

Mandatory commercial garbage service for South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed



Mandatory commercial trash pick up in South Lake Tahoe is closer to becoming a reality.

The City Council on Dec. 8 voted 5-0 to direct staff to come up with an ordinance that would require every business in town pay for garbage service. Right now it is voluntary.

South Tahoe Refuse has 610 collection accounts and more than 400 customers who haul the trash themselves to the transfer station.

Residences already have mandatory garbage pick up in the city limits. That bill includes being able to put out an unlimited number of cans or bags on a weekly basis.

Commercial customers are not expected to be offered the same deal.

As it is now, commercial businesses pay based on the size of the dumpster and how many times STR empties it, or by how much is dumped at the station.

Some businesses are notorious for having overflowing trash containers. The ones behind Ross are often full, with debris flowing into open space.

Bad business operators are the impetus for the change.

Enforcement is an issue Assistant City Manager Rick Angelocci said would need to be worked out as the ordinance is written.

With mandatory garbage service, Angelocci said the city would then have the power to tell businesses that let garbage spill out that they must use the next size container to hold everything.

The nuisance abatement program South Tahoe has now is a bit cumbersome and with the city losing a community service officer, enforcement is a huge issue.

With residential customers who don't pay their bill, a lien can be put on the property. If commercial service becomes mandatory, liens often are not an option because so many business owners are leasing the space and there is nothing to put a lien on.

One reason South Tahoe Refuse likes the idea is being able to recycle more waste from commercial businesses.

Without knowing the fee structure, it's hard to know how this is going to affect STR's bottom line.

City staff will also have to work out how this will be equitable for businesses. A small massage business does not produce much waste, while a restaurant is one of the biggest producers of garbage.

Another issue is that many landlords combine garbage " and water " into the rent. Whether mandatory commercial service will increase what a landlord pays is not known. Therefore it is not known if this will be another financial burden on small business owners or just a means to keep the town clean, with more waste being recycled.

How the fee structure will work for a standalone entity vs. a strip mall that may have one dumpster for multiple businesses is not known.

The ordinance will be brought to the council in early 2010.