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### County to study switching to curbside trash pickup

By BECKY EHMANN, For The Capital

Queen Anne's County has initiated a study of its drop-off trash collection, which is running a \$2.2 million deficit.

The \$55,000 study, approved by the Board of County Commissioners last week, could be the first step in switching to a cheaper and more convenient system for residents: curbside trash pickups.

"We expect this study to shed some light on three issues," said Commissioner Joseph Cupani, R- Church Hill. "One of our goals is to reduce the size of county government, and this would help reduce the number of employees needed to cover drop-off processes. Second, we'll like to cut county costs. And third, we want to add convenience for the taxpayer. If the study shows we can cover these three issues, or even guarantee two of them we should move ahead with the plan."

Commissioner Gene Ransom, D-Grasonville, said he'd only vote for curbside pickups if it saves taxpayer money.

"If it's not a savings to everyone, I'm not in favor," Mr. Ransom said.

In the existing solid waste collection program, residents can deposit solid waste and recyclables at the county's five transfer stations, including ones in Stevensville and Grasonville, after purchasing a book of tickets. They cost \$20 for 15 tickets, one good for each visit.

But ticket book sales have never covered the fees charged to transfer waste, also known as "tipping fees".

"The regional landfill charges \$47.50 per ton," said Todd Mohn, deputy director of public works. "In 2003 ticket

books produced \$308,000, but tipping fees amounted to \$685,000."

County costs include staffing stations, trucks, fuel and the transfer from these sites to the Midshore Regional Solid Waste Facility in

Talbot County.

Currently about one-third of the county households purchase ticket

Mohn said. "It is difficult to keep non-county residents and contractors from illegally dumping commercial waste."

In fact, residential and commercial solid waste is only one - though the largest - component of the county's waste management responsibilities. According to the county's 10-year plan recently submitted to the state, waste generated in 2003 also included 880 tons of animal carcasses from the county's 90 chicken plants as well as other farming operations, 1,555 tons of sludge, which is the byproduct of sewer treatment plants, and 8,673 tons of septage, or liquid and solid material removed from septic tanks.

Consulting firm GBB Inc. from Fairfax, Va., which has done similar studies for other Maryland counties, will begin its study early next month and be done by June.

Mr. Mohn describes the potential curbside pick-up process as similar to those now used by incorporated towns.

"The town manager solicits contracts for curbside pick-up," Mr. Mohn said. "The fees become a line-item charge to residents on town utility or sewer bills."

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