

West Boylston Solid Waste Advisory Team
Minutes--DRAFT
June 3, 2008
Town Hall Offices, 127 Hartwell Street

Present:

Judy Doherty, Chair

Craig Gonyea

Elise Wellington

Julianne DeRivera

Janet Vignaly

John Westerling

Irene Congden, DEP Recycling Coordinator, Central Massachusetts

Paul Hennessey, WB resident

The meeting began at 7:03 p.m.

Meeting protocol and housekeeping

Ms. Doherty advised the SWAT that the team had not been following protocol for public meetings and that at each meeting, they needed to be approving minutes for the previous meeting.

Ms. Doherty reminded the team that the official secretary, Dana Karlsson, had moved from town and added that the team needed to vote in a new official secretary. Ms. Wellington nominated Ms. Vignaly to be the new secretary, and Mr. Gonyea seconded the motion. Ms. Vignaly was unanimously elected secretary of the SWAT. Mr. Westerling volunteered to print out final copies of minutes to give to Kim Hopewell, Town Clerk, for the official record.

Town Meeting presentation and Community input

Members noted that SWAT efforts at the Town Meeting—display table, brochure, and light-hearted but informative presentation—were well received. Ms. Doherty reported that several residents approached SWAT members and were enthusiastic about getting involved in recycling efforts: Mr. Bill Bowman, who used to be with Allied Waste, was interested in being a part; Kerry Thomas offered her expertise in financial analysis and her interest in educational efforts; Paul Hennessey was a member of the original Solid Waste committee 25 years ago and came to the meeting to contribute his knowledge and experience; Bridget Orway, a Girl Scout leader in town, showed her support; and Mary Ambrose wanted to organize a grassroots neighborhood effort to change residents' attitudes about recycling—she mentioned an interest in organizing a school competition as well, where students would be in turn educating their parents to recycle. Ms. Congden noted that the Green Team already has lessons available for schools to use in teaching about recycling. Ms. Doherty suggested that an interested parent may instruct students through the after-school program. Ms. Congden noted that to participate in The Green Team, there would have to be a West Boylston teacher to sign up the group, but a parent could run the lessons.

Mr. Hennessey spoke of the efforts of the original Solid Waste committee, which had been making a 25-40 year plan. The committee had been working with a company that wanted to build a transfer station at the old landfill on Temple Street (Rt. 140), but due to many of the associated costs of running the project as well as the excessive volume of garbage which could potentially pollute the environs, the committee opted to close the landfill and establish curbside pickup for the town.

Ms. Wellington asked Mr. Hennessey what direction he saw for the Solid Waste program in town. Mr. Hennessey summarized his understanding of the current situation: 95% of towns in Central

Massachusetts had recently vetoed the 2 ½ override (so the chance of the town approving an override are not good and new revenues are needed). , Leon Gaumond (West Boylston Town Administrator) has spoken about the trouble finding adequate funding for next year's budget. Given the current situation, Mr. Hennessey concluded that most communities will end up choosing to adopt a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) program.

Responding to a question regarding Holden, Ms. Congden stated that Holden, which had once relied on privatized trash pick-up, had now gone to a single contracted waste hauler. She said that Central Massachusetts was the region with the highest number of communities with privatized waste management, with 12 towns doing so. In these towns, each household pays \$400-500+ per year, which in some instances does not include recycling and sometimes entails collection only every other week, i.e. privatizing trash collection is very expensive for residents. Ms. Vignaly added that privatized haulers do not provide an incentive to recycle. Mr. Hennessey also noted that at Town Meeting around 15 years ago, residents voted strongly that the Town should take care of waste management; i.e., residents did not want to privatize trash pick-up. Ms. DeRivera added that 120 towns—one-third of the municipalities in Massachusetts—have gone PAYT. Later, Ms. Wellington noted that Shrewsbury Town Meeting had just voted in a PAYT program “‘overwhelmingly’”, and she distributed a Telegram & Gazette article about the move.

