



PRFSC November 2017 Meeting Minutes

On Wednesday Nov 15, 2017 PRFSC was fortunate to host Katie Yoxall, Executive Director of Keep Polk County Beautiful as our speaker. Katie gave a most interesting talk about what has most recently been happening with recycling not just in Polk County but state and countywide.

Katie opened the meeting by saying that what she would be describing would have mostly a Polk County flavor but since there was no counterpart for her position in Osceola County she would be describing Osceola county issues too. She spoke to a full room at the Poinciana Library made up of a mix of both Polk and Osceola county residents. She opened her presentation by saying that what had happened during the past few months with recycling on the Polk County side was a convergence of multiple events that had made things much more confusing than could ever have been expected. Those three events, all happening within weeks of each other were the advent of new recycling rules implemented within Polk County, the change in Polk County from one solid waste contractor to another and last but not least a major hurricane hitting Central Florida.

Changes in recycling rules

The most significant topic she spoke about was the change in recycling rules. What she described was the changes to recycling rules required by the combination of economic and technological factors. These were described as the two major causes of the very much confusing new sets of recycling rules. Among the technological changes are the new materials introduced for plastic and paper products that had been traditionally recycled. Examples cited were new types of plastic containers that were much more bio degradable and much more expensive and difficult to recycle than had been available previously. New paper

products that were more biodegradable and less expensive to produce than available previously. New knowledge of the impact of issues such as food contamination and material contamination on the recycling process that made it more expensive to continue to sort the contaminated recycled materials from those that could actually be recycled.

Katie described the 'old school' recycling that used to involve multiple containers at the household level requiring separation of glass, plastic, paper and card board into separate bins and then each of those separate bins being dumped into separate compartments of the recycling truck and hauled away for processing. The continued cost for doing this became prohibitive and kept rising. As a result the public would not stand for paying the price. The combination of the economic and environmental factors caused the recycling curbside pickup process to evolve to what we recently saw in Polk County to the yellow recycle bins having all the eligible recyclable materials intermingled picked up by a single partition truck manually to what was recently introduced automated container pickup. Katie described the total recycling process really being two different systems. The front end system which most residents see as the curbside system and the back side system taking place at the waste disposal centers where the actual items are separated based on current technology and recycling ability so that items can be sent either to landfills or the appropriate recycling centers.

What Katie suggested is that persons wanting to know the latest in 'dos and don'ts' in what can be recycled and cannot be recycled in Polk County refer to the web site www.polkwastewise.net to get the latest information on what should and should not be recycled in Polk County. What she described is that the rules at the front end of the recycling system would vary from county to county and municipality to municipality based on the current contracts and practices of the waste management contracts in place. These could change based on the available facilities and procedures at the back end processing facilities and would change from time to time. Some of these changes would be brought about by changes in technology. Some would be changed by economic factors. In every case they would be a result of the combination of both and would vary from one place to

another. What might be done in Poinciana might not be handled the same way in New York, California or the Midwest.

The perfect storm of things that could go wrong

So what has happened in Polk County over the past two months is the perfect convergence of three major recycling events, some planned and some unplanned all taking place at once. The first planned change was the conversion from the old recycling containers to the new recycling carts. These changes were brought about primarily by economic factors. It was felt that cost savings could be achieved by replacing the old system of manual container pickup. This would make pickup faster and less labor intensive. Since the various type of recycled items were being intermixed in a single container why not simply put them in a single container that could be automatically picked up by a new truck? Since we were changing containers why not change the curbside recycling rules at the same time? The plan was to roll out an extensive educational effort by Polk County to fully explain the changes and why.

At the same time the change in containers was planned the county switched waste hauler contracts. Because of complaints with the old company the county let out competitive bids to select two new haulers who could better serve the east and west sides of the county. Since new equipment would be required to pick up the new containers why not switch companies at the same time? The plan sounded good.

Then the unexpected happened. Hurricane Irma hit Polk and Osceola Counties. Rather than having county resources focused on the new recycling plan rollout the focus of the county workforce had to shift to saving and restoring lives. The hurricane hit on September 11. The old waste hauler was winding down the old contract which he had lost out on the bidding for the new. The new waste haulers were not yet started having yet to assign the new routes to their new drivers and new trucks. Starting the day after the storm there was debris and piles of trash located all over the county waiting to be picked up. For the first week after the storm some Polk County residents did not get anything picked up at all.

The county put in place a new 4 month plan with the two new waste haulers to get everything in the entire county picked up over a four month period. Phase 1 would be the organic debris, trees, shrubs etc. Phase 2 would be the building material debris such as fences etc. Phase 3 would be a final cleanup. This four month cleanup would take place across the entire county from west to east. Guess where Poinciana sits? Of course the easternmost part of Polk County.

So October 1 arrives, the new recycle rules come into effect and the new waste hauler pick up begins. The rest is history. Hopefully things will be clearer and work well as time goes by?