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Indianapolis recycling plan discussed at council committee hearing

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INDIANAPOLIS (WISH) – City-County Councillor John Barth will tell you Indianapolis hasn't done enough to promote recycling in Indianapolis.

On Tuesday evening, he led a council committee hearing for a discussion of a recycling proposal offered by Mayor Greg Ballard's office. Barth is not a fan of that plan.

Scott Holkeber spoke in favor of the proposal. He is Regional Vice President for Covanta, the company that runs the city's trash incinerator in southwestern Marion County. He told the committee his company wants to build a recycling plant next to the incinerator.

Holkeber said it would be the first complete, sustainable waste management system of its kind in North America. It would combine trash and recyclables, no sorting required. And, he said it could be built at zero capital investment by the city.

"100 percent of single family homes in Indianapolis will be enrolled automatically, increasing recycling by up to 500 percent," Holkeber said.

The new system would not recycle glass. At least not in its first phase, Holkeber said.

"Right now, we're going after what's economically viable. Glass is not economically viable in Central Indiana right now. So we're going after what we can get a return on first," he said.

Carey Hamilton hopes the city considers other options. She is the Executive Director of the Indiana Recycling Coalition.

"Recycling only works if the markets work. Recycling is an industry. We have to make sure that industry can work efficiently," she told the committee

Hamilton said other companies see Indianapolis as a target – one of the few remaining large cities that has so much opportunity and material to recover because we have not provided comprehensive recycling for our residents.

She also criticized Covanta's collection process. She said mixing recyclables with contaminated waste reduces the potential for reuse of recyclable materials such as aluminum cans.

Hamilton asked for a solution that would result in the recovery of significantly more material, creating jobs and conserving energy along the way. The solution that would result in long-term cost-savings to taxpayers as well.

The committee was only listening. Barth noted it has no say in the matter.

The decision is up to the Board of Public Works, which will meet on Wednesday afternoon. But, that, too, will be only to hear public testimony. No vote is expected yet.



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