

## MassDEP Reduce & Reuse (R&R) Working Group Virtual Meeting

Topic: Household Durable Goods

Wednesday, June 24, 2020 | 11:00 AM – 1:00 PM | Meeting Summary

The R&R Working Group is a forum for discussion of source reduction and reuse regulations, policies, and programs in Massachusetts. The group was established to help in the development of a MassDEP Strategic Reduce and Reuse Action Plan as outlined in the 2030 Solid Waste Master Plan. To learn more about the working group and find past meeting materials, visit: [MassDEP Reduce & Reuse Working Group](#)

This meeting was held virtually and facilitated by Erin Victor, Environmental Analyst, MassDEP [erin.victor@mass.gov](mailto:erin.victor@mass.gov). A total 96 people participated in the 6/24/2020 meeting. The discussion sections reflect both written and spoken comments and questions from participants.

Link to Presentation Slides: [Houshold Durable Goods Discussion Presentation Slides](#); Link to Recording: [Household Durable Goods Panel Discussion Recording](#)

### Agenda:

- 11am- 11:15 – Welcome and Background on R&R Workgroup
  - Where are we heading?
  - Survey Results
- 11:15AM – 12:15PM - Panel Discussion: Reuse & Repair of Household Goods & Furniture
  - Carlos Zabala, Morgan Memorial Goodwill
  - Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank
  - Christine Quinn, Cancer Connection Thrift Shop
  - Katrina Martin, Professional Organizer
  - Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore
  - Sharon Martens, Household Goods
- 12:15PM – 1:00 PM – Roundtable
  - Questions for panelists
  - Group discussion: barriers and strategies

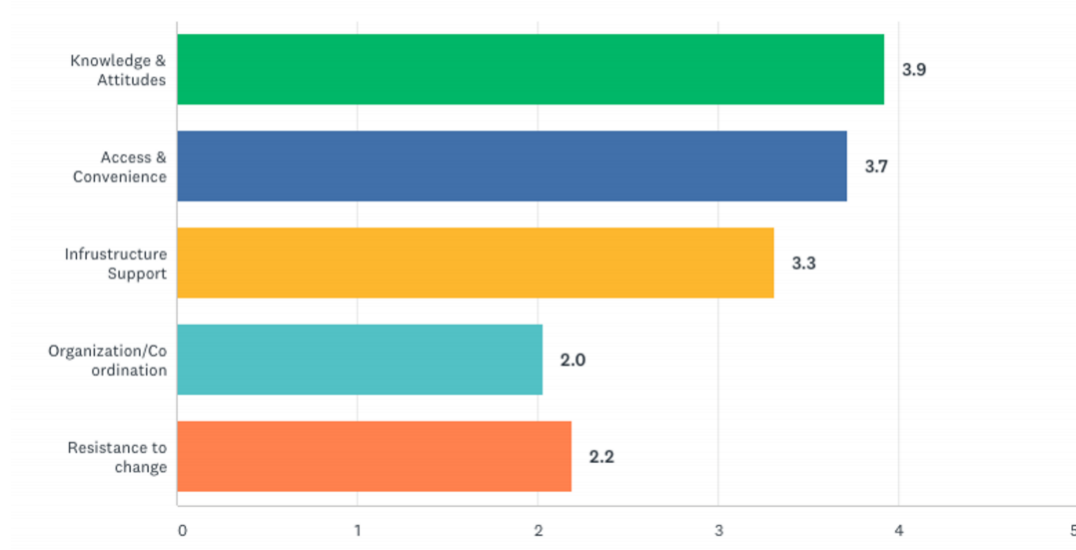
### Welcome & Background

- Background on the Reduce & Reuse Working Group (see slides 4-10)
- Presented Revised Workgroup Schedule (see slide 11)
- Survey Recap: Shared top barriers & strategies for Creating a Culture of Reuse in MA as identified by working group survey of 48 stakeholders, May-Jun 2020:

### Top 3 Barriers:

Which of these barriers should we prioritize addressing?

