

WEST BOYLSTON SOLID WASTE ADVISORY TEAM
FY 2009 ANNUAL REPORT
3/6/10

Background: The West Boylston Solid Waste Advisory Team (SWAT) was first appointed by the Town Administrator in September 2007 to advise the Town Administrator, Board of Selectmen, and Town Meeting on recycling and solid waste issues. During its first year, it researched how to promote recycling and how to reduce the town's trash costs, which it discovered were high and escalating rapidly. To educate the public on these issues, it produced a brochure, "Recycle: A Little effort. A Big difference," which was distributed at the May 2008 Town Meeting. Here, the Team also gave a light-hearted demonstration on how and why to recycle.

Using a state grant secured by the town, SWAT worked with Irene Congdon, the MA Department of Environmental Protection's Recycling Coordinator for Central MA, and researched possible ways to reduce the town's trash costs. They included: 1. Continue our present curbside collection of trash and recyclables program, but its cost was high (\$418,00 total or \$2.38/bag), its recycling rate low (21%), and there was no incentive for residents to reduce the amount of trash they were generating, which was costing the town \$76/ton to dispose of. 2. Educate residents to produce less trash and recycle more, but SWAT had been doing this for months and it had not resulted in less trash or more recycling. 3. Eliminate trash services altogether (privatization), but this would be very inefficient (many trucks going down the same roads) and would cost residents much more than any of the other options. Also, residents had shown their support for curbside collection by passing a 1991 Proposition 2 ½ Override specifically for trash collection. 4. Make recycling mandatory, but mandatory recycling bylaws are not as effective in reducing trash as Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT – see below), are very difficult to enforce, and require ongoing education. 5. Adopt "single stream" recycling, where ALL recyclables are mixed together in a large toter, which is picked up mechanically by the collection truck, but our collection contract would not allow for this type of collection and single stream does not reduce trash tonnage as much as PAYT. It would also entail hefty start-up costs for purchasing toters for all residents, which did not fit in with the Town's budget cuts. 6. Sign on with RecycleBank, which weighs the single stream recyclables and rewards residents who recycle with purchase coupons at certain stores, but this proposal involved all the same objections mentioned under #5. Also, it did not reward residents who simply purchased less and the rewards were gained only by purchasing more, so SWAT did not see this as corresponding with its goal of reducing trash.

The 7th option was Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT), where residents pay the town for each bag of trash they generate. SWAT concluded that it would save the town the most in disposal fees, while bringing in new bag fee revenue. Furthermore, it would be the most effective way to increase the recycling rate (recyclables would continue to be picked up for FREE) and have no administrative costs. In addition, It would bring equity and environmental benefits. Ms. Congdon was invited to make a presentation on PAYT to the Board of Selectmen on February 20, 2008, while SWAT continued its educational efforts, writing monthly articles on recycling and trash costs for the local paper.

After doing financial analyses of many different PAYT scenarios, on June 3, 2008, SWAT voted to support converting to a PAYT trash program, with residents receiving 50 FREE bags per year and bags costing \$2/bag for large (33 gal.) bags and \$1/bag for smaller (15 gal.) bags. This would result in a minimum net savings to the town of \$23,000 the first year and \$40,000 in succeeding years. SWAT felt that the free bags would make the change more acceptable to those with limited incomes.

