

# *Garbage Haulers for Citizen Choice*

## **New Hope City Council Meeting Transcript September 25, 2017**

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Present: Mayor Kathi Hemken (2009-2020)  
Council Member John Elder (2009-2018)  
Council Member Andy Hoffe (2005-2020)  
Council Member Eric Lammler (2009-2020)  
Council Member Jonathan London (2015-2018)  
City Manager Kirk McDonald

### **Mayor Hemken**

. . . in Part 1, a motion maintaining the city's open garbage collection system. At our — do you want to talk about that?

### **City Manager McDonald**

I was just going to say, so at the September 18<sup>th</sup> work session we presented the results of the survey that were [unintelligible] regarding changes to an organized garbage collection system, and council members discussed the results and shared the feedback that they each received from residents. So at the work session, the majority of Council expressed their support in maintaining the city's current system and directed the staff to place this item on the agenda, so that's why it's on the agenda today. And I just wanted to point out that out of the 1,284 surveys that were completed, either online or in paper form, 48.9 percent of the respondents strongly opposed or opposed changing the system, while 42.68 percent strongly favored or favored an organized system, while 8.3 percent were undecided. That's all I was going to say.

### **Mayor Hemken**

I think you meant that the 48.9 percent, they voted to keep the system the way it was?

### **City Manager McDonald**

That's right.

### **Mayor Hemken**

Okay. I wanted to make sure I understood. John?

### **Councilmember Elder**

I will make a motion to send this item back to staff to continue to work on getting us further details on how organized garbage collection would impact our community. I'd entertain a second.

### **Councilmember Lammler**

I will second.

**Mayor Hemken**

Okay. It's been moved and seconded. Any discussion? Eric?

**Councilmember Lamble**

I've been on this — and let me be clear. Without violating the open meeting law, there's no way I can tell how this vote can go, but I have my feelings based on the work session. And that is that if we have that vote, organized trash collection could fit. I do intend to support organized trash collection, and I'll explain briefly why.

I've been on this Council since early 2009. In that time, I always enjoyed the way we've never shied from an issue, even when people said, "Well, you can't talk about that." Well, that's kind of our job to talk about things that are sometimes unpopular. Sometimes we disagreed, then we listened to each other, made our case, and tried to win that — raise the count to three votes, sometimes four. And all those times there was always someone that couldn't make it past two; sometimes they couldn't make it past one. When we had our vote, the entire Council owned the decision and moved on, so hopefully this will be another one of those times.

The question before us is whether we begin negotiations for organized trash collection. I've never supported a single hauler. I have concerns with who would be doing the billing. I also have concerns about pricing, complaint handling, and contract negotiations. Contrary to what many have been told, none of that was established, none of that was set in stone, and if we don't get to have that discussion, we don't get to three votes, we don't discuss it further. Anyone who's keeping track of how this matter came up, knows that it came up at least twice since my election in 2008. On both occasions, I was opposed to it.

So having said that, I think there's some things that we can study that maybe might change some minds, might not change some minds, but I think we should discuss some of those things. Some examples I might have is, you know, discussing single-side collection, the possibility of limiting the number of licenses we issue. I think it is known and made apparent to the haulers that we intend to refute — well, that we'd be limiting the number of licenses and not issuing new ones. I think we would probably see a large hauler buy out a smaller one. They do it; they've done it before. This would reduce traveling.

The other thing is I do believe the science that says that they are causing extra wear and tear on our streets. A good analogy is to place a dumpster on your driveway once a week, never move it, then put it back there. Sorry it's not a 10 — you don't have a 10-ton driveway, but you've got to pay for it anyway. So one of the things that I might be suggesting is franchise fees so that the hauler might be responsible for some of what they did. Before I — I'm not going to read my whole spiel here, but I'm leaving out at least a page here — you're welcome!

[Laughter]

One of the things that brought me from “no” to “yes,” was the way the haulers presented their information, or should I say disinformation. We don’t have lobbyists. The citizens of New Hope don’t have lobbyists to call and knock on doors and send mailers. We do it ourselves. These folks like to send out these flyers containing disinformation about what they thought we were doing or what they wanted you to think we were doing, and a lot of the argument that we received was based on that. To those that gave respectful arguments for and against organized hauling, thank you. That said, I live in a community with 175 homes. We have an organized system. For some reason, the haulers chose not to contact us. Go figure.

I think that continuing this discussion, rather than ending it, is a good idea, whether it changes minds or not. So thank you.

**Mayor Hemken**

[Inaudible]?

**Councilmember London**

[Inaudible]. Thank you. You know, I was disappointed that, you know — well, I will say this. I’m happy that we could possibly continue discussion, because had we not, or if we don’t, we’ll never have actually investigated what benefits the residents would receive. We still don’t know what the system would look like, what the prices possibly would be, what the — how the contracts would be set — what terms, whether people would receive yard waste, different container sizes, full-year/partial-year options.