Answered: 37 Skipped: 3

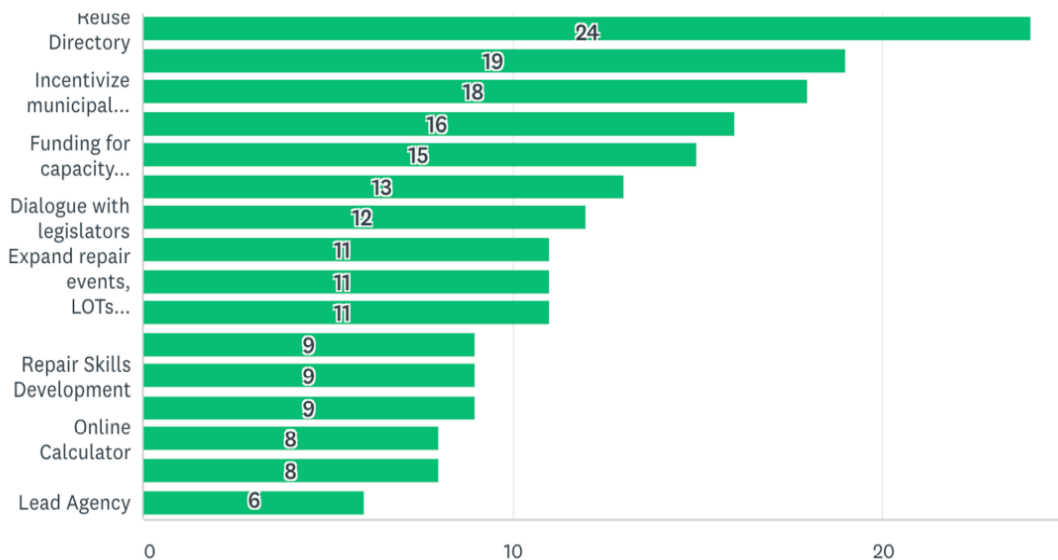


- Consumers lack the knowledge, attitudes or behaviors that would support a greater cultural adoption of source reduction and reuse in Massachusetts
- Insufficient access to and convenience of reuse and repair options in Massachusetts
- Need for greater infrastructure support for reuse and repair organizations

### Top 5 Strategies:

What do you see as the top 5 strategies we should prioritize in order to p...

Answered: 40 Skipped: 0



- Creating a Reuse Directory
- Incentivizing Municipal Reuse Programs
- Funding for Capacity Building
- Dialogue with legislators
- Expand Repair Events, LOTs, etc.

## Meeting Objectives

- Come away with list of actions to consider for R&R Action Plan
- Focus of Panel Discussion:
  - Discuss barriers to recovering more unwanted items for reuse
  - Identify opportunities to overcome these barriers

## Framing the conversation:

- How do we define “durable goods”?
  - The Bureau of Economic Analysis (U.S. Department of Commerce) defines durable goods as: “Tangible products that can be stored or inventoried and that have an average life of at least three years.”
  - and consumer durable goods as: “Commodities, such as motor vehicles, that are purchased by consumers and are used repeatedly or continuously over a prolonged period.”
  - Examples of consumer or household durable goods:
    - automobiles
    - appliances
    - furniture
    - tableware
    - tools and equipment
    - sports equipment, luggage
    - telephones and electronics
    - musical instruments
    - books
    - jewelry

## Panel Discussion:

### Panelists:



Carlos Zabala  
**Morgan Memorial  
Goodwill**



Richard Purnell  
**New Life Furniture  
Bank**



Christine Quinn  
**Cancer Connection  
Thrift Shop**



Katrina Martin,  
**Professional Organizer**



Kevin Maguire  
**Habitat for Humanity  
ReStore**



Sharon Martens  
**Household Goods**

What are the major trends in your field, what changes should we expect/need to be ready for?

- **Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore**
  - Trends prior to COVID-19 are no longer valid, we are adjusting our business model accordingly
  - Prior to COVID we saw these trends at a national level at Habitat ReStore:
    - Uptick in foot traffic in store
    - More modest desire to donate
    - Large increase in donation requests
    - Increase in conversation about what we currently carry
  - In speaking to donors and shoppers, we heard that COVID-19 has led to many people in extreme financial uncertainty wishing they had better prepare for a rainy day. Many donors and shoppers have indicated they plan to shop smarter. We predict this will lead to an increase in donors and sales, but only if we do a good job explaining how reuse works; how reuse benefits people and can help with their situations.

