MassDEP Reduce & Reuse Working Group:

Summary of Stakeholder Input on Barriers to Promote Reduce/Reuse/Share/Repair

MassDEP held 10 meetings of the Reduce & Reuse (R&R) Working Group between March 2020 and January 2021. More than 320 individuals participated in these meetings. This document summarizes the input received over the course of this process from working group participants. However, listing of barriers in this document does not imply acceptance or endorsement by MassDEP.

Cultural Barriers (Individuals)

1) Consumers lack the knowledge, attitudes or behaviors that would support a greater cultural adoption of waste prevention, reuse, repair and share practices in Massachusetts.
   a) Individuals may lack awareness and knowledge of the importance of waste prevention and reuse:
      - Individuals are unsure what can be donated and where
      - There is a lack of consumer awareness of secondhand markets and reusable alternatives to single use products
      - Trash is "out of sight, out of mind" – individuals may not understand the social, environmental, and economic impacts of waste disposal
      - Many individuals lack basic repair skills
      - Donors often do not realize the cost burden of "wishful donations" on reuse organizations who have to pay for disposal of goods they cannot re-sell
      - There is inconsistent messaging between industry-wide calls for what textiles can be reused and recycled and individual non-profits tell people they will take
   b) Individuals may hold onto beliefs that keep them from engaging in waste prevention and reuse, such as:
      - New is better than used
      - Price is a good indicator of a product's durability/quality
      - Fear of tinkering with broken items
      - Reuse/refill is not safe (especially during COVID)
      - "ick factor" and stigma related to secondhand items
      - Distrust of the second-hand industry due to how the media portrays overseas reuse, recycling, and repair markets
      - Throwing things out is seen as free
      - Resistance/challenges to change; many waste prevention and reuse behaviors require adoption of new habits (i.e. remembering to bring bags to the store or choosing second hand rather than shopping online)
      - Status quo (throwing away) is usually the easiest/cheapest option or path of least resistance
2) There is insufficient access to convenient reuse and repair options in Massachusetts:

- Consumers may find shopping secondhand inconvenient because it takes more time and energythan buying new items, especially with so many options to buy new items online.

- There is out of date information online about what items an organization will accept for donation
- Many reuse organizations do not offer ways to see their inventory and shop online
- There is a lack of a centralized place to donate all of one's unwanted goods when spring cleaning or moving; people are looking for a one-stop-shop which leads to many "wishful donations"
- Buying new is more convenient than repairing which takes more time and requires finding a repair professional
- Even those interested in repair meet barriers such as access to instruction manuals, tools and parts and discomfort with attempting repair on their own
- Architects/builders typically purchase new materials when designing a project since it is easier to find the items and desired volume is more often in-stock
- Consumers may lack the transportation means to pick up secondhand items or donate large items to reuse organizations
- Consumers may lack access to the tools, parts, and/or manuals needed for repairing a good

Infrastructure Barriers (Reuse Organizations):

1) Reuse and repair organizations need greater support to maintain and grow their capacity.
    - Access to affordable and convenient retail and storage space is difficult to find, especially in certain areas of the state
    - The upfront investments in donation bins, trucks, and storage space are difficult for some reuse organizations that are operating as non-profits with limited margins
    - There is a lack of access to and retention of skilled and semi-skilled workforce, many reuse organizations rely strongly on volunteers and lack a strong, consistent funding source to enable payroll for more employees
    - Reuse organizations have to pay for the disposal of illegal dumping and donated items they cannot re-sell such as tires, mattresses, propane tanks, cleaning chemicals, etc. These "wishful donations" are a drag on the organization's operating budget
    - Reuse organizations lack the space, tools, and skilled workers to repair broken/damaged donated goods that could be re-sold or re-distributed if repaired
    - Reuse and repair organizations often lack a marketing department and advertising budgets making publicizing their location/services difficult
    - Many reuse organizations have difficulty retaining truck drivers for transporting large, donated items.
    - Picking up donations from residents comes with additional challenges which prohibit many reuse organizations from offering this service – for example not knowing what items they are picking up and their condition ahead of time, risk of staff injury when navigating dogs, narrow halls, stairs, etc.
    - Reuse organizations have difficulty moving items that are no longer in style (such as wooden office furniture)
    - There is a lack of physical storage space that would allow reuse organizations to hold onto donated materials longer in order to find an appropriate outlet for reuse. It's difficult to match supply and demand under the time constraints posed by limited display and storage space
    - Lack of organization and coordination amongst reuse organizations in Massachusetts

