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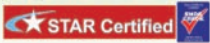
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EDITOR'S NOTE



Tipping point

BY **FOON RHEE** / foonr@newsreview.com



Most of the city
of Sacramento's
garbage ends up
in Kiefer Landfill
in Sloughhouse.

PHOTO BY FOON RHEE

to a landfill in Nevada, but
dumping it closer to home at
Sacramento County's Kiefer
Landfill in Sloughhouse.

In 2011, BLT sold the
contract, plus a recycling
and transfer station, to
industry giant Waste
Management. The city gave
its consent, though it meant
Waste Management would
both haul garbage and

control the transfer station.

Some critics warned that the deal stunk. Eye
on Sacramento claimed that BLT Enterprises
cashed in after secret negotiations and that Waste
Management's willingness to pay \$70 million
clearly indicated the tipping fee contract was
overpriced. In 2012, the Sacramento County Grand
Jury, a citizens oversight group, issued a report
questioning the contract.

If the city gets out of the deal and lands a
lower bid, that could help keep rate hikes for
residents in check.

So would figuring out how to collect garbage,
recyclables and yard waste for less. Mayor
Darrell Steinberg is a strong supporter of the
new efficiency study, saying that with the trash
rate increases, the cost of new employee union
contracts and neighborhood investments with the
new Measure U sales tax, the city must prove to
taxpayers that it is running a lean operation.

City Auditor Jorge Oseguera says the study
will include 20 options for cost savings or revenue
enhancements across city government. "Everything
was on the table," he told me.

In scope, it's similar to the study completed in
2010, just after the recession forced painful budget
cuts. The same consultant, Management Partners,
recommended 49 proposals, including between
\$101 million and \$154 million a year in cost saving
suggestions.

Among them: put the city's solid waste service
out to competitive bid (that didn't happen with the
2010 contract extension) and to phase out "loose
collection" of yard waste (in-the-street service was
reduced, but the "Claw" returns leaf season).

The council is scheduled to receive the
study in the first quarter of 2020. That's just in
time for 2020-21 budget decisions, but some of
the cost-cutting ideas could be very politically
unpopular indeed. □

Sacramento City Council members gave

residents a break, lopping off the final two years of
a garbage rate hike. But those higher bills may still
happen, depending on two efforts that are far from
slam dunks.

One is to get out from what some council
members concede is a terrible deal with the city's
garbage hauler. But to end that contract 10 years
early in 2022, the city would have to cough up
\$22.5 million—money the solid waste operation
doesn't have.

The second is to save money by making
the garbage operation—and the rest of city
government—more efficient. But the same
consultant did a similar study in 2010, and the city
didn't follow through completely.

On Dec. 3, the council voted to raise fees for
garbage collection (medium container), recycling,
yard waste and street sweeping by \$2.74 a month
as of Jan. 1 and by another \$2.96 on July 1. That
amounts to a 15% increase, to a total of \$42.59 per
month.

The council, however, put off the staff
recommendation for further hikes of \$3.19 a month
starting July 1, 2021 and \$3.44 on July 1, 2022.
That would have meant a total 33% increase—and
was too much for council members to stomach.

The city's garbage costs are rising in part
because of higher "tipping fees"—how much it
must pay to get trash dumped in a landfill. That rate
has risen from \$60.31 per ton in 2015-16 to \$69.01
in 2019-20, according to the city. The cost has
jumped from less than \$4.7 million in 2014-15 to
more than \$6.4 million in 2018-19.

The tipping fees contract has an ugly history.

In 2010, the City Council approved an amended
20-year contract with BLT Enterprises that took
full effect in February 2012. At the time, supporters
highlighted the environmental benefits of no
longer trucking the city's garbage over the Sierra