

City's planned "One Plus One" trash pickup worries City Council

By Ed Ericson Jr., *Baltimore City Paper*, 5/27/2009

Change is coming to Baltimore's trash pick-up, and some City Council members are not happy about it. Despite rare opposition to a bill, the council advanced the measure without amendment, and will take it up for final passage at the next council meeting on June 8.

Called "One Plus One," the new system will reduce the number of garbage pickups to once weekly, down from twice per week, while increasing the number of recycling pickups from twice a month to once a week. The Department of Public Works has been working on the new system for months in an attempt to save money and "right-size" the collection system. According to a letter sent to every household in the city by Public Works Director David Scott, the current system has been largely unchanged since the 1970s.

Critics of the new system--which include Council members Belinda Conaway (D-7th District), Agnes Welch (D-9th District), William Cole (D-11th District), Bernard C. "Jack" Young (D-12th District), and Warren Branch (D-13th District), all of whom voted against the bill during the May 18 council meeting--say the new trash-collection system will lead to more trash in the streets, more rats, and hardship for people who live in the city's most densely packed neighborhoods.

"Those are arguably the dirtiest districts in Baltimore," Cole says. "They have lots of row homes, lots of which are divided into two- or three-dwelling units. If you have a neighborhood with parking pads, and in some cases garages, trash storage isn't an issue. In these other neighborhoods, storage becomes a real issue."

One of the most contentious of the new bill's provisions is a reduction of the amount of garbage to be picked up weekly from each residence, from 160 gallons currently to 96 gallons when the new system goes into effect on July 1. Cole introduced an amendment to the bill that would have phased in the reduction over three years, but the amendment was defeated.

Critics worry that the Department of Public Works, despite its outreach efforts, has not yet informed enough people about the changes. "I do not have a problem with the sustainability stuff," Cole says. "I think it's wonderful. I've just been saying, can we go just a little bit slower here, and bring everybody along?"

Cole says his concern is for some of the Bolton Hill property owners in his district who rent homes to multiple students, who may generate more trash than a single family would. "We're saying to them, you either have to provide hauling service, or get your tenants to put less trash out," Cole says. "That's great, but they have to be able to build it [the added cost of trash service] into their leases."

Cole says that Mount Vernon, another neighborhood he represents, is exempt from the new rules because of logistical issues. "But that further complicates things," Cole says. "How do I explain to my constituents in Bolton Hill that their neighbors don't have to comply?"

Department of Public Works spokeswoman Celeste Amato says Mount Vernon (where *City Paper's* office is located) is exempt because of traffic conditions downtown. The neighborhood will continue to get twice-weekly pickup at night, to avoid the traffic, but will have to comply with the 96-gallon maximum in the new system.

Amato says the city is ready for the change. "We did a lot of community meetings to get feedback," she says, adding that the department does not intend to be punitive about enforcement of things like the times people are allowed to set their trash cans at the curb.

The new system will free up crews to do even more bulk-trash and alley cleaning, she says, because they will no longer be picking up recycling twice a month.

"We can make a lot of excuses for not managing household waste properly, but at some point we have to make a choice that we're going to manage this," Amato says.