- We need to ensure we are prepared for COVID-19 and possible future public health outbreaks through infrastructure/logistics adaptations – social distancing, cleaning protocols, etc.
- **Sharon Martens, Household Goods**
  - Echoing Kevin, Household Goods has seen that the need for their services is high and anticipate an even larger need next year with people losing jobs, apartments, etc.
  - Everything takes longer because cannot do everything simultaneously like used to. They have to quarantine donations prior to putting them on the floor, capacity has decreased.
- **Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank**
  - Also see both an increase in demand for services AND increased workload
  - People have been using this time to clean out their houses and want to donate furniture. There is frustration (on our part as well as our potential donors) because the additional safety precautions means the furniture bank cannot take donations at same rate as before, which impacts ability to serve folk who need the furniture.
- **Carlos Zabala, Morgan Memorial Goodwill**
  - We are slammed with donations. In March we shut down retail stores but not donation centers.
  - With Phase I reopening, everyone came out at same time. Nation Wide – as soon as we said we were open, people couldn't wait to get out and donate.
  - Because the need to quarantine items, distribution centers are not running at full capacity
  - In June, we see an average of 7,000 donors a week. March/April/May was half that.
- **Christine Quinn, Cancer Connection Thrift Shop**
  - The thrift shop is based around volunteers who are typically people in 60+ range and people undergoing cancer treatment (i.e. the most vulnerable population with the current global pandemic).
  - Due to this, the thrift shop has not re-opened and expect reopening will be challenging because will have only half the normal volunteers.
  - High demand for people wanting to donate, community is frustrated
  - Plus this is impacting the organization since the thrift shop is what provides the primary funding for the cancer connection NGO itself.
- **Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore**
  - The ReStore also relies heavily on volunteers. Welcomed back regular volunteers but many older volunteers have chosen not to come back. Normally rely on large groups as well, this has completely stopped.

- Able to accept no-contact donations. Furniture is sprayed down immediately with disinfectant, wiped down. Smaller items are washed in big industrial sink and left to dry.
- All this creates new procedures/more time to get a piece from donor to sales floor.
- **Katrina Martin, Professional Organizer**
  - Her professional organizing services came to a complete halt because of COVID
  - Hearing and seeing so many people are cleaning/clearing out and see enormous amount of items ending up in trash pickup days that could have been reused
  - In the past 5 years or so (prior to covid) there has been a greater consciousness of reuse, not putting things in landfill which was promising.
  - The challenge is to balance the need to declutter/organize with keeping reusable and recyclable items out of the landfill.
  - 99% of time it was Katrina coordinating the donation to the different sites, not her clients.
  - This is a great time to capitalize on how to make reuse easier for people.

What are the items that you see a lot of? Which items do you have a hard time finding new homes for? Which items would you like to see more of?

- **Katrina Martin, Professional Organizer**
  - In organizing/decluttering- Katrina sees a lot of:
  - Computer Equipment, Cables
  - Cameras, Camera Accessory
  - Clothing
  - Books
  - Office Supplies
  - Toys
  - Glasses
  - CDs/Tape/DVDs/Albums
- **Sharon Martens, Household Goods**
  - Household Goods has a narrow list of what can be accepted: Furniture that can be used in Apartments (i.e. beds, tables, dressers)
  - They don't want desks and other office furniture but get a lot of requests for people wanting to donate these items
  - Largely looking for good quality sturdy furniture
  - Challenge is people are starting to buy low quality furniture made mainly of particle board that doesn't hold up during assembly/disassembly.