FY 2009: When Fiscal Year 2009 began on July 1, 2008, SWAT had just done an interview program on its PAYT proposal with Channel 11, which was aired in July. At 10 p.m. on July 16, 2008, SWAT made a slide presentation of its PAYT recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. The Selectmen asked for more information on how mandatory recycling bylaws had worked in small towns, which SWAT researched and gave to them later. They also wanted more public input, so a Public Forum was scheduled by SWAT for September 9, at the Library. A new flyer, "Greener Trash Management," was prepared by SWAT for the Forum, as well as posters and an EPA video on PAYT, which was shown. Although the Selectmen did not attend the Forum, it was attended by about 50 people, most of whom spoke in favor of PAYT. Residents were encouraged to support the PAYT proposal in a Telegram & Gazette editorial the previous day. Since the deadline for submittal of warrant articles for the October 20th Town Meeting was also September 9th, SWAT submitted both a regular warrant article and a 10-taxpayer petition warrant article (Article 19) proposing its PAYT program before the Forum's input and the Selectmen's vote - to ensure discussion of the proposal at Town Meeting. SWAT attended the Finance Committee/School Committee/Board of Selectmen budget meeting on September 25 and distributed information on its proposal to the FinCom and to residents at the School Open House that night. On October 1st, SWAT met with the Board of Selectmen to report on the public input received at the Public Forum. Although the Select Board voted not to support SWAT's warrant article, SWAT decided to continue to support the article because part of the team's role is advising Town Meeting and because the proposal was purely advisory to the Selectmen, so this would be another way to gauge public opinion. SWAT then worked on educating residents as to the merits of the proposal by speaking to residents of Hillside Village, the Senior Center, and Boy Scouts. After SWAT's presentation to Town Meeting on October 20, 2008, Town Meeting voted in favor of its PAYT proposal, Article 19.

Because of the severe budget crisis facing the town, on December 3, 2008, SWAT sent a letter to the Selectmen, with copies to the Fin Com and School Committee, prioritizing its choices. Its top preference was still the proposal supported by Town Meeting, but second choice was for a PAYT program with NO free bags. Finally, only if elimination of trash services was under consideration, then SWAT preferred that a \$10/month/household fee be instituted in addition to PAYT so that privatization would not occur.

At a Selectmen's request, SWAT did further research on RecycleBank and advised against its adoption.

On March 4, 2009, the Town's Finance Director reported to the Selectmen on his fiscal analysis of a PAYT program where NO free bags would be given, but the bag fee would be less - only \$1 for large bags and 50 cents for small bags. The Selectmen voted to adopt this PAYT proposal. It would allow the Override tax revenue (\$318,000) to continue to fund the cost of trash collection, while the bag fee revenue would go toward funding trash disposal costs. At this meeting, three Worcester Polytechnic Institute students also did a presentation showing the benefits of a PAYT system as part of their community-based school

project. SWAT supported the Finance Director's new PAYT proposal and worked with the Town Administrator and DPW Director on developing an Implementation Plan, as the new program was scheduled to start on July 1, 2009 – only three months away! SWAT presented information at the April 9th Public Hearing on the proposal and SWAT's chair took part in a Channel 11 program with the Town Administrator and DPW Director informing residents about the upcoming program. SWAT also updated its extensive website with information on this new program. On Election Day, information on it was passed out to residents at the polls, where they could ask questions. A mailing going out to all residents before the May 2009 Town Meeting was drafted by SWAT, and Town Meeting did vote to establish the revolving account needed for the bag fee revenues. Informational articles for the Council on Aging Newsletter and The Banner were written by SWAT, as well as a letter sent to all town residents informing them of the July 1st start-up.

As FY09 ended, SWAT was very pleased that the DPW Director had been able to place near the Library on Central Street a huge banner (borrowed from Shrewsbury) marking the July 1st start-up date. Even more important, he had secured six places (Honey Farms, ACE Hardware, Jerry's Hardware, Price Chopper, Stop and Shop, and the Municipal Light Plant) to sell the town trash bags at NO markup, making them easily accessible. He had also found Waste Zero to manufacture and distribute the bags. With only 3 months to prepare, many town officials and citizens worked hard to make sure residents were prepared for the new program.

During FY09, SWAT held 10 regular meetings and 1 Public Forum. In addition, SWAT initiated two meetings with the Board of Selectmen at which presentations were made and participated in their Public Hearing. Individual SWAT members attended 3 meetings with the Finance Committee and 3 meetings with the Town Administrator (to help with implementation plans). The Team gratefully acknowledges the assistance of associate member Mary Ambrose and numerous other volunteers.

Stay tuned to next year's Annual Report to see how all this work paid off!

Submitted by,

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