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OUR OPINION

A new era in trash

City's decision to update garbage collection should extend to planned rate hikes

They'll take the couch.

Yes, sanitation workers in Elyria will take a couch if a resident puts it on the tree lawn for pickup. No special arrangement is necessary ahead of time.

Couch pickup is part of what defines the Sanitation Department's commitment to the city's residents and what sets its service apart from other operations, public and private.

"We set a pretty high standard," Safety Service Director Chris Eichenlaub told us Tuesday. "Our Sanitation Department is quick, efficient and we take just about everything."

Eichenlaub is determined to maintain that reputation when the department switches next year to automated pickup. City Council unanimously approved the switch on Monday. The city will replace its mostly worn-out fleet of two-man, rear-packing garbage and recycling trucks with new automated one-man trucks that save workers the task of handling garbage and recyclables. The trucks employ mechanical arms to pick up and empty carts filled with garbage and recyclables. The city will buy carts for all 16,500 households and distribute them to residents for their use.

The switch to automated pickup is a trend throughout the waste industry because it has so many advantages: It requires fewer workers. It's safer for workers, who traditionally suffer from a high rate of injury. It encourages recycling.

As the list of benefits suggests, automated pickup reduces some costs. It will save the city roughly \$254,000 in handling garbage and recyclables. The city will use the savings so that it can maintain large-item pickup, assist older residents who can't handle the carts and bolster brush pickup. The department operates now with 23 employees and will need 20 to 21 in the future, Eichenlaub said. The exact number will become clearer as the department rolls out the new program in spring 2010, he said. He anticipated that the department would continue to operate on roughly the same \$3 million annual budget.

Council raised water, sewer and sanitation rates early this year to pay for major infrastructure projects, including new sanitation trucks. Now that it has decided to switch to the less-expensive automated system rather than simply replace the rear packers, we hope it will review the sanitation rate increases it approved.

We're all for maintaining the extraordinary level of service the department provides; we're not for gold-plating it. If the new revenue from this year's 17 percent sanitation rate increase is more than needed to maintain the service level, we hope Council will scale back or eliminate increases of roughly 5 percent per year that it approved for 2010-13.

OTHER OPINIONS

NATO troops signal support for Obama

While the United States is taking on more of the burden in Afghanistan, the pledge from allies to send about 7,000 more troops is encouraging.

Most of the additional troops will be coming from NATO nations — about 1,000 from Italy, 500 from Britain and 600 from Poland. But non-NATO allies Georgia and South Korea are pledging an additional 1,400 troops. And the numbers could rise: France is still considering its commitment, and Germany is waiting until January to make an announcement.

Beyond the importance to President Barack Obama's surge, for which the United States is sending in 30,000 additional troops, the new commitments are symbolically significant.

The war in Afghanistan has become politically divisive, especially in Europe. To pledge more troops against this backdrop is a strong sign that the world is once again standing by the side of the United States. This is important news for American efforts in Afghanistan.

Perhaps of greater significance, the troop support provides a stamp of approval for Obama's foreign policy approach. And that means future endeavors have a greater chance of success.

The new troops will bring allied support to about 45,000. They'll raise the overall troop total to just fewer than 150,000.

While the international support isn't likely to reach the level of 10,000 troops that Obama had hoped for, news of the commitments was welcome, and needed.

As British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said: "We all know that in the 1990s, Afghanistan was the incubator of international terrorism, the incubator of choice for global jihad. The badlands of the Afghan-Pakistan border are a threat to people everywhere, whatever their religion, and that's why it's very important that we make progress."

— The Kansas City Star



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Residents have a right to hold recall election

If the recall provision was only intended for extraordinary, corrupt or criminal acts in office, then it should have been written as such in the city charter. It appears the charter was too broad or poorly written. This is not the fault of voters who gathered signatures or signed the recall petition. They were only doing a legal act provided for in the city charter.

When the voting is done and the results are announced, perhaps the charter wording should be studied and revised to more clearly define under what circumstances a recall election can be held.

Who knows, maybe Safety Service Director Chris Eichenlaub may be a more viable person to handle the position of mayor of this once proud city.

Also, when I voted early at the Lorain County Board of Elections, the ballot wording was not confusing. It simply stated, "Shall William Grace continue as mayor of Elyria, yes or no."

JACK C. STANDEN
Elyria

County commissioners are trimming the waste

The only redeeming thing that has come out of the great recession is that it has forced the county commissioners to make some fiscally responsible decisions. Shutting down Lorain County Transit is the first step. I can only hope that the Lorain County Regional Airport is next. Both the buses and the airport have been huge money losers for years. Had the county gotten rid of these albatrosses years ago, the general fund would be in much better shape today.

As for the Sheriff's Department, I see

no reason why the townships should expect free police protection. Townships in other Ohio counties maintain their own police departments, and it should be the same in Lorain County.

I find it interesting that the city of Elyria's new plan for trash trucks with robotic arms and single drivers is projected to save the city money, while Allied Waste tells us it will cost us more money because they will need more routes and trucks. And, by the way, you will have to pay extra to get your old couch hauled away. All this goes on while the county commissioners debate Allied Waste's request to lower fees paid to the county.

Recycling in Lorain County is a joke. It does not include boxboard, cardboard glossy paper or even common copy paper. Not to mention easy recycling of tires, paint, electronics and computers. Lorain County Solid Waste Management should be next on the hit list, since about all it can manage is to donate some benches to the Lorain County Fair.

