

Meeting Notes from Solid Waste Master Plan Workgroup on Building Municipal Capacity/Regionalization

February 26, 2009

In attendance: Vithal Deshpande, City of Somerville; Rosemary Nolan, Tri-Town Alliance (Quincy, Braintree, Weymouth); Paul Meilinger, Casella; Garrett Trierweiler, Waste Management; Irene Congdon, MAC; Jonathan Ferris, MAC; Carolyn Dann, MAC; Tina Klein, DEP; Gretchen Brewer; DEP; Rod Robison, Concord Public Works
Facilitator: Brooke Nash

Introduction: Brooke provided an overview of the stakeholder workgroup process and explained what DEP means by “municipal capacity building” – providing assistance and/or resources to help municipalities become more efficient and effective in waste reduction programs. This can include training for staff, fostering communication among municipalities, developing program models and templates, sharing case studies, and more. The second, but closely related topic for the workgroup is “regionalization” – and how municipalities can work collectively to provide more efficient, lower cost services for recycling and waste reduction.

Participant Introductions and Challenges/Needs:

- Would like the help of a marketing specialist who could review communications, printed material and “polish it” to insure that different audiences (non-recyclers, elected officials, general public, etc) would understand the message.
- Municipalities are very good at doing what they’ve always done, but it’s hard for them to look at all the options and make change
- “Risk money” (i.e., funding for new approaches) is a good tool – enough so that munis can pilot test a new idea enough to see if it will work
- MRIP grants were a huge help in the past – these funds covered things not available through other funds, e.g, a Big Belly Solar Compactor; very helpful to programs like Concord that are user-fee based
- Municipalities need help for understanding recycling benefits; they think in terms of cost only, need education and marketing help to communicate a broader sustainability perspective
- Need funding for education, e.g., a detailed recycling education brochure for Somerville is too popular to stop doing, but very expensive; would help if this could be done on regional basis
- Major problem is municipalities not talking to one another; when they do, there can be positive results; a good example is Quincy-Weymouth-Braintree tri-town alliance formed for procuring solid waste/recycling collection and disposal services.
- Need to help local elected officials understand recycling and its financial benefits

Background on Potential Funding: Brooke then presented information about potential funding sources – the Waste to Energy Credits (WECs) program and expanded bottle bill, as context for discussion.

Green Communities Act and WECs

- Part of this law makes WTE plants eligible to earn Renewable Energy Credits (RECs)
- Six WTE plants owned by Waste Management, Inc and Covanta are classified as renewable energy sources
- Utilities must purchase a portion of their energy from renewable sources, therefore must buy from Waste and Covanta
- 50% of the proceeds from sale of renewable energy credits will go for recycling funding (DEP approved recycling projects).
- Public hearings for the regulations on WECs are: March 31 and April 1, 2009
- Under this program, funds may be provided to all sectors: governments, not-for-profits, businesses, industry, haulers, etc
- Possibly will have funds available in January 2010
- DEP will issue a solicitation for these funds around August 2009

Expanded Bottle Bill

- Governor's budget for FY2010 proposed expanding bottle bill to include non-carbonated juice, water, and sport drink containers
- Could generate up to \$25 million in additional funds annually; Governor has proposed some of this funding would go to recycling programs, through DEP.
- Legislature would need to adopt legislation to expand bottle bill.

The group brainstormed two categories of assistance: ideas that require little or no financial resources and ideas that would depend on financial resources.

Brainstorming

Training needs

- Regular training should be offered for transfer station managers, as well as compost program operators
 - They need to interact with other towns to see and learn new things
 - Other states have regular training
 - Have people meet and be a region once in awhile
 - Could offer continuing education credits as other states do
- Need similar training and interaction down the road for hazardous waste management, if we get more sites

Liability Issues with Regional HHW sites

- If regional approach used for hazardous waste sites, towns worry about individual town liability
 - How is this addressed in other states?
 - How can the State back-stop a host community to encourage creation of regional hazardous waste sites, without the host community being liable?
- Concord representative strongly concurred with above; said that Concord is part of 8-town MinuteMan group for haz waste; insurance is big concern for member towns and contractors; assistance on this issue would be very welcome

DARP (see explanation at the end of this document)

- Department Approved Recycling Program (DARP)** is too easy to qualify for; the bar should be raised.
- DARP should be expanded to include higher, more challenging levels for communities to meet, such as sustainability, with more incentives offered to encourage munis to stretch further (e.g., could make like private sector corporate social responsibility programs that set criteria for companies to meet and levels of recognition they can earn)
- Make the DARP program for munis mandatory in some way
- Waste ban exemptions in DARP are not a good idea; all communities should have inspections
- Punitive outreach (like DARP) is not a good approach; DARP served a purpose at a certain time, but is ineffective for towns that don't have recycling or even solid waste staff
- Want to see a change to be more supportive of communities and offer opportunities
 - Example – Cape Towns complain they don't have DARP status and, therefore, can't apply for grants
 - Funding needs to consider different cultures in different regions of the state

