



Opinion

LETTER TO THE EDITOR: Thanks for listening

Posted Nov 26, 2019 at 6:01 AM

Cay Burton of the Okaloosa County Democratic Environmental Caucus thanks those involved for coming up with an alternative to dumping the county's recycled material into the landfill.

In April 2019, the Northwest Florida Daily News reported that contract negotiations had begun between Okaloosa County and the Escambia County Utilities Authority (ECUA) which handles our recycling, and all seemed well. In September, we learned through a Facebook post by the one dissenting Commissioner Nathan Boyles and others, that the county recycling service had been canceled abruptly and replaced with a landfill alternative.

Fortunately, the public's reaction was swift and forceful. A petition was developed which spread like wildfire. It requested the commissioners to reconsider, because over 3,800 signers were willing to pay a bit more to pursue a more environmentally friendly process. The county scheduled a "Listening Session" for the public on Oct. 10. Over 100 people attended this session. It was very gratifying to see that so many in this community care about the environment and are willing to use their personal time to speak eloquently on this topic.

At the listening session, the public made many excellent points about how we can reduce the cost of recycling and waste management at every stage of the production and distribution process. Changes proposed were tied to improving our waterways by reducing micro-plastic pollution and reducing methane release from landfills. It was suggested that product packaging be simplified; that "single use" products like plastic bottles, bags, straws and tableware be replaced with eco-friendly alternatives; and that purchasing products made from recycled materials will improve the aftermarket. Our local government can play an important role in addressing the above, by creating incentives for local businesses and by helping to raise public awareness of what to recycle.

To their credit, the commissioners not only listened, but agreed to pursue a new contract and restore recycling without additional cost to residents. This month, they created a Recycling Advisory Committee, to be made up of community members. I would like to thank my group, the **Okaloosa County Democratic Environmental Caucus**, for their thoughtful participation in the public forum and for working with others in this community to help create this win for the public!

Cay Burton, Okaloosa County Democratic Environmental Caucus