand,” he said. Hanlon expects more people will also sign up for curbside recycling at their homes.

The ban will also apply to trash brought to the city landfill from outside the city limits, effectively requiring people in the county to recycle cardboard.

Councilman Trent Fellers, who worked out the compromise issues over the past few weeks, said he will vote for the recycling ordinance and expects one or two of the other Republican council members to also approve the cardboard ban.

The City Council will hold a public hearing on the proposal at its Jan. 30 meeting, which begins at 5:30 p.m. They will likely vote on it at a Feb. 6 meeting.

The proposal will not have any criminal penalties attached. Haulers will be required to separate cardboard from other trash at the landfill or pay the city staff to do it.

"No one is going to be be policing your trash," said Councilwoman Leirion Gaylor Baird.

It will still be against the law to dump things illegally along streets and roads and at the city recycling sites.

Last year Beutler had proposed a recycling ordinance that banned cardboard, newspaper and other paper products from the landfill over a three-year period. Republicans on the City Council removed the landfill bans from that proposal, and Beutler vetoed the modified ordinance.

Late last year recycling supporters began a petition campaign to get the mayor's original landfill ban on the May city ballot.

Volunteers, who had collected more than 6,000 signatures, said they believe they could have collected enough to get the issue on the ballot.

Volunteers also said people who have moved to Lincoln from other communities were surprised that Lincoln did not have a well-established recycling program, said Raybould.

The cardboard ban will help the city manage the landfill efficiently. "It makes no sense to bury items that have value," Raybould said.

The ban extends the life of the city landfill and thus saves taxpayer money, said Gaylor Baird. "It's not only good for our environment, it is good for our city's bottom line," she said.

The proposed ordinance requirement that haulers report annually on recycling efforts will give city leaders information that can be used to decide whether to expand the landfill ban, said Beutler.

At the news conference recycling advocates and people who worked on the petition drive thanked the City Council for finding common ground.

Conservation is a uniting force that transcends political affiliations, said Chelsea Johnson, with the League of Conservation Voters. More than half of the more than 6,000 people who have signed the recycling petition were Republicans or independents, Raybould said.

The compromise recycling ordinance is a win for compromise itself, a win for the people of Lincoln, a win for the environment, and a win for economics, said Jesse Starita, a recycling volunteer.

The cardboard landfill ban will extend the life of the landfill, currently expected to close in 2032, he said.

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