Models/Templates/Information Sharing

- The next 2 years will be tough fiscally; therefore DEP should do more enabling for munis
 - Example – Tri-Town Alliance used materials from DEP's Green Team (schools) for other target groups, e.g., mayors of some towns used the Recycling Pledge
 - Example – Weymouth School did a Green Week, where kids brought their lunches in reusable containers for one week; they measured and found they reduced trash by 86% in that week; event got on Channel 5, prompted much enthusiasm
 - Have template resources (clip art, etc) for towns to produce outreach materials
- Have a streamlined Toolkit for towns with three things towns can use
- Idling reduction materials are great because common info applies for whole state; could this be done for recycling?
- Could there be a place on the DEP website where municipal coordinators could access ideas, share information, upload artwork and other files to share?
- Sarah Weinstein, who supervises the DEP website for BWP, was present at the meeting and explained that the agency is unable to let other people outside the agency post to the DEP website.
- Could this be done through MassRecycle or through a blog?
- One MAC said she saves up information, tips, good resources, etc, and puts together a weekly Friday email to all her towns that is up to four pages with two attachments; communities find a lot of value in this.
- Work with newspapers to publish an A-Z Guide of every place you can take things; three regional groups have done this; but it's not online.
- Need for better information for residents on how to recycle a range of items (e-waste, household items, building materials). How can DEP help?

- Can DEP provide regular updates to municipalities about new corporate take-back and “greening” programs, such as Best Buy (now takes electronics for free, except TVs (charge \$10 fee for TVs, but then give a \$10 in-store coupon in exchange)

Using recognition and other tools to engage the attention of higher level municipal officials

- Celebrating municipal successes is important
- Set up, or use existing smaller scale gatherings where folks are recognized by their peers on a regional basis
- DEP should write up positive success stories, not just negative press releases
- Example of a regional success: Lowell and surrounding communities formed a regional group for town manager meetings on recycling; the recycling coordinators do all the work to orchestrate, then bring town managers together to hear success stories, compare notes, exchange ideas.
- This kind of approach is needed to get recycling on town managers’ radar screens and be seen as something with high level appeal
- Contract workshops always have a good draw; how could this be accomplished for town managers and CEOs?
- Example: Hauler Roundtable held in western MA (organized by MAC) was a big success; haulers and municipalities sat down to discuss how to obtain better recycling data that communities needed for the Municipal Recycling Incentive Program (MRIP)**. (see explanation of MRIP at the end of this document)
- Need a “hook” or cutting edge topic, such as single stream and automated collection to attract higher level municipal officials (town managers and CEOs), i.e., “Where will your waste go in 5 years?”
- Show opportunities to save money through automated and single stream collection, and address barriers such as capital cost of carts that cause many municipal officials to dismiss the idea without any consideration.
- If Governor Patrick would have a local government conference, that would attract people
- Governor Patrick is interested in regionalization of services at for greater efficiencies; could municipalities get credit on the “cherry sheet” (local aid formula) for regionalizing programs?
- Mass Municipal Association should also be engaged in the dialogue on recycling, especially if funding from WECs is available

Regional Procurement of goods and services

- Procurement of goods via bulk purchasing is another way to save money
- Could regional purchasing cooperatives be helpful on collective purchases?
- A 32 gallon plastic barrel for recycling (in single stream communities without carts) would be a good item to offer on state contract
- Hardware (non-big-box) stores in the Tri-Town communities are offering a \$5 coupon on the purchase of barrels
 - Towns teamed with them to add another \$5 in-house coupon for each barrel
 - The in-house coupon was covered through a 50 cent fee on the Capitol Waste contract

- The MAC went to each participating store and distributed placards and stickers to place in the barrels
- Towns have mixed reaction to bulk purchases – it can be too much of a hassle to coordinate – unless there are dedicated locations in various parts of the state that are regularly re-stocked with bulk purchase items
- Should have a wide range of compost bins available via state contract – e.g., need special ones for food scraps; offer indoor composters
- Do a group buy at local level, like the rain barrel concept: Communities pre-pay at cost or cost plus (a little), then get local small hardware stores (not big box) that are interested in good community relations to serve as drop-ship sites for the bins (Hamilton/Wenham did this, offered a higher-end tumbling composter and sold more than 50).

