City Makes Case For Composting, Land Transfer

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Things are seemingly moving ahead in a land transfer between the Kodiak Island Borough Assembly and City Council. Last night the two governing bodies discussed the matter during the assembly’s work session, specifically as it pertains to compost.

The city hopes to build a better quality Class A composting facility on 2.36 acres of borough land, south of the landfill. Lesser quality Class B compost is already being made at the landfill. The compost would be made using biosolids, which have gone through the wastewater treatment plant and city staff stressed are very different from raw sewage.

It’s no secret that composting has come under quite a bit of scrutiny, which is why City Manager Aimee Kniaziowski and other city representatives took a trip to Washington and Idaho and toured four composting facilities. Kniaziowski said the trip provided valuable insight to places that have been composting for decades, and what similar operations could look like in Kodiak. She said a facility in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, was the group’s favorite, and best resembled what they wanted Kodiak’s to look like in terms of operations.

“This plant is smack in the middle of town in a residential area. It’s been in operation for 25 years. It was designed by the fellow that we’ve hired to help us. What they process are strictly biosolids and they do 4,700 tons per year and they have a 27 percent total solids rate. They use a covered aerated static pile method, which means the same pulling the air through the system and they mix it and they keep it covered. They use a biofilter system which is wood chips for odor control.”

Kodiak’s wouldn’t be in the middle of town, but rather on the 2.36 acres near the landfill, if the borough assembly approves the land transfer.

Much of the concerns about composting have come from community members, which Kniaziowski said she learned is very common in the initial phases of an operation. She said all four facilities they toured heard from the public at first, but it stopped once the composting was done successfully.

“The public always had concerns when they were starting up a facility and it went away as soon as they were successful. And the communities they function in view them as terrific assets, and that includes the very large commercial operator.

They’re seen as a green company so they get lots of benefit from that.”

Kniaziowski said she’s confident with what could be done here in Kodiak.

“You know we’re trying to do the right thing, for the community and all the rate payers and we’ve got 10 or 12,000 of those. We believe composting is going to be the most affordable and environmentally responsible thing to do to dispose of that. Anticipated rates for other disposal methods, which that’s part of that big packet, are just high, they’re high. This is something that we believe we can provide to people in a relatively stable fashion over the long term.”

Assemblywoman Carol Austerman said she was pleased with the city’s diligence in answering questions and supported the land transfer.

“I just want to say thank you. I think you guys have worked very, very hard and long on this process and put a lot of work and energy and effort into it. I think there are a lot of misconceptions in the community. And every time I sit down and see these presentations I feel better and better about the project.”

The land transfer will be before the assembly during its meeting next week.