

Taking out the trash: Automated trucks changing Wood River's trash and recycling

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WOOD RIVER - Next year, residents of Wood River will pay \$14.33 a month for trash pickup, which is a slight increase from the current rate of \$13.91 a month.

Along with that increase comes a few other changes. Wood River's municipal contract with Republic Waste Services is allowing automated trucks to retrieve both garbage and recycling within the municipality. These automated trucks have mechanical arms, which latch onto rubbish bins and recycling carts and tosses them into the back of the truck. This means a person will not have to do the labor himself/herself.

This change requires other changes as well. These automated trucks will not be able to go through alleyways as easily as the current trucks can. Residents who are used to alley pickups will now have to take their carts to the front of their homes. While many are embracing this change, Wood River Mayor Cheryl Maguire said, some are a little concerned.

"Those residents will have to bring their trash and recycling at the front of their homes on trash day," Maguire said. "Many people are embracing it. Lids won't blow off. Trash won't go all over. Animals won't dig through bags."

Elderly residents as well as residents with medical conditions may submit a doctor's note and the waste takers will retrieve both their garbage and recycling carts and return them to their homes.

To keep costs low, Maguire said the recycling pickup will change from weekly to bi-weekly, but added the recycling carts now hold as much as four times the volume of the old ones. In fact, residents can now choose between 95 gallon and 65 gallon carts for both garbage and recycling.

Maguire also addressed the concerns of residents regarding the cost increase as well as the worry automated trucks would cost Republic Waste Services drivers their jobs.

"Some of the communities around here pay \$40 a month, \$20 a month and \$15 a month, and we're only paying just over \$14," she said. "That is an excellent rate for our trash and recycling pickup. A lot of people were also concerned that the automated trucks would cost drivers their jobs, because there will only be one person in each truck instead of two. The drivers are Teamsters, so no one will be losing their jobs, they will just be put to work somewhere else."

These changes will affect roughly a third of Wood River residents, and Maguire expects the first days of the new implementations will be a learning process for both residents and the truck drivers, as the placement of carts must be something adjusted based on the availability of the trucks.