Regional Differences

- In central Massachusetts there's a big need for regional recycling drop-off sites for haulers. Small haulers are on the increase; 40 small haulers are serving residential sector in Central Mass.
- A model that's worked well in Leicester, MA, is a transfer station that is open to residents and haulers of multiple towns that provides for convenient drop-off of a range of recyclable items, bulky waste; all users pay a user fee; town staff don't have the bother of recording where the delivery vehicle came from because the site is open to everyone
- This is like the resource recovery park idea, which has been successfully used by CA communities. Drop-off of all recyclables, reusables, building materials, compostables, etc, can take place before the fee gate, so that users only pay for waste that can't be recovered in any way
- State should help these central drop-off facilities grow; towns were funding but now out of money; state should fund and state should permit (DEP permitting requirements are a barrier now)
- Towns with existing transfer stations are best candidates; if they charge fees for everyone, it can be open to wider public.
- Central Massachusetts has 18 towns with no recycling or trash collection
 - Sign of the times: three of these towns with no past history of programs just went out together in a solicitation for PAYT bids
 - 28 staff from these three towns are now working together to review two bids
 - If this program flies, three other towns want to do a similar solicitation
 - Their goal is to get minimum of 60% of residents to sign up, preferably 70-80%

School Recycling

- Many schools are requesting assistance to be green; a LEED-like structure/checklist would be good with gradations of green
- In terms of regionalization and market development, a lot of schools have collaborative buying already for school supplies, but don't buy recycled content copy paper
 - Schools still think recycled copy paper is more expensive; is it?
 - Schools' main purchasing is done in July; schedule for state contract buying is not good timing for schools
 - Staples has sales on recycled copy paper in October, not a good time for schools either

- Very challenging for schools to take advantage of grants because the timing is wrong in terms of the school year; could in-kind TA grants be put on a two year cycle?
- Green Team program for schools provides recycling containers, worm bins, compost bins but demand exceeds supply many times over, each year; participation in Green Team has doubled each of last three years.
- When a community switches to single stream with carts, their old recycling bins could be redeployed to schools.
- Casella is gearing up an education program for the schools – working with Massachusetts Department of Education on a curriculum aimed at being taught in science classes
- Need to re-think recycling containers at schools – problematic for custodians to lift full bins of paper to dump in dumpsters out in parking lot
 - Get it into custodian union contracts to handle recyclables; make clear it's not more material, just same amount divided into two streams
 - Is there a way to do single stream in schools?
 - Make tandem cart with 2 toters for use by custodians a grant item for Green Team
- Schools can use Abitibi Paper Retriever bins
- Need multi-bin sites for multi-family housing, so all things can be dropped off
- Covanta says they would like more transfer stations in more locations in central and eastern Massachusetts, so they have places to consolidate loads

Regionalization:

- Why don't towns team up and go out for 10 year contracts for recycling processing?
- Former NESWC South and North communities had very painful experience with regional disposal contract so they push back on any regionalized idea
- Other barriers: Processing locations are restricted by hauler ownership; it would be hard to group towns together
- In central Massachusetts, many haulers use split body trucks for recycling/trash in rural communities; this would make regional processing contract difficult.
- Hamilton and Wenham are discussing combining the two towns. However, each built its own fire station, even though the towns border each other and are both small.
- When asked why they built separate fire stations, they said when you go regional, as in the school that serves both towns, you lose control of the budget.
- In Massachusetts, if two towns can't reach unanimity, then an arbitration-type process kicks in whereby the state, or some other entity (County? Court?), makes the decision for the affected towns.
- This needs to be researched because it is an obstacle to regionalization

Homework and Topics for Second Meeting:

- Develop more ideas for diverting organics
- Further discussion on regionalization
- Reuse – how can we institutionalize this more?
- Come up with list of short- and long-term projects

- Come up with ideas of what can be done with or without funds
- Delve deeper into an MRIP-type program and possibly ways to broaden it to sustainability
- Develop more ideas for serving multi-unit buildings

*Explanation of MRIP:

- DEP set up a menu of choices of program requirements towns had to adopt in order to get Municipal Recycling Incentive Payment funds paid on per ton of diverted waste basis
- Requirements kept increasing, setting the bar higher for programs
- Eventually set up two tiers: Basic MRIP and Advanced MRIP to allow for varying capabilities of towns

**DARP Explained:

- DARP (Dept Approved Recycling Program) started in 1994
- DEP set standards for communities to meet; standards raised over time to challenge communities to improve programs
- If communities qualify as DARP, exempt from Waste Ban inspections at their facilities
- DARP does not include funds now