
Developers to pay for Aspen demolitions?

Construction material is filling landfill up; officials encourage deconstruction

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ASPEN – Construction waste as a result of demolition is filling the Pitkin County landfill at an unprecedented rate – nearly double what other communities experience.

That prompted the Aspen City Council this week to agree to join the county in supporting a solid-waste impact fee that would be levied on developers. The money collected would recover the costs of sorting and grinding construction material in the landfill.

It also could add 30 years to the life of the landfill, officials said. The fee would be designed to encourage deconstruction of buildings.

The proposal, introduced by Chris Hoofnagle, Pitkin County's solid-waste manager, would involve decreasing the fee for contractors who deconstruct a building rather than demolish it.

That could come in the form of allowing a one-week salvage period when useable items are offered to the public prior to demolition, or a contractor could work with a salvage company, such as Habitat for Humanity, so it can reuse the materials.

Such material includes roofing material, walls, foundations, steel structures, pipe, brick and other usable items.

Contractors also could receive a refund from the landfill if they prove that they salvaged material, Hoofnagle said.

"If we do this, it could be a tool for the local government to influence behavior of how waste is dealt with," he told the Aspen City Council. "This is about having development pay its way.

"A fair amount of development happens within the city limits, and a fair amount of it comes to the county landfill."

The fee, the price of which is undetermined, would be assessed per square foot and would be applied at the issuance of a demolition or construction permit.

Because there is far more demolition material than waste from new construction, the fee would be higher for demolition material than construction activity, Hoofnagle suggested.

Landfills around the country typically collect about 25 percent of their waste from construction and demolition debris. The rest is municipal solid waste – soft trash and garbage that comes from human consumption.

The Pitkin County landfill comprises one-third of municipal solid waste; the rest is construction and debris material, which is bulky and is responsible for filling up the landfill, Hoofnagle said.

In 2007, of the 183,445 cubic yards of waste delivered to the landfill, 116,510 cubic yards were construction and demolition debris, according to Hoofnagle.

Pitkin County has piloted a program that involves sorting reusable construction material and grinding the rest to achieve volume reduction.

So far, that effort has recovered 69 tons of scrap steel and several hundred tons of boulders, and it has reduced the volume of building material buried in the landfill by more than 50 percent during a six-month period.

If done correctly in the future, that process itself could add an extra 10 years of life at the landfill, Hoofnagle said.

The landfill uses a trash compactor to reduce soft trash. But for construction and demolition debris, the

compactor is inefficient because it doesn't have the ability to break down and compact the air out of loads of demolished material.

If grinding would still take place, processed construction material would blanket the soft trash every day, eliminating the use of soil and providing an additional 20 percent reduction in the use of landfill airspace annually.

Hoofnagle said the more governments that participate, the lower the impact fee would be. He plans to approach the towns of Snowmass Village and Basalt for their support in assessing the fee. The Pitkin County commissioners already voted in support of the proposal.

"I think it is an idea that should go valley-wide," said Mayor Mick Ireland in support of the fee.

Hoofnagle said he will draft legislation and bring it back to the council for a formal vote. If approved, the new law and fees would go into effect on Jan. 1.

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