

## **DPW – Street/Solid Waste Division**

**To:** Alderperson Arnett and Public Works Commission Members

**From:** Stacy Winkelman

**Date:** December 3, 2025

**Subject:** December 9 Agenda Item

### **Background**

I wanted to have a discussion regarding our leaf collection program. For the past couple of years, we have been integrating collecting leaves curbside in compostable paper bags through a pilot program. Our goal was to explore the efficiencies of a bagging program versus traditional vacuum collection considering staffing levels and equipment needs. The City has provided bags free to residents to promote the pilot program, highlighting benefits including the Division's ability to pick up the bags more quickly and frequently than vacuuming loose leaves. I realize the pilot program shifts how leaves have been collected in the past and would affect residents broadly if the pilot program is expanded; that is the reason I feel we need to have some good discussions on pros and cons and eventually have this body decide how to proceed in future years. Going into this season we had four vacuum system units: a 1996, a 1998, a 2000 and a 2018. The 1998 model needed extensive work; \$7,500 in repairs just to get started. That machine has already had a lot of repairs and money stuck into it and after speaking with our mechanics and getting their opinions, I made the decision to pull the unit out of service. I am estimating a new unit will cost \$75,000- \$100,000.

### **Budget Goal**

Storm Water Utility Capital Account #16-58-16-60

### **Financial Impact**

Maintenance and purchase of new machine(s).

### **Recommendation**

N/A – Update

### **2025 Operational Goals**

The purpose of our operational goals is to identify, prior to the budgeting process, what work the city intends to achieve in 2025. The goals should align with our mission. Not only will the operational goals inform budget prioritization, but they will also guide the creation of the 2026 and beyond Department Work Plans.

## DISCUSSION POINTS –

The three operational leaf collection vacuums use 8-9 employees to run efficiently. They also are pulled by 1-ton trucks, tying those vehicles up to being used strictly for leaf collection, totaling six (6) pieces of equipment/vehicles using fuel and having wear and tear. A street sweeper needs to follow the leaf collection route to sweep behind collection – another piece of equipment and employee.

*The compostable bag system can use as little as one rear loader with two people. Ideally a couple trucks out collecting in peak times – two trucks, four people. The street sweeper will still have to sweep leaf collection routes, but there is far less debris left behind.*

Timing – we have run into leaves not falling until the middle to end of November and as happened this year, snow and cold came early and now some leaves are buried and frozen to boulevards. With new development, the City is expanding, leaving a shorter vacuum collection window for more homes between leaves falling and snow/cold coming.

*Bags can be filled any time and stored or collected quickly.*

An expanded leaf bagging program may require more work from residents and would be a change in how the City has collected leaves in the past. Residents will also have to purchase bags from hardware stores, although the City, through the pilot program (storm water utility), has been providing packs of five (5) bags to residents who come to the Street Division and ask for them. Do we want to keep doing this? Expand it and promote it more?

Explore what other communities are doing:

- Oconomowoc is all on the compostable bag leaf collection

- Jefferson has a one-person leaf vacuum machine that covers their whole City. (I would like to go see their machine and explore pricing)

- Contact others