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Notes from editor (not for publication):

Nicely argued, Tom. Thanks for sending this and stimulating discussion here. —All the best, Jeff

HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

Brattleboro should discontinue municipal trash pickup

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

Delaying the decision to cut this program until a budget crisis would be more costly than making it now. As a town and as individuals, we have options. Let's explore them.

####END SUBHED####

TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

AS A VOLUNTEER, I have been supporting Brattleboro town staff with research and analysis about curbside collection of waste since April. They have worked diligently and creatively to achieve the objectives set by two consecutive Selectboards for a municipally funded program.

11 Based on new information and a review of the
12 information I'd previously gathered, I believe that Brattleboro
13 should discontinue municipally funded curbside collection and
14 disposal of trash and recycling.

15 One piece of new information was the announcement of
16 an estimated 12% increase in education taxes and the
17 preliminary estimate of Brattleboro's municipal tax increase in the
18 range of 4.4%. Combined, it seems we can expect that the total
19 property tax increase will approach double digits.

20 Considering the challenge we had passing a budget this
21 year, it is unlikely that the town budget will pass with an increase
22 that big. In the search for substantial cuts, trash and recycling
23 may be the only line item where private arrangements can readily
24 fill the gap and where staff cuts would not be required.

25 The other recent information came from research into the
26 likely decrease in sales from higher prices for pay-as-you-throw
27 (PAYT) bags, from \$2 to \$4.60 for yellow bag and from \$3 to 6.90
28 for purple. This research shows that modest increases in price
29 make sales go down by 0.1% to 0.6% for each 1% of increased
30 cost.

31 Brattleboro's prices are going up by over 225%, which is
32 nowhere near modest. A conservative estimate of the decline in
33 bag sales is 22.5%. It could easily be higher.

34 Delaying the decision to cut this program until a budget
35 crisis would be more costly than making it now. Over the next
36 few months, the town will invest lots of staff time in preparing to
37 roll out a program that may not survive the budget process.

38 If a decision to change course is not made before the
39 budget vote is warned, the town will also have ordered and
40 probably taken delivery of \$150,000 to \$350,000 of recycling
41 bins. These investments will be completely wasted if the trash and
42 recycling program are cut from the budget.

43 Thus, I decided to speak out before we pass the point of
44 no return.

45 * * *

46 HERE ARE SOME OF the other reasons I suggest giving up
47 on municipally funded curbside collection of trash and recycling:

48 • *Most towns in Vermont do not provide curbside*
49 *collection of any sort.* None of the other towns that provide
50 municipal fire and police services do. (Let's call them "high
51 service towns.")

52 Despite not providing municipal trash collection, these
53 other towns are not noticeably more awash in trash than
54 Brattleboro. And all but a few of the other towns in Vermont have
55 lower tax rates, including all of the other high-service towns;

56 • *It is a bad deal for the town.* I have compared
57 Brattleboro's proposed contract cost to that of the five other
58 communities which provide curbside collection of trash and
59 recycling. The metric is cost per stop: one stop each for trash and
60 recycling.

61 The average cost per stop for the five communities is
62 \$2.64. Brattleboro's anticipated cost per stop, assuming
63 maximum participation under the latest proposal, would be
64 \$4.80, not including the municipal expenditure on recycling
65 bins.

66 • *It is a bad deal for many taxpayers.* The tax burden of
67 the curbside program is currently spread across all properties in
68 town. This includes taxpaying properties that would be excluded
69 from the program, like residential buildings with five or more
70 units and all non-residential properties.

71 These excluded properties comprise approximately 41%
72 of the Grand List. This means that they pay 41% of the taxes for
73 everything, including the recycling program. This would amount
74 to \$284,723 collected in FY27 for properties that would be
75 excluded from the program, and this money would support the
76 recycling for other properties.

77 • *It is not a good deal for some eligible households.*
78 Those households that use more than 1.6 bags per week and that
79 have a property assessed at higher than the residential (R1 & R2
80 property codes) average of \$221,150 would be better off making

81 private arrangements with a hauler. Those properties that use two
82 bags or more per week, regardless of assessed value, would be in
83 the same boat.

84 • Finally, all of the cost estimates of the trash and
85 recycling program above are based on meeting bag sales
86 projections. If bag sales are short of projections by 25% or more,
87 the trash program will need support from other sources. The
88 estimates also assume that the recycling carts will be funded by
89 sources other than FY27 tax receipts.

90 * * *

91 THE TOWN OF Hartford provided curbside recycling until
92 the end of the FY25. In contract renegotiation, its hauler more
93 than doubled the price. Hartford said no. A Hartford citizen I
94 spoke with had been paying \$65 per month for trash and \$5 per
95 month for recycling pickup under the town contract. After
96 Hartford no longer had a contract, this individual began paying
97 the same hauler \$50 per month for both.

98 I shared similar thoughts with the Brattleboro
99 Selectboard and town manager on Dec. 7. I thought I should
100 share them with the voters and taxpayers of Brattleboro. As a
101 town and as individuals, we have options other than what we've
102 been doing. Let's explore them.

103 If you want more information, please contact me at
104 tomfranks.opinion@gmail.com.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

105 **TOM FRANKS** has experience in private, nonprofit, and
106 governmental organizations. He has a master of science in
107 environmental management and policy from Rensselaer
108 Polytechnic Institute. He is a Brattleboro Representative Town
109 Meeting member representing District 9.

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