

Layton officials balk at recycling mandate, file notice to leave waste district

By Collin Leonard, KSL.com | Posted - March 27, 2025 at 9:52 a.m.



Layton officials are working to leave the Wasatch Integrated Waste Management District in response to a mandatory recycling program. That would significantly raise the cost of Layton residents wanting to use the landfill that is located in their own city. (Spenser Heaps, Deseret News)

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Layton officials plan to exit Wasatch Integrated Waste Management District, citing representation concerns.
- The decision follows a mandatory recycling program dispute with the district's board.

LAYTON — A letter signed by the Layton mayor, council members and the city manager is generating concern from residents after being circulated on social media and passed around the Davis Landfill.

The letter expresses the city's intent to withdraw from the Wasatch Integrated Waste Management District, a special service district comprised of Davis and Morgan county municipalities that share resources for waste disposal and recycling. It was signed in February but presented to Davis County commissioners last week.

Implications of Layton leaving the district could be widespread rate increases as infrastructure adjusts to the sudden downsize and a loss of millions in revenue, according to Nathan Rich, executive director of the district. The city accounts for around 16% of the waste, Rich says.

"Layton is a big city with a big population," Farmington city manager Brigham Mellor told KSL.com. "So them taking their garbage bag and going home — that has an impact."

But those who could see the most impact are the residents and businesses that use the Davis Landfill located in the city. Forty-nine thousand trips were made to the dump by these parties in 2024, accounting for 32% of nonhauler transactions at the landfill that year, according to the director.

Layton looking to leave the district coincides with a push from the board to reduce the amount of out-of-district waste accepted at the landfill. Rates are set to increase significantly for those making trips from out-of-district (\$50 per load starting in July), and Layton residents could be considered out-of-district, despite the fact that the landfill is in the city.

"I think it would be a travesty. I think it would be a terrible mistake," Rich said.

Bundled recycling dispute

The Davis Landfill is filling up, but the district hopes to extend the life of the relatively cheap and accessible waste facility for another 18 years, according to Rich. Reducing and diverting material sent to the landfill through green waste and recycling is a key strategy to address this.

The 19-member board, composed of representatives from 15 cities, three Davis County commissioners and one Morgan County official, voted on a resolution in January 2024 requiring a mandatory recycling program with penalties for those who did not participate.

realized that the life of the landfill could be extended with a robust recycling program. And the only way to have a robust recycling program was to implement recycling districtwide."

The more communities participate in the recycling programs, the cheaper the service becomes, board members argued, allowing even more people to participate.

The decision by the board caught Layton officials by surprise due to a breakdown in communication. In a February board meeting, Layton Mayor Joy Petro, who serves as the board chairwoman, said she "believes that the board moved too quickly; however, she admitted to not giving her City Council the information regarding the recycling program in a timely manner," according to meeting minutes.

KSL.com reached out to Petro multiple times for comment but did not receive a response.

Layton City Manager Alex Jensen told KSL.com, "They proceeded to tell us how, when, and where we were going to do it. That led to, as you can imagine, quite a bit of consternation on the part of the staff and the City Council, who hadn't heard a single thing about this."

"When the district came down with the the heavy-handed approach," he said, "we actually said we're happy to more aggressively publicize and put out education materials and encourage people to do recycling because we know there are some benefits to recycling. But we'd like to do it in our way, through education and not through compulsion."