So to say that we were going to end it before we ever discussed the actual specifics of the plan was, you know, a complete, I think, shock to me, because how can you ever sell and get people to approve something if they don’t even know what they’re going to get? And that’s something that I had proposed in the loss/aversion bias. I knew going into this that people were going to oppose the change 4:1 anyway, you know, because people just fear losing something that they know versus gaining something that they don’t know. And we — you know, we didn’t really ever discuss the specifics.

You know, that being said, the people that opposed the plan, as Council Member Lammale addressed, often was incited to do so, and many of the opposition came right after this flyer was mailed to everyone. I received it as well, and the calls ensued. And yet, as Council Member Lammale said and I’ll agree, much of it was misinformation, because, as I just stated, and as the discussion here is to move things along to discuss further specifics, we don’t even know the specifics.

So, you know, one of the things I wanted to — and the reason I wanted to address this is because there’s something called negative extranalties, and there’s a large cost of 50-plus trucks. Yes, there’s seven haulers, but let’s again remind everyone there’s 56, 50-some trucks that are licensed to operate in New Hope. The haulers all own more than one truck, so you have the wear and tear that is not passed on, other than the taxpayers may pay it when we fix the streets and have to maintain things, in your garbage bill. They just simply have a tipping cost when they

take the garbage to the incinerator or the dump, and you pay per pound. And they don't assess you based on — because we could somehow — the studies that we've looked at and the engineering studies say that it could be \$100,000 to \$300,000 a year in cost savings if we went and reduced the amount of trucks on the roads. Well, I think that's significant, you know, but people — whether you want to look at the Minnesota Department of Transportation studies or not, you know, again, the physics is these trucks are heavy and they equate to 1,000 to 3,000 car trips, so each time — and I've counted 22 trucks up and down my block on a given Tuesday. Now, that could be 60,000 cars driving up and down my street, and so it takes, you know, again, just like smoking, it doesn't kill you on your first time. It may take an extended period of time, and some people will live to 100 being a smoker, but somehow in this country, we realized, "Oh, second hand smoke. Yeah, that is a large negative extranality," and people shouldn't have to pay for that. And so this, again, is a large negative extranality that I'm trying to hold someone accountable for and document what the possible cost would be so that the full costs are identified and paid for in the system.

So I hope — you know, it's not a chance to politicize any — everyone. No one contacted me saying, "I want my freedom of choice removed," you know. No one calls and says that. No one's even for that, but in trying to look at what's happening to the taxes in the City over the next decade, I simply said, you know, in 2014 or before, the road condition was fair to 4. There was an engineering study. We've got 65 miles of streets in the City, and it cost us in the tens of millions of dollars to maintain and continue to upgrade these streets, and so I'm just pushing forward a strategy to possibly reduce the wear and tear on the streets to elongate their life, and that will, then, reduce the amount of taxes in the near term or push them off as far as possible. So that — I —

**Mayor Hemken**

Andy?

**Councilmember Hoffe**

What you're asking for is more research. Is that correct?

**Councilmember Elder**

That's exactly right.

**Councilmember Lammle**

Yes, correct.

**Councilmember Hoffe**

So one of the questions would be the cost savings for residents. That statement has been made. Where does it come from? How do you get that? Another one would be the actual cost of the street wear caused by the garbage trucks. I know you've just mentioned many of the — how do we document that? And, finally, the cost to the City of not just setting this up and handling it, but there will be complaints. Who's going to take care of the complaints? This is just for research?

**Councilmember Elder**

Yes. That's all it is, Councilman Hoffe, and those are all valid questions.

**Mayor Hemken**

Just to do — just I need to defend staff a little bit on this. The first question we asked staff, why we did this, was, “Do you have any interest in continuing with this project?” We did not say we had to do it, we're not going to do it. We said, “Does the public have any interest in considering this any further?” And it was very clear to us that they did not, and that's why that vote came at the work session. I think your motion is well thought out, and now it's time to tell them, “Yes, we do want some more information, and we'll get that.”

So, with that, we have a motion. Take the vote.

**City Clerk**

Council Member Hoffe?

**Councilmember Hoffe**

Yes.

**City Clerk**

Council Member London?

**Councilmember London**

Yes.

**City Clerk**

Council Member Lammale?

**Councilmember Lammale**

Yes.

**City Clerk**

Council Member Elder?

**Councilmember Elder**

Yes.

**City Clerk**

Mayor Hemken?

**Mayor Hemken**

Yes.

**City Clerk**

Thank you.

**Mayor Hemken**

So, thank you. Well, after we thank you, Jeff for all your work getting us to this point, you've got some more work to do. Thank you.

**City Manager McDonald**

And if I could just add, so I think it's only appropriate — and obviously the next time it's discussed at the Council level — that it ought to be well publicized so the public is well informed.

**Unidentified Council Member**

Please.

**Mayor Hemken**

Yes.

**Unidentified Council Member**

Please.

**Mayor Hemken.**

Yeah, this never was meant to decide whether we were going to do it or not. It was simply meant to give staff direction whether they should pursue this or not.

[END OF DISCUSSION]