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FEATURED

Chauncey recycling drop-off site shuts down

Solid Waste District seeking another location to replace it

By Kayla Beard Aug 5, 2018



The former site of the Athens-Hocking Recycling Centers' main facility, owned by Athens County, has been a recycling drop-off location for years. This sign remains at the front of the property, now occupied by the Athens County Sheriff's Office.

Kayla Beard

As the recycling drop-off location in Chauncey shuts down for good and Athens County utilizes the property for new purposes, the Athens-Hocking Solid Waste District (AHSWD) is seeking another location to replace it.

Athens-Hocking Recycling Centers (AHRC), the service provider paid by AHSWD to maintain drop-off centers throughout Athens and Hocking counties, will continue to collect materials from various other drop-off locations and at its main facility on Industrial Drive in Athens.

The recycling containers at the Chauncey site were removed last Wednesday after 30-plus years, according to AHRC Director Bruce Underwood. The lease agreement that the county had with the AHRC ends at the end of this month, Underwood said.

In an email provided by Underwood that was sent to him by JoAnn Rockhold (clerk of the Athens County Commissioners), she stated that the commissioners would “not allow” the lease renewal, and that AHRC would have to vacate the property by August 31.

Athens County Commissioner Lenny Eliason said the lease agreement was established at a below-market rate with the AHSWD, which then subleased the property to AHRC. Roger Bail, Operations Coordinator for AHSWD, said Monday morning that the lease has been between AHRC and the county commissioners for the last five years, and that the decision to terminate the contract was between those entities and separate from AHSWD.

The county would not have been able to offer the same below-market rate, Eliason explained. “They decided they didn’t want to keep that space if it would go back to a market rate,” he said. “... I know the solid waste district is working on getting some other locations.”

For decades, the property in Chauncey was home to the AHRC main sorting facility, Underwood said. In the summer of 2015, the non-profit moved to a new sorting facility at 5991 Industrial Drive, which allowed the service provider to move to single-stream collection, sorting materials so consumers don’t have to, according to a previous *NEWS* article. The site in Chauncey became a drop-off location, primarily for hard-to-recycle items, Underwood said.

Now, books, electronic waste and other “specialty” materials, which have been drop-off only, are being suspended at AHRC due to a lack of space and resources. “We need dry, covered storage to store a lot of these items, Underwood said, “then you have to have forklift access and those sorts of things for logistics.”

“We knew this was coming,” Underwood said, but AHRC doesn’t have enough funds available “to just build another building,” especially with the market downturns in the industry. Underwood said the non-profit is looking into grant options, “but it’s not an overnight solution,” he said.

Though the location is closed, “all is not lost,” Underwood said. AHSWD has a total of 21 drop-off locations, ten of which are in Athens County. The AHSWD has been looking for another location, as well, to make up for the loss of the drop-off in Chauncey.

Construction of a new drop-off location in The Plains was put on hold after community members expressed concerns and complaints to the Athens Township Trustees over the site’s planned location – a portion of The Plains Community Park property. The location had been approved by the Athens Township Trustees. The trustees had already entered into a land-use agreement with AHSWD to allow a drop-off site to be constructed, as The Plains is the only community in Athens County that does not offer any free, public recycling areas or services.

At a meeting in June, however, residents filled every chair in the Athens Township Trustees meeting room to voice concerns about the location of a proposed drop-off site in the park, despite a general consensus that having a drop-off in The Plains would be beneficial. The trustees only have two locations under township ownership which they could avail for recycling containers – the community park site and The Plains Fire Department property, which had been deemed inadequate for several reasons upon consideration.

“Given the negative response of community members attending a recent trustees meeting, establishing a community recycling drop-off location at the Plains Community Park as a joint project with the Athens-Hocking Solid Waste District is no longer being considered,” Athens Township Trustee Steve Pierson said in an email Friday. “... Until an alternative location can be identified, Athens Township remains one of just a handful in the Solid Waste District that does not offer free recycling opportunities to community residents.”

The Richland Area Fire Department will soon be receiving two recycling containers near the facility, of which “citizens in (Athens) township can take advantage,” Pierson said. Richland Area Fire Chief Dale Sinclair said Saturday that there are already two containers at the nearby Shade Community Center, and that “we haven’t had any trouble with them,” so the department agreed to house two more behind its main station on Hooper Road, near the dumpsters.

Athens City School District Supt. Tom Gibbs confirmed in an email July 26 that he had spoken with Roger Bail about potentially housing some recycling containers on an unused portion of the Athens High School property, but added that he hadn’t spoken to anyone else, yet, about the possibility. “The specific location Roger suggested would likely not work,” Gibbs said, adding that such a decision would not likely be made anytime soon. “While this might appear to be an easy decision, there has been some resistance to the location of a recycling drop-off point in The Plains and I’d like to take some time and be very thoughtful before approving any such request,” Gibbs said. “... The Athens City Schools does have a great working relationship with the Solid Waste Authority and want to continue to be good partners, but I also want to make sure that we are being mindful of all of the pros and cons.”

Bail said he has not yet found another site, and had no other comments or updates to share on the potential of placing containers elsewhere.

THE ATHENS COUNTY SHERIFF’S office plans to use the majority of the former Chauncey recycling drop-off site as an impound lot and storage area, and is already using a large blue garage on the property to store unused vehicles, County Sheriff Rodney Smith said. The department will install a wire fence around the garage area to store cruisers that aren’t in use, Smith said.

The Sheriff’s Department has previously stored unused vehicles in another garage at the Athens County Fairgrounds, Smith said. “Every year we just have to move our stuff out of there,” Smith explained, which became an inconvenience for the department. When the garage at the Chauncey location became available, that presented an opportunity for the department to have more permanent storage. The new garage is a much better option, Smith said, adding that “it’s easily accessible in the county.”