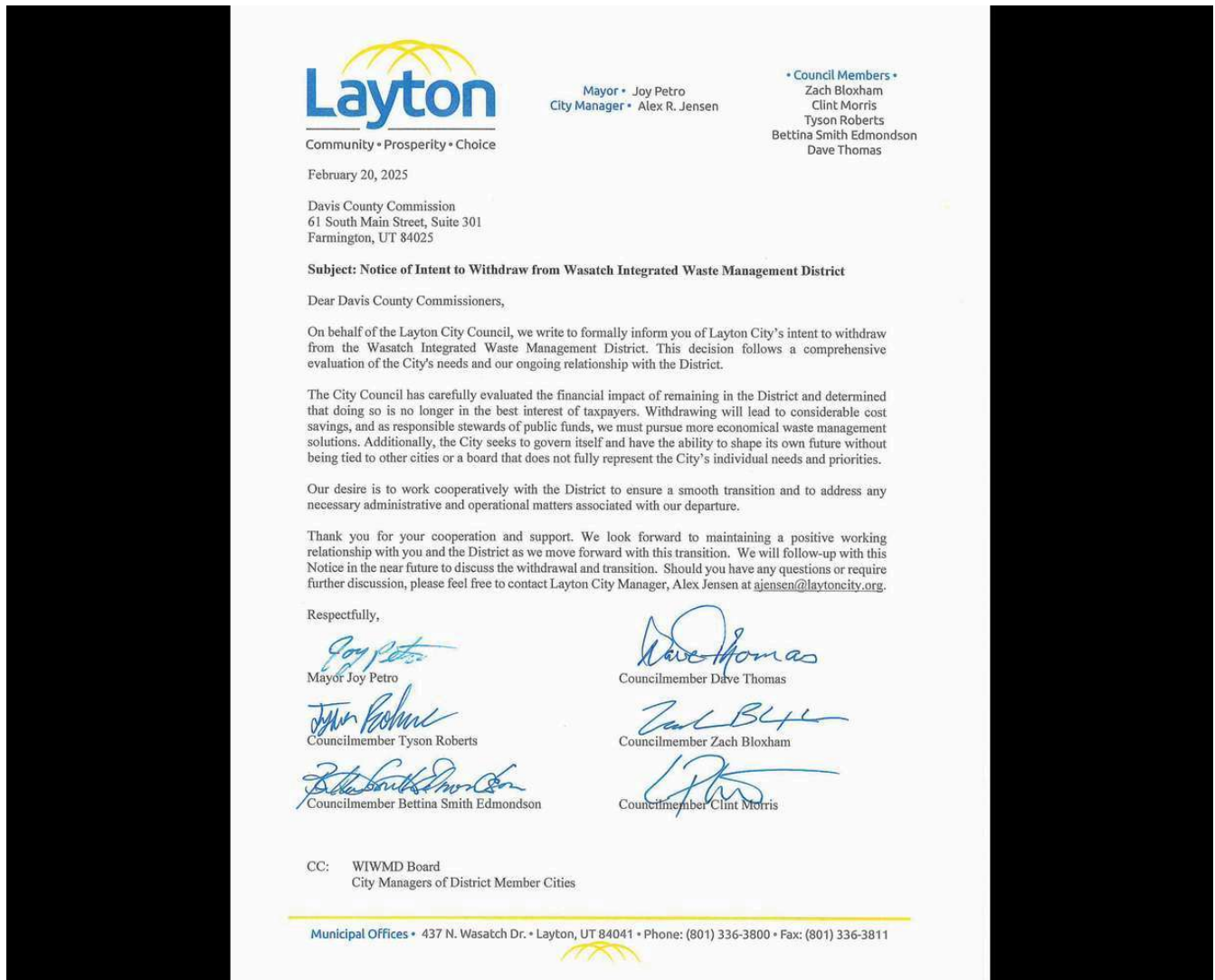
Layton currently has a voluntary recycling program with a 32% participation rate, according to an annual district report.

At the February 2024 meeting, Davis County Commissioner Bob Stevenson, also a former Layton mayor, said, "Nobody is trying to take rights away from anyone. This board was organized to make these types of decisions."

Questioning the authority of the board to enact a mandatory program, Jensen told KSL.com, "We respectfully but strongly disagree with that."

After significant pushback in February 2024, headed by Layton representatives, the district board revised the program to be an incentive structure to participating communities, based on the amount of waste diverted through bundled recycling, opt-out recycling and green waste programs.

Jensen said the changes were a "distinction with no difference."



A letter of intent to leave the Wasatch Integrated Waste Management District signed by Layton officials. (Photo: Layton)

Layton's intent to leave

"We tried to work out family differences, if you will, within the family initially," Jensen said, but city officials "came back with the view that we could save our citizens a substantial amount of money being out of the district as opposed to being in the district, and not having one vote out on a 19-member board, we could control our own destiny."

No Layton council members returned requests for comment.

Rich said that the per-can rate for a household may be lower out of district, but contracting directly with a private company does not provide residents with a number of extra services, including in-district rates to use the landfill, access to tire, mattress and metal recycling, curbside green waste programs and more.

Jensen believes Layton may find other ways to "still provide the mutual benefits that we've experienced in the past."

"Maybe there's not," he said, "but that's our hope is to explore all of those and see if there's something that is reasonable."

"We've made political decisions to charge a little bit more to provide better service," according to Rich. "It's about stewardship. It's about not having the hubris to take resources out of the Earth, use them once and just throw them in a landfill when they could be used again."

The public was largely left out of the decision to leave the district thus far, despite the potential effects the move might have. Many learned about the decision by the council in closed meetings from a pamphlet handed out to those dropping off waste at the Davis Landfill.

"We were hopeful in the next week or two anyway before this kind of blew up to start having an open dialogue because we've been anxious to get information to our residents and for them to understand it," Jensen said, "but we didn't want to show bad faith to the county or to the district in how we approached it. That's been the reason for the delay."

Meetings will continue between all parties, as details of the separation get ironed out. Layton is responsible for a portion of a \$15 million bond across all district members, but officials do not have a clear answer yet on what portion the city may be on the hook for.

Agenda items on the issue will likely be heard by the Davis County Commission in the near future, Rich says.

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