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Panel wants time to study landfill

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CROSSVILLE — An economic development team of Crab Orchard residents have been studying what services the community wants the city to provide and possible ways to fund those projects. But the possibility of a landfill beginning operation inside the city limits may leave their study moot.

"It's a game changer," said Joe Sherrill Friday during a meeting of the group. "It sets the course for Crab Orchard. What they do will affect what we are as a community.

"If it's accepted, we may as well dissolve this committee. If it's rejected, we can discuss the alternatives. If in six months we determine a landfill is the only way the city can make a lot of money, they can resubmit the request. But this committee hasn't even had time to discuss the alternatives for revenue."

Surplus County Property has requested the city grant the business permission to open a landfill operation in a quarry located off Main Street at the site of a quarry operation. The landfill operation could be a source of revenue for the city, but many residents have previously voiced concern over possible environmental consequences, increased cost of road maintenance due to increased traffic and the impact on the community's economy as a whole. The company is owned by Dennis Hinch and Pat Stone.

The company also submitted an application to open a landfill in 2008. At that time, the application was denied by the city.

At the August meeting, the company was asked to provide a detailed economic impact analysis before the aldermen considered the application.

Hinch told the Chronicle, "It will be a glorified stump dump."

He said the closing of the Cumberland County landfill left a need in the county for a place to take demolition waste, such as bricks and mortar being from the old portion of Pleasant Hill Elementary being demolished to make way for a classroom addition.

"There's no where to put that waste," Hinch said. "It has to go to an accredited landfill."

He said there were rumors in the community about the type of waste the landfill would take. As a class III/IV landfill, it could not accept household waste or medical waste. If approved and permitted, the landfill would be authorized to take farming wastes; landscaping and land clearing wastes, such as trees,

stumps, soil and leaves; construction and demolition wastes from new construction, remodeling, repair and demolition of buildings and roads; shredded automotive tires; and wood wastes and sawdust. It would not be able to take "special wastes," those difficult or dangerous to manage like fuel-tank residues, oils or other lubricants, friable asbestos wastes, paints, solvents or other discarded commercial chemical products.

"We've got a big hole with sheer walls and a solid limestone floor. It's close by but it's far removed from the city," Hinch said. "They won't even know it's there except for the check they would get every month."

The Tennessee Jackson Law requires both the city and county legislative bodies to approve any new landfill for solid waste disposal or solid waste processing. Public notice is required and interested persons can make comments during the 30-day comment period. A public hearing can also be requested.

The legislative bodies must vote on the proposed application, taking into account the type of waste to be disposed of; the method of disposal; the projected impact on surrounding areas from noise and odor; the projected impact on property values of surrounding areas; the adequacy of existing roads and bridges to carry the increased traffic; the economic impact on the county, city or both; compatibility with existing development or zoning plans; and other factors that may affect the public health, safety or welfare.

The economic development committee began meeting in May after the city council voted to establish it. Since that time, they've been reviewing city revenue, polling citizens on what services they would like to see and discussing visions for the future.

In a recent opinion poll, members of the committee spoke to their friends, neighbors and acquaintances. According to this poll, additional services the residents would like were garbage pick-up services, especially for the elderly or home-bound, and full-time law enforcement and fire protection. The poll also asked if the residents would accept a landfill operation if that was the only way for the city to have funds to provide the additional services.

Norma Turner said, "Eighty-five percent of the people I talked to said they would prefer a property tax to a landfill."

Crab Orchard does not charge a property tax or business tax. The city revenues depend on sales tax revenue and state-shared taxes. The committee noted the state was using an out-of-date list to determine the city's share of sales tax collections. That has since been updated to reflect new businesses in Crab Orchard and increase its tax collections.

Hinch said the city would receive a tipping fee on every ton of waste disposed of in the landfill. That would help the city's financial situation, he said. The city received \$178,762 in revenue for the 2010 fiscal year and incurred \$200,388 in expenses with salaries and street lights the two largest expenditures. Revenues for that same fiscal year were \$178,762, down from previous years due to loss of some grant funds and a drop in sales tax collections. But the city has a healthy fund balance, Sherrill said.

"The city has no debts and could go two to three years without more," Sherrill said. "But if we want new things, we don't have the money."

The city's expenses have remained about the same each year with slightly decreasing revenues. The 2010

Census also recorded a drop in the town's population, falling from 1,065 people in 1980 to 876 people in 1990, 838 people in 2000 and 752 people in 2010. This has also led to a decrease in revenue as some taxes are distributed based on population.

The issue of a landfill locating in the city limits is not on the agenda for the Crab Orchard City Council meeting for September, but the committee will be reporting to the council the findings of its opinion poll and ask for direction as it continues its work.

"We've been trying to help get the city's house in order and, once we've done that, we can discuss long-term projects. But we're being pushed into a timeline," Sherrill said. "We've had four good meetings, but we're going to need 20 or 30 to make a dent in documenting alternatives."

Hinch said the application process to being a landfill operation was lengthy and included a number of regulatory hurdles.

"It'd probably take one to one and a half years to start operation," Hinch said. "It takes a long time to get permitted. But we have to have the Jackson Law waiver before the state will even look at our application."

The Crab Orchard City Council will meet Sept. 6 at Crab Orchard City Hall, 338 Hebbertsburg Rd., at 6 p.m. The landfill is not part of the agenda at this time, but the public is invited to attend.