Ms. DeRivera inquired whether there is hazardous material at the landfills. Mr. Westerling responded that there was, but the environment is inspected periodically to ensure there is no escaping pollution. Ms. DeRivera asked if there is recycling at landfills. Ms. Congden replied that one company offered to sort through town landfills to remove any recyclables, then the company would pay the participating town to build a new landfill there. Ms. DeRivera asked why the Town of West Boylston could not put athletic fields on the landfill site. Ms. Congden said that this does happen, and that Nashua, for example, has three examples that can be examined.

Ms. Vignaly reported that she had spoken with Ms. Karen Pare about the Town website, and the possibility of adding a FAQ section for specifics on recycling. Ms. Wellington offered to be the member who would channel questions and answers to Ms. Pare and Mr. Westerling offered to obtain answers to any questions.

Ms. DeRivera reported that she had spoken with Mr. Steve Howland, who offered a 1/2-hour block for a televised interview. The SWAT was allotted a segment at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 25. Mr. Howland said that the SWAT may email him questions they want to be asked ahead of time. Ms. Congden and Ms. Wellington said they were willing and available to participate in this televised interview. Ms. Wellington said she was still looking for a number that would represent to residents the price of collecting and disposing of one bag of trash. Mr. Westerling calculated this price to be \$2.38.

Ms. Vignaly reminded members of the five options told to residents at Town Meeting. According to Ms. Vignaly, the first effort—to increase education and outreach efforts—has already been a focus of the SWAT. The second—to enforce the existing state mandate banning recyclable materials from the waste stream—is under the jurisdiction of the DEP. Ms. Congden brought up a point of news she had included in her email updates, that the DEP had recently found and penalized 10 companies and 4 waste haulers not complying with the ban. The third and fourth options—enacting a Town Mandatory Recycling Bylaw and adopting a PAYT program—would be discussed as an option. The fifth option—privatizing solid waste management—was already deemed undesirable and was dismissed from the discussion.

“Chalk Talk” Decision Making Process

Members of the meeting then participated in a “Chalk Talk” discussion (a silent, written pooling of ideas on posters) about the merits, drawbacks, questions and concerns about the different options for the Town’s Solid Waste program. Ms. Vignaly provided members with her calculations regarding estimated savings to the Town, using FY08 numbers, as well as the average extra cost per household for purchasing bags. Results from the Chalk Talk are below (because of the protocol of the exercise, comments are not associated with any member, and clarifying comments are included in parentheses):

1. Mandatory Recycling Bylaw

(Estimated cost savings: \$18,000; estimated average yearly household bag cost: \$0)

- Enforcement difficult/impossible; enforcement requires more staffing
- Produces much less recycling (than PAYT)
- No accountability
- Allied Waste says they’ll warn, then not pick up
- My neighbor wants this one because she cares about recycling but doesn’t have extra \$ (for PAYT)
- Can be done at BOS meeting anytime, then add PAYT later

2. PAYT with 2 size bags, 0 free

(Estimated cost savings: \$240,000-285,000; estimated average yearly household bag cost: \$72-114)

- PAYT rewards recyclers and those who reduce their solid waste
- Likely to get lots of taxpayers angry
 - Only for first few months
- Make the break—Do it now 0 free bags
- Leaves most \$ (of all proposed options) for more needed town services, such as schools. Saves most \$ for town.
 - Who controls where savings go? Maybe put direction (destination) as part of warrant article
 - Leon wrote back (that we can’t direct where savings will go)
- Option used by most PAYT communities. PAYT produces highest recycling rate and reduces trash the most
- I doubt people will vote for this one
 - ? rebates
- Politically unpopular (*refers to all PAYT options*)
 - There seems to be momentum these days with budget problems
 - Also, gets rid of unfair way we pay for trash (e.g. 6 bags vs. 1 bag)
 - Socialized trash collection (= present system) vs. capitalistic incentive (= PAYT)
 - Fairer to those not serviced by WB program

3. PAYT with 1 or 2 size bags, 50 free

(Estimated cost savings: \$30,000-65,000; estimated average yearly household bag cost: \$0-14)

- Best for those who are poor or worry about money
- If recycling goes above 30%, we are wasting bags
 - And increased collection cost
 - Can give one black bag vs. colored bags
- Giving free bags an administrative problem (nightmare)?