- **Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank**
  - Also not accepting particle board
  - They do accept desks, as long as can be used in a small apartment
  - They get a lot of Knick Knacks. People just want to drop off everything but they have no interest in these items, they are a furniture bank not a thrift shop.
    - Carlos mentioned these are accepted a Goodwill, however could take like 5 boxes, not twenty. The issue is the **Scale/Volume**. When they have multiple boxes of items they can't use, they would normally give to a church rummage sale. Good stuff but now not sure how to get rid of? From a cost effectiveness standpoint they cannot divert a crew (truck/staff) to deliver just 5 boxes at a times. Would need to do at volume from operational standpoint, hard to do small things regularly. i.e. need truck multiple times, drivers/volunteers multiple times.
- **Carlos Zabala, Morgan Memorial Goodwill**
  - Goodwill will accept home décor, Knick knacks- as long as it's not broken.
  - They get an abundance of textiles/clothing (get more than housewares) because people can fit more in a box/bag
  - They would love to see LESS hazardous materials – cleaning sprays, supplies, aerosols, camping propane tanks, bleach. (They don't have any of these items on the acceptable lists but it's difficult to determine at point of donation what is in box.)
  - They have to call stericycle to dispose of these items as hazardous waste and it is very costly.
  - Would also prefer to not get Mattresses which cost them money to disposed of.
- **Christine Quinn, Cancer Connection Thrift Shop**
  - The Cancer Connection Thrift Shop tries to filter as much as they can at point of donation. They are always fighting the misconception that they will be glad to take all of people's stuff. It's hard for people to accept that you won't take everything.
  - Not getting donations for specific purpose (like furniture banks) but trying to make revenue for their charity. Needs to be able to convert the donated item to cash – not just something that people don't have an outlet for and don't want to throw away.
  - Also get old paint cans, cords without the "thing", used cleaning sprays, etc. - tucked down at bottom of box and then in the situation where they need to pay to dispose of these items which hurts their ability to fund their social mission.
  - They don't take furniture because they are a smaller org. Would take more often if high quality. People aren't buying the cheap particle board materials.
  - Thrift shops are not like regular retail spaces, in a unique situation. Can relate to other speakers, nice to hear from.

- For individuals, determining what is a quality, desirable item is difficult (especially since they have an emotional attachment to items or paid a lot of the item at one point).
- The easiest to parse out is clothing and textiles, they can resell bedding from nice brands
- **Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore**
  - At the ReStore they see everything
  - They welcome more of the appliances, cabinets, vanities, countertops, working power tools. They sell hardware, building and home improvement things. Essentially the Non-profit home depot.
  - The issue is when they get non-working power tools and would like to see less of the small items donated because people just don't know what to do with it. I.e. Tupperware, glasses.
  - They don't take upholstered or leather furniture.

## What do you do with broken items? Do you repair any donated items?

- **Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank**
  - Their message to public is they don't take broken furniture
  - However, they do minor repairs when needed, they have a great team of volunteers who will do basic repairs when things slip through the cracks during donation. They don't have tools for major repairs
  - They have a dedicated team of painters to give fresh paint to items, their founding belief is about treating people with dignity. First question they ask is – would I have this in my own home?
  - Pre-COVID excitement, there was talk of doing more substantial repairs and upcycling furniture. This has been put on hold.
  - Operate using a “Just in time” model. Items doesn't stay in warehouse for long. Storage for quarantine really delays this.
- **Sharon Martens, Household Goods**
  - Similar to Richard, Household Goods won't tell people they accept broken things but do have a workshop and volunteers who enjoy making basic repairs, refinishing items
  - They always check all appliances/lamps take to make sure they work. Volunteers help with all of this.
- **Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore**
  - Similar, the Restore will do small repairs and assemblies. Rely heavily on volunteers. Currently this is on standstill without volunteer interest



