

**TOWN OF BLACK MOUNTAIN BOARD OF ALDERMEN  
REQUEST FOR BOARD ACTION**

**Meeting Date:** February 14, 2011

**SUBJECT:** Citizen Request for consideration of change(s) to the Town's Bagged Leaf Collection Program (*request of Phyllis Parker*)

**AGENDA INFORMATION**

**Agenda Location:** Unfinished Business (*Deferred from meeting of 12/20/10 without action by BoA*)  
**Item Number:** 6A  
**Department:** Public Services Department  
**Contact:** Mark Combs, Public Services Director  
Pam Hoen, Senior Administrative Assistant  
**Presenter:** Mark Combs, Public Services Director

**BRIEF SUMMARY:** The Town does not currently have the equipment or staffing to provide bagging, collection and disposal of leaves throughout the community on a comprehensive (or even occasional) basis. The Town's sanitation contract with GDS calls for the vendor to collect and dispose of leaves from October through March, provided that the homeowner bags all leaves and places them at the curb according to vendor requirements. The Town provides limited assistance in bagging leaves for elderly residents (age 70 or older), whose home value does not exceed \$200,000, via a contract with First, Inc. Currently, the town has 49 residents registered for leaf-bagging assistance, with 29 actually served this year to date. The current policy provides solely for bagging assistance and does not provide for assistance in raking leaves, however we are aware of the occasional instance in which the contractor has also provided assistance with raking. This is problematic insofar as the Town is paying the contractor by the hour, and therefore any service outside the scope of established policy results in higher cost to the Town.

The original intent behind the program was to provide assistance to low income elderly residents who were physically incapable of bagging leaves themselves and could not afford to pay a contractor to bag their leaves for them. As currently practiced, however, the program selectively discriminates and does not always meet the dual goal – for example, age does not, in and of itself, determine physical ability to bag one's own leaves – physical condition and/or disability at any age is more directly tied to the need for assistance. And older residents who may be fortunate enough to live in a mortgage-free home valued at \$200K or more may be both physically unable to rake leaves and “cash poor” (on a low fixed income despite amassing favorable equity earlier in life). The age and valuation thresholds were established somewhat arbitrarily and the assessment of one's eligibility for the program presents an administrative challenge, with staff currently relying on an individual's self-referral and honesty to determine program participation.

In a letter to the board dated Nov 15, 2010, Ms. Parker requests that the Town extend the program to all senior citizens regardless of income, home value or ability to pay. There are a

number of options that would provide for more equitable participation in the leaf-bagging assistance program, but short of eliminating the assistance altogether, nearly every proposal leads to greater participation and higher program costs. It should be noted that a previous Board intentionally eliminated comprehensive leaf collection/disposal services some time ago as a cost-containment measure.

It should also be noted that since the comprehensive leaf pick-up program was discontinued, compliance with the bagging policy has varied greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood and even from house to house. There are significant numbers of town residents who simply choose not to address leaf collection/disposal at all, or who rake/blow leaves into gutters, waterways and ditches in violation of Town policy. This widespread practice leaves the Town's streets in an unsightly condition, ultimately creates problems with water quality, clogged stormwater drains and diverted run-off, and generates additional challenges and workload for Public Services crews responsible for maintaining streets and Rights-of-Way.

In December, the town manager offered for the board's consideration the following options:

- 1) Limit leaf-bagging assistance to those individuals who qualify for a Homestead Exemption, as determined by the Buncombe County Tax office
- 2) Eliminate Town-provided leaf bagging assistance in favor of initiating a volunteer-based assistance program
- 3) Eliminate leaf-bagging assistance altogether and require *all* property owners to manage leaves on their own properties
- 4) Explore alternatives that would provide leaf management in a more equitable fashion without increasing costs to the town, and consider program expansion only if accompanied by new supporting revenue (General Fund or user fees)
- 5) Explore the possibility of returning to a town-wide vacuum collection system provided directly by the Town or by an outside contractor at an estimated additional cost of \$40,000 annually; which would also require up-front acquisition of equipment
- 6) Make no changes in current policy, but address the issue again in FY2012, as part of a comprehensive study of all sanitation services, costs and potential revenue, in advance of the expiration of the Town's service contract with GDS in June, 2012.

**MOTION FOR CONSIDERATION:** At the board's discretion (to adopt one or none of the above options)

**FUNDING SOURCE:** Expansion of service beyond current levels would require either reducing General Fund expenditures elsewhere or increasing General Fund revenue through implementation of sanitation "user" fees

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Letter from Phyllis Parker dated November 14, 2010
- Staff analysis dated December 9, 2010

## **MANAGER'S COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Given the current state of the economy and the extremely challenging budgetary climate the Town continues to face moving into FY2012, the Manager recommends doing nothing at this time that will either expand service or add costs to the already overburdened General Fund.

Staff recommends Option 3 as the most equitable and least costly option to the Town, however this option reduces service (to the 29 current participants) and does nothing to address the leaf management challenges that have arisen as a result of discontinuing comprehensive collection and disposal.

If the Board wishes to continue leaf bagging assistance for those individuals most in need, then Option 1 provides for a more defensible, and more equitable, means of determining who should qualify for assistance, while taking the onus off the Town for making that determination. Although this plan would marginally increase the number of individuals eligible for assistance, we believe we can absorb this modest cost increase within the existing adopted budget.

Especially in light of the fact that leaf bagging season is almost over for the current year, and any change in policy would have negligible impact until next fiscal year, the ***Manager recommends adoption of either Option 3 or Option 6, or a combination of the two (eliminate service now and study options for increased service as part of contract renewal discussions).***