

# **Brunswick Recycling & Sustainability Committee Meeting**

**May 9, 2020, 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

## **Minutes**

**Members Present:** Marie Caspard, Jamie Ecker, Jennifer Hicks, Harry Hopcroft, Kay Mann, Steve Weems, Steve Wood, Dieuwke Zolas

**Staff Present:** Jay Astle, Director of Public Works

### **Updates on town budget, Jay Astle**

- \$75,000 savings if recyclables currently processed at \$125/ton are landfilled at \$80/ton - calculated over 1200 tons of recycling produced. Extra \$125,000 savings by paying ourselves at the landfill which goes towards the landfill closure. Total savings - \$200,000.
- Revenues for the town in general have severely decline, no excise taxes, property taxes have been delayed → only a 1% increase, rather than typical 3% (each percentage is \$460,000)

### Committee Discussion:

- Should be dealt with as two-layered
- Revenue declines are not state mandated. Municipalities have been closed so it's difficult to collect excise taxes & property taxes have been delayed by a month, possibly longer & state's ability to participate in revenue-sharing is unpredictable. Property taxes are within the town's control, ability to take in excise taxes for vehicles is directly related to municipal buildings being open to the public.
- Possible that fee trash bags will come back as early as June 1, most likely July 1: bag tags are not part of the operational budget, it goes toward the landfill closure fund.
- We pay \$80/ton out of the operational side of municipal budget to landfill enterprise fund. \$8 million is needed to close the landfill. We've starting saving money to prepare. The state reimburses ~80% of closure. Casella is paid for transportation & landfill enterprise is paid for tipping the trash. The closure budget is \$5 or \$600,000 short.
- There's a lot of pushback against stopping recycling but \$75,000 will need to be acquired from somewhere.
- Landfill closure is based on agreement with the state of Maine. The extra 1200 tons of recycling added to the landfill wouldn't make a difference. The closure date is carved in stone.

**Upcoming actions subcommittee will take with Town Manager John Eldridge to address the potential loss of recycling program, Jamie Ecker, Steve Weems**

Subcommittee presents a draft set of recommendations for the town council to consider that provides options to preserve the recycling program as it exists (see at end of minutes).

#### Steve Weems & Jamie Ecker presentation:

- We can negotiate a better contract with Casella, but it probably won't cover the \$75,000 in needed savings. It's not worth fighting the cut, but work to cover that.
- Would also like to include as an option: voluntary fee for tag program. Current residences that are recycling could voluntarily pay a fee to continue participating in the recycling program. We have about 5,000 residential accounts. If we have a fee of 25/year we'd cover the shortfalls from the Casella.
- We have almost no time for taking a big pivot (ie: changing providers) - budget needs to be finalized by June 15.
- Recycling markets have been bad in the last 2 years. Casella commodities prices haven't been good - the town is in an exceptionally poor contract with Casella. EcoMaine is much better, shares revenue with member communities, but we have no structure to transfer recycling to EcoMaine on such a short notice.
- One of the recommendations is to improve the contract with Casella and improve transparency, add education components, and help with reducing contamination. Casella is obligated to tag recycling if too contaminated. \$289,000 fee currently for recycling processing.
- 15% of the recycling stream is glass - would be better to landfill it.

#### Committee discussion:

- Committee emphasised its interest in ramping up education (with help from a summer intern and continuing talks with Rick Wilson at the HS), improving the town's contract with Cassella to increase transparency, and reduce contamination (possibly with increased enforcement).
- A focus eliminating glass to reduce the cost of recycling materials: hardest to transport and releases the least amount of GHG in the landfill. Ask Cassella how they manage glass.
- Discussed how to avoid the fee disincentivizing recycling. Reinstating blue bags and integrating a buddy program where someone else could support low-income residents could address this concern.
- Agreed that an emphasis on composting should be part of the recommendations.
- Committee agrees that the town leave recycling program as close to the way it is now, recognizing that the town will be transitioning in a year and a better provider/arrangement can be established after the landfill closes in 11 months.
- Committee discussed administrative obstacles of recycling fee. The emphasis is on the fact that this would be a temporary arrangement.

Steve Weems makes a motion that the committee approve the following set of recommendations for the Town Council regarding preserving recycling and addressing budget challenges:

- *Improved contract terms with Casella* one that would more effectively tie its single-stream recycling charge to changes in commodity pricing in the market, with better audits of what is actually in the SSR stream and better visibility of about the current value of various recyclable commodities.