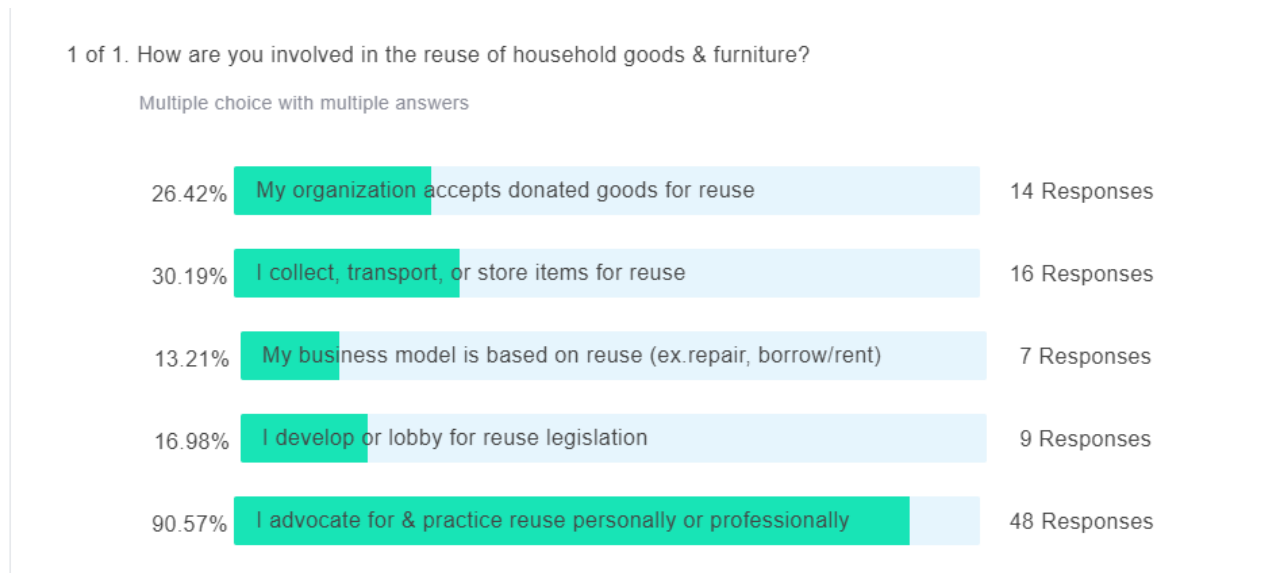
- Items are often broken in transport and these can be an easy fix but don't have the staffing manpower or space for greater repairs

## What could state or local government do to help support your reuse work?

- **Carlos Zabala, Morgan Memorial Goodwill**
  - The biggest challenge is that they are not opened at full capacity. Operating hours have been shortened, number of shoppers in store are limited, number of items on shelves are decreased. Not sure what could change.
- **Katrina Martin, Professional Organizer**
  - Transportation. Large part of population who would donate more but cannot or will not, don't have time or means to get the items to reuse outlets
  - Perhaps cities/towns can expand pick up day – ie. Reusable items pickup day, textile pickup day -need to make easier for people
- **Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank**
  - New Life is experimenting with additional drop off options to make donation easier, they were discussing with several towns to have drop off at local transfer station.
  - Get calls from recycling committees suggest to pick up items from swap shops. However, the cost to get out there for a chair is not cost-effective as non-profit. Need higher yielding donations.
  - Incur cost of people giving stuff they can't use. Many people give out the furniture bank's name but they don't always reference our detailed acceptance list.
  - Education would be helpful for us, not just throwing out the name of our organization but pointing people to website about what we actually take. Including quality level -- clean, no pet hair (don't have facility to clean).
- **Christine Quinn, Cancer Connection Thrift Shop**
  - They are all in the same position with the "hot potato"- Item that keeps getting pushed to someone else.
  - If money weren't an issue, municipalities would maintain a master list of places that things can go. Or a bigger facility that does take everything that parses out from there.
  - Personally, they recommend calling people and double check that they want those items if they don't take them.
  - When people try to bring in items they don't accept, try to be as helpful as possible and understanding – point them to other possible resources.

- Education to consumer in general would be helpful, you can't just dump your stuff! People need to consider this from the very beginning- the point of purchase.
- **Katrina Martin, Professional Organizer**
  - People are attached to their belongings. People call Katrina when they are facing the idea of decluttering for some reason – downsizing, divorce, death, foreclosure, etc. at this point they become more willing to let things go with these life events.
  - 80% of the time it provides a source of comfort to know that it will be useful for someone else.
- **Sharon Martens, Household Goods**
  - Many people can't access reuse because of transportation and moving large items.
  - If money and staffing weren't an object, would make sure access for the people who need furniture the most.
  - Right now have limits on what they give away to make complete set for their patrons. If they had no limitations would let people take as much furniture/household goods as they want.
- **Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore**
  - Would like to send drivers out to pick up all the items people want to donate
  - Have had difficulty in recruiting, hiring, retaining drivers
  - Would like to see a Massive Marketing Campaign – what we do, who we are, why we do what we do, how can benefit the consumer (especially now)
- **Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank**
  - Same, New Life has a tough time retaining keeping training drivers to move furniture
  - Pay a good salary yet still struggle to find and keep drivers
  - This does effect how often can go out to get furniture, do pick ups
- **Sharon Martens, Household Goods**
  - Tried to do pickups early on but had to shut this down quickly. Didn't know what you would receive and it was physically and emotionally demanding on staff. Stairs, doorways, hallways, dogs/cats, etc.