- Done at supermarkets—bar codes
- I really like this option because some people in town who sincerely try to recycle will not incur extra household expenses.
 - Maybe for first year, this is instituted. Then go to “0” free
 - I like this
 - DEP grant?
 - All town PAYT options are able (eligible) for the grant
 - Up to \$4 per household
 - Voucher application for low income
 - Smart idea as economy (\$) in town worsens, voters could change the way PAYT works but this point is good for bringing voters on board

4. PAYT with 2 size bags, 20 free

(Estimated cost savings: \$145,000-190,000; estimated average yearly household bag cost: \$32-74)

- Seniors and empty nesters may be able to use these and not need more.
- Savings to town higher

5. Other

- Suggestion to lower taxes to help people pay for bags
- We need to get public/town offices to recycle

Members then asked clarifying questions regarding contents of the Chalk Talk.

Ms. Congden explained that some programs allow each household to put out one black (generic, not designated for PAYT) bag for free, then put excess in a different colored (PAYT) bag. This system reduces upfront costs, as the town must anticipate and purchase 52 fewer bags per household.

However, the coupon system where all trash must be in a specially colored bag (issued by Town) allows towns an easier transition from year to year, if the town wants to cut down on the number of “free” bags. Ms. Congden said that Shrewsbury and Northboro were two towns which recently went with one free bag per week to start their respective programs.

Ms. Doherty said that West Boyston is surrounded by towns going PAYT, and this may be a good time to go to October Town Meeting with a PAYT article.

Mr. Westerling asked if free bags have historically been helpful when other towns have sought to change to PAYT. Ms. Congden replied that the “free bag” system makes for an easier transition for townspeople, and that education is not as complicated as with other systems.

Ms. Congden informed members that a Mandatory Recycling bylaw could be enacted simply at a Board of Selectmen meeting. Members echoed a previous idea of pursuing both Mandatory Recycling and PAYT. Ms. Vignaly stated that she was opposed to such an idea, as both of the systems would require education and outreach, so she was concerned about doubling SWAT’s efforts. She added that mandatory recycling in other towns produces meager savings. She further stated her concern that if the townspeople made the transition to Mandatory Recycling, some may feel they had already done their part to increase recycling, and would not be open to being approached soon after, with PAYT. Ms. Wellington echoed her sentiments and supported the idea that the SWAT could instead recommend PAYT as the first item of action, with Mandatory Recycling as the backup plan.

Ms. Doherty suggested the team take a vote on the preferred program to recommend to the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Gonyea made a motion to recommend the “#2 Option,” PAYT with no free bags, to

the Board of Selectmen. A discussion ensued about the difficulty of passing a program where residents would have to pay substantially more money. Members reiterated the idea that after introducing PAYT with free bags, the town would later have the option to reduce the number of free bags, depending on the Town's budget, that this might be an easier way to ease the town into the idea of PAYT. Ms. Congden pointed out that (with 50 free bags) each household would be allotted one ton of solid waste for free, and that if it generated more, it would have to purchase bags. Mr. Gonyea withdrew his previous motion and made a motion to recommend the "#3 Option," PAYT with 50 free bags per household, to the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Vignaly seconded the motion and the motion passed, 4 to 1, with Ms. DiRivera dissenting, voicing her preference for the "#2 Option."

Other

Ms. Wellington asked Ms. Congden if she would send the SWAT a second revision of her financial analysis of PAYT, working toward a financial break-down that all members would feel comfortable defending. Ms. Wellington said the SWAT should show the numbers to the Finance Committee, and ask what the FY09 budget looks like. Mr. Westerling responded that West Boylston will be starting next year \$1.3 million in the hole, and that it may be better to go first through the Board of Selectmen, but that the SWAT should consult Mr. Gaumond about this. Members agreed to contact the Board of Selectmen about attending their July 16 meeting.

Ms. Wellington asked Ms. Congden if DEP required a report from SWAT about the way the funds were used for the grant awarded to West Boylston. Ms. Congden said that she herself was taking care of it.

Ms. Doherty reported a request that there be SWAT representation at the September 20 Arts Festival, specifically at the "Recycle City" Sculpture.

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, July 8, 2008.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Submitted by,
Janet Vignaly
Secretary