

During the course of discussions regarding the question of privatization of sanitation, there have been several aspects that have been misstated or misunderstood by individuals who are opposed to a change. This piece is intended to correct the record, so to speak, with regard to those matters and provide additional information where appropriate to better inform anyone who may still have questions on the topic.

Why does privatizing sanitation make sense?

Focus on Core Priorities: Generally, the City collects trash, recycling, or yard waste 4 to 5 days a week, 52 weeks a year. With holidays and equipment failures, along with the seasonality of yard waste collection, it works out to about 4 ½ days per week. On any one of those days, if an employee assigned to the sanitation division for collection is unavailable, somebody else in another division has to fill their slot to ensure that collection isn't affected for the hundreds or even thousands of customers who are expecting service that day. By its nature, then, the collection of solid waste and recycling take precedence over the replacement of lead water lines, street maintenance, and ADA compliance. By entrusting sanitation services to a reliable private provider, we can redirect our focus and resources towards essential municipal functions such as streets and sidewalks, public safety, and other community programs.

Enhanced Service Delivery: Our goal is to provide you with the best possible sanitation services. Privatization allows for more flexibility and innovation in service delivery, ensuring that your needs are met efficiently and effectively. Innovations in the industry are more likely to be implemented by a private firm with industry professionals than by a small municipal provider that is far less invested in or familiar with technological innovations in the field. Not pulling people from the street or water divisions to cover sanitation has a significant impact, but having the three employees focus on streets rather than sanitation has an even bigger impact in how we can address the concern that actually matters the most to our residents. Moreover, with their collection of one free large/bulky item per month and their ability to collect white goods for \$35 per item, LRS's level of service would exceed our capabilities and their provision of additional carts for ¼ the cost of additional carts from the City provides another improvement in service.

Cost Efficiency: Privatization can help us achieve significant cost savings while maintaining quality service standards. By partnering with specialized private companies, we can leverage their expertise and resources to optimize operations and reduce expenses for our customers. The availability of the 3 laborers also has the potential to provide significant savings in that the City would be able to perform work on infrastructure projects in house that is now performed by contractors who are required by state law to charge significantly higher costs than we would incur if we had employees available to perform the work.

Streamlined Operations: Private companies are better equipped to handle the complexities of sanitation management with greater efficiency than most municipal governments. From waste collection to recycling initiatives or waste diversion programs, they have the knowledge and experience to operate at optimal levels. Because it's the focal point of their efforts, they perform the associated tasks better on a day-to-day basis, just like we hope to be able to do with street maintenance when we more narrowly focus our efforts.

Several years ago, the City surveyed residents to learn their thoughts on service delivery. Why wasn't a survey done for privatization or why wasn't this put to a vote? The City did conduct a thorough survey in 2016. Each time the cost of repeating the survey has been included in a draft of the budget it

has been removed, presumably because there are limited resources and the City Council still views the original results as valid. We know, for instance, that the top priority identified by residents in the original survey was the maintenance of streets. There is no illusion on the City's part that the streets have improved so much since 2016 that they are now lower on the list of priorities. In ranking the importance of sanitation, only 4% of residents indicated that sanitation was among their top three items, while 78% were satisfied with the level of service, and that number is likely to have increased since the implementation of automation. We know people are generally pleased with the service they receive even though it isn't a high priority for them and that they are less happy with the level of service for items that they believe are more important. The proposed privatization better aligns the City's efforts with the opinions of residents as expressed in the previous survey. With regard to the idea of putting the matter to a vote, the City retains the right to determine the services provided and the character and extent to which those services are provided, performing the duties of the offices to which they are elected on behalf of the voters who elected them as established by law. Decisions such as this are exactly what the City Council was elected to determine.

How do we know that LRS or another private hauler will provide the same level of customer service that we provide? Will they provide valet service for the elderly, report crimes to the police department, or perform wellness checks on residents who didn't set their trash out? LRS has an A+ rating by the Better Business Bureau, with a proven track record of resolving customer complaints. They will perform the valet service in the same manner that we do, with a list that we'll provide to them. They'll also have a customer service center to dispatch drivers similar to the service provided by our utility clerks now, except that removing that function from our staff will lighten the load in an area that we've been trying to streamline, as well. Our records do not reflect a significant history of the sanitation division playing a major role in addressing crime in the community. We're pleased with any help they are able to provide, and they'd still be able to provide tips while employed with the City in a capacity other than sanitation. We're also not familiar with any instances of wellness checks and would suggest that to the extent they occur, they are infrequent at best and would remain that way under LRS. In both instances, any actual reduction in service would be acceptable, as those tasks are far removed from what we typically expect from contractors or our employees working in sanitation.

What about Hog Days, Prairie Chicken Festival, or other special events? Employees from multiple departments/divisions have helped in the past with the early morning cleanups, including volunteers who weren't paid by the City to perform the work. It's true that the City has parked trash trucks to make emptying cans easier at the big events, but we could easily park a dump truck or roll-off container that would serve the same purpose. Last year, 15 people helped with the morning cleanups during Hog Days, including three employees from sanitation and all four of the women who work as clerks.

But these are good union jobs that we should support and protect. What about that aspect? The employees who would continue to work for public works in other capacities would retain their employment in positions that are covered by the collective bargaining agreement. Moreover, the LRS employees who would be collecting trash in Kewanee would also serve in positions covered by a collective bargaining agreement, as they have a union shop, as well. Residents who have expressed their concerns because these are union jobs may not be aware that the City negotiated with the union regarding the impact of privatization and reached an agreement with AFSCME Council 31 on behalf of the local union.

But we want our money to support “local” people. What about that? Under the existing system, trash collected in Kewanee is hauled to Atkinson. Under the proposed system, trash would be hauled from Kewanee to Atkinson. The collective bargaining agreement in place allows employees the opportunity to reside up to 15 miles away from Kewanee. We expect that with their workday being in Kewanee and Atkinson, the people who would be working for LRS would reside in the immediate area, as well. It’s not practical to think that people who are not from the area would commute here from outside the region for work on a daily basis. The work would be performed by local people.

The problem is that the City keeps reducing staffing. The City should keep sanitation and add three more people. In January 2015, there were 21 employees in the divisions that comprise Public Works. In January of 2024, there were 20. Automation removed the need to have an employee on the back of the trucks for daily collections, resulting in more available manhours for employees engaged in Public Works tasks other than sanitation. Adding three additional people is not a financially viable option for the City.

If the private sector takes over the prices will go up a lot. It’s not often that people take up the mantle of praising government for its ability to save money and operate efficiently, but this is one of those rare instances. LRS’s proposed rates do not exceed what has been adopted for rates in the next few years for the City, but when they get to a point where their rates exceed what we have adopted, we’re going to be at a point where we have to raise rates, because our rates were based on our costs and our costs have continued to rise, as well. LRS’s contracted rates for the city project to be less for us than our rates project to be for residents in the future, given our costs.