## Poll : How are you involved in the reuse of household goods and furniture?



### Discussion:

- Transportation- some attendees mentioned you can outsource pickup and labor. Bungii is a service like Uber or Lyft. Drivers lift and tote items.
- Broken Items/Tools – attendees noted fix-it clinics, cafes may benefit these because they could potentially practice repair on tools and then use the tools in future repairs.
- At Boston Building Resources, when they receive a broken item, they figure out what replacement part is needed online and when sell the item, they let people know it's broken and include note about where to find the parts/cost for repair.
- COVID-19, are panelists seeing increase in junk? Rejecting higher portion of attempted donations.
  - Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore: has actually seen in increase in thoughtfulness, had more time to sort through and give thought to what is reusable, and what will generate income for organizations
  - Sharon Martens, Household Goods: donation quality is about the same, some people are careful and others trying to avoid disposal cost
  - Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank: donation quality has remained the same.
  - Carlos Zabala, Morgan Memorial Goodwill: same, no real change in what is donated. Want to know Kevin's secret. Education?
- How are people getting the word out about what items are accepted?
  - Christine Quinn, Cancer Connection Thrift Shop: They have a list to handout to people who come into shop or donate; posted on website; Facebook page;

revamping website- will have blog to do more of the education part of it and let people know people surprised about how much they can use and how things are donated (carefully put together, how not just dumped in a box).

- Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank: handouts at events, online, education to all volunteers – have a good understanding of what’s acceptable, can help be ambassadors.
- How Long do you hold onto an item before having to dispose of if not purchased/picked up?
  - Kevin Maguire, Habitat for Humanity ReStore: have a markdown process in place. Longer on floor the more the markdown. 30 days, etc. by 90 days marked down significantly and typically find home. Case by case based on quality of item. May try to send to a different location if not working at one location because different demographics.
  - Carlos Zabala, Morgan Memorial Goodwill: similar, stay on floor for 4 weeks. After 2 weeks, 25% markdown, 50% week before pulled off floor. Decide if can recycle or trash.
  - Sharon Martens, Household Goods: clients only come once, keep until someone takes it. Everyone has own ascetic, know people will need it.
  - Richard Purnell, New Life Furniture Bank: most items only last a week on the floor. Since have such a strict acceptance, don’t take many items they would need to dispose of.
- Cynthia Arens, Lexington Public Schools Green Team: Have you partnered with or are willing to post items that you can’t move on everything free FB groups, email lists. Lots of traffic on this, giving stuff away.
  - Yes, Christine and Sharon have done this. Freecycle, local free center at DPW, etc. They don’t have the time/bandwidth to do themselves but point people to these resources/ideas.
- Peter Mui, Fix-it Clinic – Have you seen the Marie Kondo Effect? Deeper purge then might normally would have done leading to higher quality items?
  - Christine Quinn, Cancer Connection Thrift Shop: their thrift shop has a good report with the donors. Can create an algorithm for what people are bringing and why. Each box tells a story. Can tell if they just moved or cleaning out loved one’s items after they passed away. It’s pretty obvious without even speaking to anyone. People have been cleaning out more because of Marie Kondo phenomenon and yes, see a higher quality item because of the approach – just because it’s lovely, quality, sentimental – if it’s not useful or sparking joy – can still donate. The longer you hold onto an item you are not using, the less valuable the item becomes.
  - Katrina Martins, Professional Organizer: This has had an impact on her own services. Could use these questions (from Marie Kondo) to help guide people decluttering. Get out into the world to use.

- Erin Victor, MassDEP - perhaps we see this filtering into consumption patterns as well? Purchase less, higher quality items. i.e. Fast Fashion is a rising topic and people are realizing maybe they don't need new clothes each season.
- Is there an opportunity for new skilled and semi-skilled local jobs refurbishing furniture and appliances in MA? There's a company here in the SF Bay Area that does commercial furniture reupholstery for companies and hotels:  
<https://www.linkedin.com/company/kay-chesterfield-inc>.

