



October 6, 2017

Dear Orange County Residents:

Since Hurricane Irma, I and the District Commissioners have received numerous communications regarding storm debris pickup. For those of you who are frustrated and disappointed, I don't blame you - not only do I understand your feelings, I share them, and sincerely appreciate the opportunity to provide this update.

As you may be aware, we are hampered in our debris collection efforts by several unique factors.

First and foremost, in the wake of Hurricane Harvey's impacts to Texas, followed by the unprecedented impact of Hurricane Irma on virtually every county in Florida, debris removal resources and personnel are extremely lean. To compound this simultaneous and widespread need for debris removal contractors, as you may have read or heard in the news, several counties in the state are paying contractors well in excess of the going industry rate. In some cases, jurisdictions have paid more than double our contract prices. Unfortunately this has resulted in some contractors foregoing their longstanding contractual obligations in order to travel to areas that are paying inflated prices. Although Orange County has long had debris removal contracts in place - including very competitive pricing - we are being impacted by this type of practice. And while some might urge us to follow suit, because this is a manpower issue, paying "ransom rates" will simply result in more profit to the companies, with only a marginal difference - if any - to our citizens.

We have been vigorous in our protests on behalf of Orange County's citizens, and were extremely pleased when Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi issued investigative subpoenas on Oct. 2, 2017 to three debris-removal companies as part of an ongoing investigation into allegations that contractors are either failing to perform at pre-storm contract rates; not performing until negotiating higher rates; or are slow to perform under existing contracts. Two of Orange County's contractors, AshBritt and Ceres Environmental, each received one of those three subpoenas. Rest assured that we'll deal with contractual issues at the proper time, but our focus today is doing what we can to expedite debris collection.

In addition to continuing to facilitate debris pickup for more than 800,000 residents in unincorporated Orange County, we have reassigned 15 Public Works crews from other duties to assist in residential debris removal. Together with our contractors, these Orange County crews are working 12 hours a day. At this time, our estimates suggest that debris clean-up will produce about 1.3 million cubic yards of debris - enough to fill up Epcot's Spaceship Earth 15 times - and will likely continue through the holidays. We know that completing the collection process cannot come quick enough for many in our community, but I join our teams and contractors in asking for patience. With a county as large as ours, and considering the above issues, it will take some time to complete our planned debris removal.

I'm aware that in a number of neighborhoods across the county, individuals and neighbors have banded together to dispose of their debris for no charge at one of our [11 citizen drop off sites](#), or for a fee at our [county landfill](#) when using professional lawn and yard maintenance workers. Precisely this type of "neighbors helping neighbors" activity has happened in my own neighborhood, which at my personal request is at the very bottom of the [debris pickup schedule](#). For me, this is not a symbolic gesture - it is representative of the implicit contract and bond of trust I feel with every Orange County resident and family.

As a reminder, separate from debris collection is your regular weekly yard waste collection, which is only for vegetative material that is set out in bags, cans or bundles. In several neighborhoods, due to the extraordinary volume, [weekly yard waste collection](#) has fallen behind. We are aware of this, and are working with yard waste haulers on their efforts. Please know that many of the crews have been working extended hours and on the weekends to provide service. In the meantime, I urge you to continue to place and keep your yard waste curbside for collection.

Together, we are making Orange County the best place to live, work and raise our families, and we appreciate your patience as we work through these uniquely challenging times.

Sincerely,

Teresa Jacobs

Orange County Mayor