

REDUCES RECYCLES

RECYCLE

Midland sees increase in participation with new recycling program

MARYELLEN TIGHE
for the Daily News

Eighteen months ago, only one-half of Midland residents participated in the city recycling program.

Once curbside recycling decreased from every other week to once a month in the fall of 2009, the amount city residents recycled decreased from 139 tons to 109 tons, said Janet Yuergens, assistant director of Public Services, causing concern.

"We just didn't feel like it was an effective recycling program," she said.

So when the recycling collection contract with Republic Waste Services expired at the end of July, the city signed a contract for upgraded recycling services, which started Aug. 1, Yuergens said.

The \$366,300 five-year contract caused an immediate increase in participation rates; they climbed to 65 percent in August and then 85 percent in September. Rates have held steady since then, Yuergens said.

The new program replaced 14-gallon bins with 95-gallon carts as part of the single stream system, said Stephanie Glysson, Republic Waste Services senior manager of government affairs and municipal services for Michigan. The single stream system eliminates the need for truck drivers to sort at the curb by sorting through the many more items accepted at a specific facility.

"Recycling used to be by drop-off, by volunteers... as more and more communities and their residents were demanding the ability to recycle the industry responded," Glysson said. "Back in the '80s we used to have a truck that would have one stream for glass and one stream for plastic ... products were divided into fibers and rigid containers."

As more products could be recycled, trucks were spending longer in the neighborhood

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sorting items, she said. The new system allows trucks to get in and out of neighborhoods. The carts also prevent items from blowing away, unlike the smaller bins.

"People love the carts, they love the ease of the carts and the single stream system," Yuergens said. "There's no sorting, you just drop it in the bin. Residents find that they have more than enough to fill that cart in a month's time."

Jean Cronin, who has lived in the historic neighborhood downtown for eight years, said she has seen a 50 percent increase in the number of her neighbors who recycle since the program was implemented.

She said her family recycled before the program, even when they had to take items to the recycling center because the old program didn't pick them up, but she said the new system makes recycling much easier. She said a system like this is important, especially in a city like Midland that prides itself on being green and future-oriented.

"The key to getting more people to recycle is you have to make it easy for them," Cronin said. "I know that it's very hard to prove that they're getting their money back... but it's got to pay off in the long term."

The previous program cost \$283,500, Yuergens said. The rate increase was for the upgraded service and because the city's contract expired.

The additional 84 tons a month that is being recycled is not making its way to the landfill, which could add to the life of the site, but it is difficult to tell how much with just six months of change, said Scott O'Laughlin, landfill superintendent.

"(There could be) 1,250 yards approximately per year of savings, which results in just under 1 percent reduction in approximate volume over the course of a year," O'Laughlin said.

The recycling that used to go to the landfill is now shipped to Republic Waste Services Pinconning division, Glysson said.

There the materials are transferred to compactors and are shipped to locations in Huron Township or Ann Arbor to be sorted, she said.

"It's a combination of mechanical and hand sorting, Glysson said. "After it's sorted it is bailed, then it goes to various end markets."

End markets are buyers who are interested in the raw recyclables, she said. Who buys the materials varies week by week, depending on who offers to pay the most.

The plastics recycled could be coming back to users as re-usable grocery bags or laundry detergent bottles, Glysson said. It all depends on who buys them next.

"We have devoted our financial resources to single stream recycling," she said. "We believe that is the future of recycling."