

A composting facility for Tulsa's green waste could create a local compost product, leaving a smaller annual bill to taxpayers or even paying for itself, according to a presentation to a City Council task force Tuesday. Michael Patton, director of the Metropolitan Environmental Trust, presented several compost facility options that — if successful — could recycle green waste curbside at a low cost to the city. Streets and Stormwater Division Manager Roy Teeters also presented estimated costs from several composting facilities in other cities that showed potential operating costs per ton of composting green waste. "At this amount, I personally would say that we've got to continue to think about this," Tulsa City Councilor Phil Lakin said. The trash task force will eventually make a recommendation to the city's trash board on how to proceed. The Trash Operations Task Force is staffed by city councilors, members of the trash board and eight council-appointed residents. Green waste has largely gone to the city's trash incinerator since Oct. 1, 2012, because plastic bags required by the city for green waste could not be removed at the city's green-waste mulching plant. Options being considered by the task force include requiring biodegradable paper bags, giving customers green-waste carts and removing plastic by hand. Patton presented research to the Tulsa City Council's Trash Operations Task Force on seven U.S. cities that have working green waste programs. "Every city does it differently," Patton said. "The only thing you can do wrong is spend too much money or not listen to your residents." Cities Patton presented that are comparable to Tulsa include Kansas City, Mo.; Houston; Little Rock, Ark.; and Columbus, Ohio. In Austin, Texas, the city's waste program makes and sells compost — branded Dillo Dirt, Patton said. Tulsa's ability to make a compost facility feasible and produce a product like Dillo Dirt relies on efficiently gathering as much green waste as possible, Teeters said. About 5,000 tons of green waste was burned at Tulsa's incinerator during a year ending this October, Teeters said. The city's current practice of taking green waste to the city's incinerator costs about \$12 per ton, including a state tax, Teeters said. A compost facility

could cost \$18.77 per ton at the lowest, Teeters said from research he presented on comparable programs. The highest comparable program was \$36.73 per ton. As previously reported, an Oklahoma Poll of 400 Tulsans conducted Nov. 1-5 indicates that 64.2 percent of likely voters approve of the trash system, up from 55.3 percent a year ago.

As for green waste, 62.6 percent of respondents said they would prefer the city mulch or compost the material as officials intended — even if it costs more — and 21.6 percent indicated that they approve of burning green waste. The margin of error is 4.9 percent. About 5,000 tons of green waste was incinerated last year, yet Teeters said city estimates of actual green waste disposal are more than three times that because Tulsans often put it in with their regular trash pickup.

Although operating costs could be low, initial costs of creating a compost facility could be substantial, Teeters said. A larger, more expensive facility would lower the annual operating cost assuming more green waste can be processed, Teeters said. The task force also discussed possible locations for a compost facility, including next to the existing wood chipping facility. Teeters said a compost facility could also drive down costs of wood chipping.

Currently, the city pays to dispose of excess wood chips that build up each year. They would instead go to the compost facility, Teeters said. Green waste compost in other cities Kansas City, Mo. Requires paper sacks for leaves and branches but does not allow grass clippings. Two collection days are scheduled about four weeks apart from late October to December. There is a limit of 20 sacks or bundles of branches, no more than 40 pounds each. Houston Curbside recycling requires biodegradable plastic bags certified by the city. Bags cost about \$1 each. Little Rock, Ark. Weekly collection by bag, box or customer-purchased container less than 30 gallons and weighing less than 50 pounds. The city separates plastic bags mechanically and by hand. Compost sells for about \$25 per ton, or a program delivers 10 cubic yards of the compost for about \$250. Columbus, Ohio Curbside collection is every two weeks. Allows any

type of paper bag or customer-owned container up to 30 gallons. A dozen locations allow year-round drop-off of yard waste free of charge. Austin, Texas Curbside collection in paper bags or containers no larger than 34 gallons. Material is mixed with bio solids from the city's waste treatment plant. The compost, branded Dillo Dirt, is sold by the city and by local retailers. Source: Michael Patton, director of the Metropolitan Environmental Trust Jarrel Wade 918-581-8367