#### Additional Hurdles/Barriers:

- Fred Cullen, Green Team Junk Removal – Agrees that access to reuse outlets is critical. Green Team Junk Removal partnered with MI Box for a furniture collection event in Holliston, made first drop off of donations at Fresh Start Furniture Bank in June. Plan to go ahead and repeat next week. No dumping, reach out via FBook, had boxes manned by staff members, 2 ½ hour windows, denied stuff as well and people took quiet well.
- Want to partner with others – Home Goods, ReStore, etc. They can help provide storage boxes & hauling that can allow the orgs to accept furniture items at more convenient locations. Email Address: [greenteamjunk@gmail.com](mailto:greenteamjunk@gmail.com).
- What about barriers to Swap Shops, Lending Libraries? Are these different than seen by the non-profit organizations?
- Jackie Gillis, volunteer at the Hudson transfer station – Hudson has a swap shed at the transfer station. They are reopening on weekdays to divert from increased traffic/volume, people want it re-opened. Opportunity to train another population in Hudson. The need is out there and people love to look at used items, especially if free. Because they had been closed, Jackie has been taking some items and putting them on freecycle and they are going like hot cakes – ie. Crock pot, basketballs, etc. Have also seen big uptick on social media exchange sites.
- Scale/Volume of donated items for reuse: Freecycle pages are great for individual items, it's more difficult (time consuming) to post and coordinate individual pick ups for multiple items all at once - ie. spring cleaning/ moving.
- Church rummage sales are another type of reuse. Flea markets, consignment shops, yard sales, tag sales. People who coordinate are often overwhelming at end of event, have many items not sold and need to figure out where to store, how to get rid of. Often involves extra work/cost.
- People thing and expect that it's "free" to throw items away. The downstream cost of disposal is not factored into the acquisition cost.

## Solutions:

- Reuse marketing/educational campaign: Encourage people to think of the whole life cycle when buy items. Encourage reuse, connect people to donation sites.
- For the Reuse Directory – entries need to be accurate and clearly market what each vendor accepts.
- For non-profit reuse centers, consider outsourcing the pick-up labor.
- Incentivize purchasing of used materials by making them sales-tax-free.
- Provide more community drop-off, donation days to make reuse more convenient and accessible.
- Connect with tech schools to help enable more repair of durable goods.
- Add donations drop off options to CHARM (center for hard to recycling materials) locations – could have donation bins with labeled with items that the charit(ies) want and then could deliver (or coordinate) pick-up when full.
- Make the beyond the bin directory be the go to place for reuse for the state.
- Explore relationships between dumpster haulers and charities. If you rent a clean out dumpster, you get a storage box first to fill with donations. The storage box could then go to a CHARM location to be sorted to the right charities, any household hazardous waste could be disposed of properly at the CHARM center.
- Outreach/networking with condo associations, retirement, nursing homes to share resources available for reuse when someone leaves behind items when they move, downsize, or pass away.
- Each organization could have their own ReCollect tool to allow people to search which items they accept/don't for donation.
- Partner with owners of un/underutilized spaces (empty stores/malls) to see if non-profits can store items there temporarily to help with the capacity challenge due to quarantining donations.

## Announcements:

- Reminder to submit reuse and repair organizations for inclusion in a statewide Reuse Directory
  - Tell us about the reuse/repair/share retailers in your city, town or neighborhood: <https://airtable.com/shritqRieYZI54YQ5>
- Next Meeting:
  - Date: Wednesday, July 29
  - Time: 6-8PM \*
  - Location: Virtual.
  - [Register Here](#)
- Solid Waste Advisory Committee Meeting:
  - Thursday, June 25, 2020

- 1:00 p.m. (via webinar)
  - Register:  
<https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7201955500931172110>
- Fix It Clinic, virtual event:
  - Sat June 27 @ 2PM (EST)
  - Lawrence Berkeley National Lab (LBNL)
  - <https://www.facebook.com/events/623089704965437/>
- Micro-Grant Last Call for Applications
  - [Micro-Grant Online Application](#)
  - [Grant Guidelines](#)
- Networking Resources
  - [R&R Workgroup Contacts](#)
  - To join the R&R workgroup or update your information using this [form](#) or by emailing [erin.victor@mass.gov](mailto:erin.victor@mass.gov)