

Changes in Baltimore garbage pickup a step closer

By Annie Linskey, *Baltimore Sun*, May 19, 2009

Baltimore is a step closer to once-a-week trash collection with the City Council throwing its support Monday behind Mayor Sheila Dixon's controversial changes to the municipal garbage schedule.

The council will have to vote on the measure once more before it is sent to Dixon to be signed, but Monday's 8-to-5 vote indicated that several council members who initially had opposed the mayor's plan now support it.

The bill reduces garbage pickup to once a week, but also increases recycling to once a week.

"I had mixed feelings about the bill," said Councilman Nicholas D'Adamo, saying that twice-weekly pickups aren't even enough for families like his who have frequent crab feasts and need to dump the shells before they decay.

But he and others credited Dixon's outreach efforts in swaying their votes.

Valentina Ukwuoma, who heads Baltimore's Bureau of Solid Waste, held 83 public meetings on the issue since January to persuade city residents that the mayor's plan would work.

After the vote Ukwuoma expressed relief. "We hoped for the best, it has been a struggle," she said. "We knew if we got to the community we would be able to convince them."

The bill also reduces the volume of trash the city will collect to 96 gallons a week. The city now collects 160 gallons a week.

Councilman William H. Cole IV attempted to amend the legislation so that the volume limitations would be phased in over three years for some residents. That effort failed overwhelmingly.

Councilman James B. Kraft shepherded the bill through Monday's hearing and called the bill "far reaching" and "visionary" because it will make it easier for more people to recycle.

"We are asking the people of Baltimore to change," he said. "I think many times in our city our constituents are further ahead of us than we think."