



October 2014

Issues Brief

City of Yakima e-Newsletter

Biodegradable Bags Are Back For Fall Leaf Collection Program

Seven years ago the City of Yakima's Solid Waste & Recycling Division began giving away biodegradable bags in order to help clean up the community during the fall and winter and to help reduce problems caused by leaves clogging up the stormwater system. The program has been successful and has returned for another year.

From Monday, October 13th until supplies run out, bags will be given away to Yakima residents at the Public Works Complex located at 2301 Fruitvale Boulevard. Bags can be picked up Monday through Friday between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm.



Biodegradable leaf bags are primarily made of cornstarch and disappear after being composted.

About 40,000 bags will be given away. People who pick up bags will need to provide proof of city of Yakima residency.

"Most people really only need between 5 to 10 bags," said Solid Waste & Recycling Manager Loretta Zammarchi. "We want people to only take as many bags as they really will need so we can get them to as many households as possible."

Zammarchi encourages people who already have City yard waste carts to use them to dispose of leaves and other yard debris rather than using the biodegradable bags to do so. Yard waste carts will be picked up until the end of November. The yard waste program is not operated during the winter, but resumes in March.

An even better option than tossing leaves in yard waste carts or bagging them is to use them for mulch

or compost. That way leaves are put to good use and don't take up valuable space in landfills.

Crews will begin picking up the biodegradable bags filled with leaves on November 3rd. Crews will be rotating between four designated areas within the city every other week picking up bagged leaves until January 9th. Area 1 consists of the western most area of the city. Areas 2 and 3 cover the central sections of Yakima, and Area 4 includes neighborhoods and business districts in the eastern part of the city. A map of the four areas, along with pickup schedules, can be found on the City's website at - <http://www.yakimawa.gov/services/refuse/files/2014/08/2014-Collection-Schedule.pdf>.

The biodegradable bags picked up by the City will be taken to a Yakima County landfill, which does not allow anything other than leaves to be in the bags. Zammarchi says if other yard waste or garbage is in a bag, they will not be picked up. Arrangements can be made for non-biodegradable bags filled with leaves to be picked up for a fee of \$2.35 per bag by contacting the City of Yakima Solid Waste & Recycling Division at 575-6005.

◆ Finished Plaza Design Points to Both Yakima’s Past and Future

Two ridges. Two rivers. Two gaps. One valley. Those prominent geographic characteristics dominate the area in and around Yakima, and they inspired the design for a potential Downtown Yakima Central Plaza.

After having gathered ideas and input from the community at multiple public meetings, through a comprehensive survey, and during numerous City Council sessions, the plaza design team unveiled the finished concept for the multi-use space in early October. The design incorporates iconic features from our area’s past while also paving the way for future economic growth in the area around the plaza.

During a public meeting on October 6th and at a City Council meeting the following night, the design team, which is led by the Seattle-based Gustafson Guthrie Nichol landscape architecture firm, shared detailed drawings of a plaza that includes water features that resemble irrigation canals and rolling farm sprinklers, groves of trees reminiscent of orchards, a large shade structure evocative of a barn, and much more.

In early September, the City Council chose a preferred design from six that had been created by the team. The Council also selected a preferred plaza site – space between 2nd Street and 3rd Street north of Chestnut Avenue that is now being used for parking. After the Council made those decisions, the design team spent about a month further refining the preferred design.

Additional work is still necessary in order to develop more accurate cost estimates, but an initial evaluation puts construction costs at between \$10 million and \$12 million.



The rendering above shows a street level view of a potential Downtown Yakima Central Plaza. The water feature just to the center of the picture resembles irrigation canals that have brought water to Yakima and made it a center of agriculture.

Y-PAC coverage of the public presentation of the completed plaza design, which took place at the Seasons Performance Hall, can be seen on the City’s website at – <http://bit.ly/1ncqZOp>. The design team’s presentation to the City Council, which took place on October 7th, is available on the City’s website at – <http://bit.ly/1BSwFYr>.



This rendering’s street level view of a potential Downtown Yakima Central Plaza shows a water feature to the right reminiscent of large, rolling farm sprinklers and shade structure to the left similar in design to old, wooden barns that were common in the early days of the Yakima Valley.

Yakima City Manager Tony O’Rourke has indicated that if the City Council were to give a green light to the plaza project, an effort would be launched to secure private funding to cover a portion of the cost of building a plaza. Now that the design of the plaza has been finalized, the City has more concrete information to provide to potential funding partners.

The Council is scheduled to decide whether or not to go ahead with an advisory vote on the plaza next year during its October 21st business meeting.

◆ Another Irrigation Season Coming to an End

When the first white pioneers arrived in the Yakima Valley in the mid 1800s, what they saw was an endless expanse of high desert. Sagebrush, bunchgrass, and thistle dominated the landscape. Shafts of ancient basalt sprang from soil that was a mix of volcanic ash and glacial deposits.

At first, the land in the Yakima Valley seemed best suited for raising cattle and other livestock. In fact, that is exactly how most early settlers scratched out an existence – growing herds of not just cattle but sheep, goats, chicken, etc.

But while those who trekked west to the Yakima Valley to make a new home saw terrain mostly consisting of various shades of brown, they also saw great potential. They believed the soil in the area was perfectly suited to create an agricultural mecca that could rival those found anywhere else in the U.S. or, for that matter, the world. To accomplish that lofty goal, our ancestors needed one crucial ingredient – water.

The earliest known experiment with irrigation in the Yakima Valley is believed to have taken place in 1864 when water was diverted from Ahtanum Creek to help grow a few acres of crops for the Catholic mission nearby. After achieving some success, private canal companies began to form to bring water to more and more land. But the late 1800s, irrigation had proven its worth in unlocking the agricultural bounty of the Yakima Valley.



This undated photograph shows ongoing construction of an early irrigation canal in the Yakima Valley. Today, water is delivered by such canals to more than 460,000 acres of land in the region. Irrigation has been the key to making the Yakima Valley one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world.

After a few years of lobbying the federal government, leaders from the Yakima Valley convinced Congress to study, and ultimately begin to build in 1905, a network of canals and other delivery system to turn the region into what its earliest settlers had envisioned – an agricultural powerhouse.

Over the many decades that followed, irrigation systems in the Yakima area were expanded and refined. Today, the irrigated lands within what came to be known as the Yakima Project total more than 460,000 acres, including lawns and gardens in the city of Yakima.

Wednesday, October 15th marks the end of another irrigation season for the vast majority of the residential and business customers served by the City

of Yakima's irrigation system. That's the day that the system operated by the City's Water/Irrigation Division will be shut off until next spring.

The few other irrigation system in the area that operate independently from City systems will also be shutting down over the next few weeks.

"It's a good idea for people to spend some time now preparing for the shutdown," said Acting Irrigation Supervisor Brad Harrison. "If they need to do some final watering, they should get that done this weekend. People should also go through the process of winterizing their own irrigation systems before the water stops flowing on October 15th," said Harrison.

The City of Yakima has operated irrigation systems since the early 1900s. The system that now exists to deliver water to customers in Yakima actually consists of 66 individual, smaller systems that were consolidated almost 20 years ago into a single utility. Through that utility, the City currently provides water to about 11,000 customers.