RUDY RINGWALL
North Ridgeville

Public transit cut will cause ripple effect across county

As The Chronicle-Telegram has highlighted, many federal dollars and jobs will be lost with the discontinuation of Lorain County's contract with First Transit Inc. More importantly, the loss of public transportation has a deeper ripple effect on our community.

Those most affected by these cuts are the low income and vulnerable populations in Lorain County. Many use LCT to travel to jobs. Without LCT providing that transportation, unemployment will increase in a county already suffering from a disproportionately high unem-

ployment rate. Additionally, families who already suffered from job loss will be unable to apply for public benefits and health care if they do not have transportation to the Lorain County Department of Job and Family Services. LCT cuts will create a further inability for those who are seeking employment to fulfill the work requirement that Job and Family Services imposes on those who receive public benefits.

Without access to public transportation, the residents who desperately want to support themselves and their families will be unable to obtain or potentially retain their jobs.

At Legal Aid, we secure justice and help provide access to employment for those who are low income and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions. The elimination of LCT will harm the client community we work so hard to assist.

JESSICA BAGGETT
Elyria

Baggett is managing attorney for the Lorain County office of the Legal Aid Society.

Letters to the editor guidelines

The Chronicle-Telegram welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are subject to editing for brevity, accuracy and clarity.

Letters should be 250 words or shorter. Letters longer than 250 words may be edited to approximately the required length.

Include your signature, full home address and telephone number.

BY MAIL: Editorial Page Editor, The Chronicle-Telegram, Box 4010, Elyria, OH 44036

BY FAX: 329-7282. Attention, Editorial Page Editor.

BY E-MAIL (preferred): letters@chroniclet.com.

On Prudoff, Grace and Eichenlaub...

It's time to unload a mildewed amalgam of half-baked half-thoughts, some of those nagging predilections and aversions that crowd a consciousness begging for expression however brief and tardy. They are zombie-thoughts, only half alive yet restless and haunting until pinned down and confronted. Then they disappear as quickly as a \$20 bill on a bar top.

The CRA mess in Lorain is an entirely appropriate entanglement for Sandy Prudoff to leave as his legacy. Only Darth Vader himself would come up with the idea of tax rebates for people who already bought their homes years ago coupled with an unwarranted application fee to his own office. Not surprisingly, it soon angered and involved Council members, county and state officials, homeowners and enough smooth-riding lawyers to start a Lexus dealership. It's an embarrassing sideshow of the type Lorain is famous for and that Prudoff has provided for decades.

Have Lorain Police Chief Cel Rivera and his department just written off West 17th and 18th streets? There has to be less gunplay in the neighborhoods of Kabul than these 10 square blocks in central Lorain. Is this considered a dispensable neighborhood because its residents are poor and mostly black? Of course not.

The city must do whatever is necessary to take back those streets, including turning the chief loose with a shotgun and an unmarked car, just like the old days.

No one but a disgruntled firefighter would consider them a recall-provoking offense, but the roses and light poles on SR57 in Elyria are a failure by any engineering or aesthetic point of view. And, by the way, whatever happened to that audit of the Fire Department? There was gold to be mined from that report, but



JOHN COLE

Elyria was bullied out of it.

The Lorain County Visitors Center's location is laughable but it's too late to do anything about that. Its architecture is a matter of faulty taste but it's too late to do anything about that.

Something needs to be done, however, to correct a tired, almost seedy, appearance. It may be off the beaten path (unless you're looking for Jamie's Flea Market) and it may be inhospitable-looking, but it should be immaculately groomed, landscaped, flowered and washed. There's not much beauty or imagination on display here.

Don't get between a Smith and a Smitek, especially during last month's election. Gary Smitek, Avon Mayor Jim Smith's cousin, ran for Council and in the process criticized the size of the city's debt and singlehandedly sank the new library levy. The thin-skinned but hugely popular mayor worked for other candidates and Smitek lost. More to come as the mayor flirts with retirement.

Lorain needs to shrink to a one high school town as soon as possible. Send all students to Southview temporarily while Admiral King is demolished, build the new high school at the Admiral King site and name it Lorain Admiral King High School. It's the very best name for a lot of reasons, but if it's too touchy for the school board, call it Lorain Obama High School and be done with it.

Is there a better candidate for federal stimulus money than closing Lorain's sewer plant at the mouth of the Black River, moving it upstream and building a

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regional facility across from the steel plant? It's a green-footprint, job-creating infrastructure project in a chronically-depressed Democrat stronghold.

Whether it's George Bush or stimulus, it never seems to trickle down to Lorain.

The vote on Dec. 22 to recall Elyria Mayor Bill Grace will be eagerly interpreted by friend and foe alike. A large vote to keep Grace as the mayor could rejuvenate him to run again and pass some taxes. A close vote could energize the mayoral aspirations of any number of pretenders to the throne. If he's recalled, we have to learn how to spell Eichenlaub.

It becomes more apparent every month that Interstate 90 is Lorain County's main street, its most sought after address and its most compulsive addiction.

Big boxes, bigger boxes, hospitals, car dealers, law firms, ball stadiums, fast foods, gas stations — all the growth that in years past would occur downtown is now draped across the interstate like charms on a bracelet. It drains us so that we hardly have any cities left but we can't live without it as our roads turn into interchanges and our interchanges sell out at higher and higher prices.

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