- Reuse and repair organizations face consumer skepticism and mistrust related to sending materials to overseas markets due to the media portrayal of international reuse, repair, and recycling markets
- Furniture and building materials may contain chemicals of concern which impact the ability to repair, reupholster, or reuse items (e.g., brominated flame retardants, formaldehyde, lead paint). Just determining which chemicals of concern were or were not used in a product and if the product has any recalls itself is a lot of work
- There is a lack of scalable commercial washing facilities to support reuse/refill operations for beverage and food containers
- Many K-12 schools do not have the dishwashers needed to support reusable trays, plates, and utensils in the cafeteria
- Independent repair shops lack access to the parts and manuals from the original equipment manufacturers (OEM) necessary to repair items
- End markets for certain textile grades like polyester uniforms are limited

<u>COVID -related challenges:</u>

- Reuse and repair operations are not operating at full capacity during COVID-19 (and some remain closed) due to volunteer shortages, sanitizing protocols that take up floor space and time, and restrictions on how many people can shop in a retail space at one time
- In person repair events have been put on hold due to COVID-19

Policy Barriers (System):

1) Local, state and federal policies may inhibit reuse and repair:
   - Local zoning ordinances may limit where reuse and repair operations can operate. For example, there are several ordinances in MA cities and towns that specifically address placement of donation bins
   - The Federal and State Food Codes, enforced by Local Boards of Health, require that reusable containers be provided by the establishment and upon return for reuse are cleaned and sanitized properly by a food employee in order to limit contamination of food and equipment.
   - HIPAA and other state and federal laws mandate that computers have their hard drives destroyed (not just wiped) to protect private patient data, thereby precluding reuse options
   - Baby/toddler equipment (e.g. car seats) are very difficult to donate/reuse due to product recalls and perceived liability issues. Requires significant amount of time for organizations to stay on top of the latest recalls
   - MA towns (not cities) are not allowed to charge fees on single-use items such as to alternatives to plastic bags such as paper bags, etc.
   - Extended Producer Responsibility laws for electronics incentivize shredding electronics over reuse; some laws preclude reuse or don't allow OEMs to count reuse towards performance standards embedded in the laws
   - Legislation promotes the destruction of working solar panel that come out of use due to efficiency losses instead of selling for repair and reuse
   - Local legislation mandating compostable items have had unintended consequences by pushing single use compostable service ware in settings where compost service is not available or the compost site operator does not accept the compostable ware

- Local health legislation in some areas restrict what items reuse organizations can accept due to health concerns such as bed bugs and lice (pillows, bedding, mattresses)
- Some local Boards of Health (BOHs) place additional restrictions on food donation/food rescue

<u>COVID related:</u>

- Elementary or Secondary School require that water to be included as a part of meals for students. With students learning remotely during pandemic, lunch still has to be sent to homes and meeting this requirement is difficult in areas that have banned water bottles
- Most schools have also closed off water bubblers, making it difficult for students doing part-remote, part in-school learning to use reusable water bottles. Some schools have gone as far as temporarily banning reusable water bottles

Market Driven Barriers:

- The quality of furniture has declined over the past few decades - manufacturers and consumers have moved towards particle board rather than hardwood furniture which does not hold up over time and is difficult to repair
- Manufacturers continue to design for obsolescence (planned obsolescence) to encourage reoccurring sales and profits over time, particularly in the electronics industry
- There is a weak correlation between price of product and its durability/repairability
- Single use packaging is cheap due to raw material subsidies from federal government (e.g. Mining Act of 1872)
- Office spaces are typically refreshed frequently to keep up with the latest styles; these interior design projects are not accounted for in sustainability reports or certifications
- Manufacturers have monopolized repair through contracts that limit consumer rights and physical design that is incompatible with repair
- With the introduction of “builder grade” solar panels, many consumers are purchasing these inferior panels that are cheaper upfront but only last around 10 years rather than the 25-30 years of the higher quality, more durable solar panels