

## Better estimates

That Harford County has a recycling rate of 63 percent — the highest in Maryland — is commendable and can be attributed to fairly impressive efforts on the part of the county government, the various trash haulers and, most importantly, those who take the time to separate paper, plastic, glass and metal from the balance of what we throw in the trash.

In an effort to continue to increase the recycling percentage of what is thrown away in Harford County, the county government is considering a shift away from the alternating weeks collection schedule to a plan under which all curbside recycling items — paper as well as cans and bottles — would be collected the same day.

This sounds convenient enough, but the cost estimate is something that should be cause for pause among county officials. The problem isn't so much the dollar figure, but that the estimate isn't a little more specific. The estimate of what an all-in-one recycling day would cost the county is between \$200,000 and \$800,000.

That's quite a range and leads us to ponder how solid the numbers are and whether it would be worth the cost if the result weren't sure to be an actual increase in the county's overall recycling rate.

While curbside recycling is probably what comes to mind most when the subject of recycling comes up, a number of other large tonnage line items figure into Harford County's recycling totals, notably yard waste that gets composted, computers, electronics and appliances and other hard to dispose of things like paint and car batteries.

The ultimate goal, of course, should be to recycle everything, in some way, shape or form — even if recycling comes in the form of using garbage for fuel as Harford County does at the waste-to-energy plant in Joppa. In the long run, such practices conserve resources, while the elimination of actual garbage through recycling also means there wouldn't be a need for sanitary landfills.

Such projects should, however, be firmly rooted in financial reality, and a project that has a cost estimate that varies so widely should be sent back to the drawing board.