- *Make zero or limited changes to the current SSR program – just better information and waste auditing to hopefully result in less contamination.*
- *Institute a special voluntary program for recyclers to cover the \$75,000 gap between processing the recycling and landfilling the recycling. At \$25.00 per year per household at 60% participation would cover the gap.*
- *Restructure the list of allowable materials that can be put in the residential recyclable materials bin to include a more limited list of higher-value materials. [Example: limit the SSR program materials to (i) fiber (cardboard, mixed paper, clean paper packaging), (ii) metals, and (iii) three numbered and identified grades of plastic bottles (#1, #2 & #5).] Redirect other materials currently included in the SSR program (such as glass and mixed plastics with no market) in the municipal solid waste stream being landfilled.*
- *Work with the town to approach reduction of contamination through education and enforcement.*

Seconded by Steve Wood.

No discussion, All in favor Motion approved

Next steps:

- Jay Astle recommended that the recommendations are run by council liaison Steve Walker before sending to Town Council.
- Request time at May 18th Council meeting to present short term plan and budget recommendations.
- Jamie requested that the town have a meeting with Cassella and that he attend.

Meeting adjourned at 3:15.

Next regular meeting is May 26.

## **Notes on Town of Brunswick Recycling Options for FY 2020-2021**

May 7, 2020

These are notes for consideration at our Saturday, May 9 Special Meeting. John Eldridge, Town Manager, has recommended cutting \$75,000 from the Public Works Dept. recycling budget. This figure is derived from a multiplication of the estimated annual tonnage of the curbside single-stream recycling program times the difference between (i) the projected payment to Casella (Pine Tree) for recycled materials processing and (ii) the tipping fee at the municipal Graham

Road landfill. This effectively would suspend the recycling program for the year and result in landfilling all residential curbside Single-Stream Recyclables (SSR).

The Town assumes that of the approximately 1,500 tons of total SSR, from municipal, school, and residential sources; approximately 1,200 tons per year of this volume is residential SSR, collected from approximately 5,000 households.

In our (Ecker, Weems) judgement we are not likely to prevail with the Town Council if we just fight the Manager's proposed budget cut. The overall budget difficulties are unprecedented and dire. Therefore I think as a committee we should focus on the following:

Proposed Goal: Help the town achieve \$75,000 savings so it will continue the single-stream recycling program in some form during the next budget year.

#### Option A

- Negotiate a better contract with Casella, one that would more effectively tie its single-stream recycling charge to changes in commodity pricing in the market, with better audits of what is actually in the SSR stream (Casella is obligated by contract to enforce compliance at the curb), and better visibility of about the current value of various recyclable commodities.
- Restructure the list of allowable materials that can be put in the residential recyclable materials bin to include a more limited list of higher-value materials. [Example: limit the SSR program materials to (i) fiber (cardboard, mixed paper, clean paper packaging), (ii) metals, and (iii) three numbered and identified grades of plastic bottles (#1, #2 & #5).] Redirect other materials currently included in the SSR program (such as glass and mixed plastics with no market) in the municipal solid waste stream being landfilled.

#### Option B

- Get better contract terms and enforcement from Casella (as outlined above)
- Make zero or limited changes to the current SSR program – just better information and waste auditing to hopefully result in less contamination.
- Institute a special fee program for recyclers to cover the \$75,000 – analogous to a “fee-per-bag” program. (If this were the sole option, it would amount to a fee of about \$15.00 per year per household.)

### Option C

- Find a way to redirect the SSR program materials to Ecomaine. This would involve some sort of transfer from the smaller packer trucks that collect the recyclables at curbside to larger trailers to haul the recyclables to Ecomaine's facility in Portland. (We are talking 1-2 trailers per week only.) All told, this might save us \$35-40,000 per year, or about half the goal of \$75,000.
- Implement changes in the list of acceptable materials in the SSR program as necessary, as outlined in Option A above. This would save more.
- Accept the fact that due to the logistical and potential permitting difficulties of this option, in the very short-term, beginning July 1, until we could bring this option on line, the recyclables would have to be landfilled at Graham Road.

One tactic could be to just accept the \$75,000 reduction in the budget, while we work with the town on one or more of the foregoing options. If \$75,000 savings and/or new income is essential to preserve the recycling program, the consequence of failure is the recyclables would be landfilled anyway. At least there would always be some place to send the recyclable materials and the Council would be assured of the savings. Certainty about what to do with the recyclables on a weekly basis and the budget savings probably will be necessary.

One final but separate thing to be aware of: the Council has suspended trash bag fees due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These fees raised \$293,000 in 2018, according to Jay Astle. This money has been dedicated to a separate Enterprise Fund for the landfill closure work scheduled for next spring. If this suspension is not reversed by the Council, it will result in another funding shortfall, and also continue the wrong message in terms of incentives.