

MAYOR'S NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER 2009

I have been re-thinking my decision last month to not write a newsletter. With an approved budget and City Council in agreement on the tax rate and other important issues, I figured city residents wouldn't mind not reading a letter from me. It appears, however, that wasn't a good idea.

I have heard from many citizens about the trash can ordinance, receiving more phone calls, letters, personal visits, emails and citizen's comments at the council meetings on this issue than any other (including flooding and RV restrictions) in the ten years I've been involved in city government. I do appreciate hearing from you and I am interested in your opinions; I was, however, surprised about the number and intensity of the messages. I really thought that this was one of the most innocuous decisions that council has made recently. Compared to the decisions we made about city employees' salaries, including a substantial raise for all police officers, purchasing a new fire truck and expanding the police station, the trash can ordinance didn't appear to be as big an impact on the quality of life in Jersey Village. I was obviously mistaken.

I want to respond to the five major comments I have heard with what I consider to be the facts:

1. Residents want to use trash cans because loose or wild animals will get into the trash bags scattering debris around.

Currently, about half of the residents put trash out at the curb using only bags and no trash cans. I suspect that if animals were getting into their trash and scattering it around on a regular basis, these residents would not be doing this.

2. Prohibiting the use of trash cans will increase the use of bags, costing people more money and hurting the environment.

According to our current trash contractor, almost 100% of the city's residents already put their trash in plastic bags. It is unusual for any one to put garbage directly into the trash can so I am not sure how prohibiting the use of trash cans will increase the use of bags, resulting in additional expense or environmental impact.

3. Some people will have difficulty getting their trash to the curb without using trash cans.

Anyone who has trouble taking their trash to the curb in bags may still take their trash to the curb in the usual way, remove the trash from the can (assuming it is in bags) and take the trash cans back to their yard. This way, they will only have to make one trip to the curb each trash day.

4. What was the reason for this ordinance against trash cans?

Council voted to not allow the use of trash cans in order to improve the visual aesthetics of the city. The city has received numerous complaints about having trash cans and recycling bins at the curb for two days each week. The trash cans distract from the overall appearance of the city, creating an unsightly eyesore.

5. This ordinance was passed without citizen input.

City Council has studied and debated the trash issue for several years, many times in 2009 alone. I would guess that we had more discussion about trash than anything else this year; trying to decide how to reduce the visual impact on trash day and keep collection costs reasonable. I personally spoke to many residents prior to putting this on the agenda.

For many years, Jersey Village residents enjoyed garage door pickup. When the contract expired about five years ago, the city went out for bids. We changed contractors, taking the bid for curb pickup after deciding that garage door pickup was cost prohibitive. (It is approximately \$200,000 per year to have garage door pickup – about the cost of adding two police officers to the JV force or about \$100 a year for each of the 2000 houses in the city.) During this budget cycle, Council considered how to improve the aesthetics of the neighborhood while keeping trash collection costs reasonable.

We discussed the situation with our contractor and researched how other cities handled the problem, finding that most cities either use city-purchased trash cans with lifting mechanisms on the trucks or they use bags only. The advantage to using bags only is that once the trash is picked up, there is nothing to look at. After discussion of this situation on at least five occasions in 2009, Council decided to save money and go for the most aesthetic method which allowed only trash bags at the curb.

5. (Continued)

So, to allow trash cans or to not allow trash cans; that is the question. Some residents do not like seeing trash cans cluttering up the neighborhood and others believe that trash cans are preferable to bags. I am generally against governmental restriction, but some of them are worth having. For instance, most of us would prefer that our neighbors not park their cars in the front yard, so we have an ordinance to address that situation. Drawing the line as to what is good and what is bad, what is allowed and what is not, is often difficult.

City Council has decided to put the trash can ordinance back on the agenda for the meeting on November 16. On this issue, I have an open mind, but I do not get to vote on the decision. If you want to influence the Council decision and see how the system of representative democracy works, I invite you to attend the meeting.

I really wanted to use this letter to start a dialogue about what I consider a far more important issue that will be facing Jersey Village in the future: Transit Oriented Development. A commuter rail line is coming through the area in a few years and Jersey Village can be a player or not -- that will be up to you to decide. I will address this subject next month since this letter is so long, I am sure most people have already stopped reading. I hope everyone enjoys their Thanksgiving and is thankful we live in Jersey Village.

Council Action Report – Regular Session Meeting October 19, 2009

ORDINANCE OR RESOLUTION	PASS/FAIL
Ordinance No. 2009-51, continuing in effect Ordinance No. 1995-20, adopted on November 20, 1995, and codified as Chapter 42, Article III, Division 3, entitled "Curfew" of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Jersey Village, Texas.	Passed
Resolution No. 2009-63, authorizing an Interlocal Agreement with Harris County for housing City prisoners.	Passed
Resolution No. 2009-64, setting a two year staggered term of office for the Recreation and Events Committee beginning October 1, 2010.	Passed
Ordinance No. 2009-52, amending Ordinance No. 2009-50 passed, approved, and adopted September 14, 2009 to reflect 5:00 p.m. as the correct time for residents to place trash out on the street for pick-up the day preceding the day of collection.	Passed
Resolution No. 2009-65, approving change order No. 4 with SER, which allows for the change in elevations to the Storm Water System on North Tahoe Drive.	Passed
Ordinance No. 2009-53, providing for the levy and collection of ad valorem taxes by the City of Jersey Village, Texas, for the year 2009.	Passed
Resolution No. 2009-66, authorizing an agreement with Kimley-Horn Associates Inc., for services relating to Phase Two of a Feasibility Study regarding Transit Oriented Development within the City of Jersey Village.	Passed
Ordinance No. 2009-54, allowing a budgetary amendment to the 2009-10 budget (Transit Oriented Development – Phase Two – Feasibility Study).	Passed
Resolution No. 2009-67, authorizing a contract with Belt Harris & Associates, LLLP for auditing services.	Passed
Resolution No. 2009-68, changing the name of the City's fire fighting organization from "The City of Jersey Village Emergency Services" to "The City of Jersey Village Fire Department."	Passed