

# Town of West Boylston

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## History of SWAT's Solid Waste Review Solid Waste Advisory Team (SWAT)

### History of West Boylston's "Pay-As- You-Throw" Program

In 2007, using the MA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP's) Municipal Waste Reduction Outreach Toolkit, the Solid Waste Advisory Team (SWAT) spent its first eight months educating itself on ways to reduce trash and increase recycling. To promote recycling, monthly articles were written for The Banner. The Team asked Allied Waste, the town's waste hauler, to place bins for recyclables at Goodale Park's athletic fields and presented lessons on recycling at the elementary school. A SWAT member also led local participation in the DCR Earthday pickup, facilitating separate disposal of recyclables.



Thanks to a DEP grant, the SWAT received assistance throughout the year 2007 - 2008 from the DEP Central MA Recycling Coordinator, Irene Congdon. She did an analysis of the recycling and cost benefits to the town if it were to adopt a Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) trash collection system. She presented this fiscal analysis to the Board of Selectmen on February 20, 2008. In May 2008, the SWAT met with Mike Szczepan, the regional manager of Allied Waste, the town's trash collector. Further research on solid waste management options (see below) was done by committee members on the Internet, on the EPA website, in newspapers, and by contacting officials from other municipalities, as well as DEP PAYT Program Manager, Joseph Lambert.

At the May 2008 Town Meeting, the SWAT gave a report and recycling demonstration stressing that **recycling saves the town money** because the town was spending \$76/ton to dispose of trash at the Wheelabrator incinerator, but there is NO disposal charge for recyclables. Town Meeting members were also given a new informational brochure that SWAT wrote outlining the town's trash situation and encouraging residents to recycle. Entitled, *Recycle. A little effort, a BIG Difference*, the brochure was available at the Library and Town Hall. In July 2008, Channel 11's "Access" program interviewed a SWAT member and the DEP Recycling Coordinator for Central MA, Irene Congdon, about the town's trash/recycling program and SWAT's recently adopted recommendation to pursue a modified Pay-As- You-Throw (PAYT) program.

Pay-As-You-Throw is a unit-based pricing system for trash management where residents use town- issued trash bags for which a fee is charged, though under SWAT's original modified proposal, residents would NOT have been charged a fee for the first 50 bags they used. On October 20, 2008, the SWAT presented this proposal to Town Meeting. It voted in favor of recommending this proposal to the Board of Selectmen, which had not yet voted in favor of it. As months passed, however, and the severity of the budget deficit became clearer, the town needed to look for more areas where it could save money. In March 2009, the Board of Selectmen voted unanimously in favor of PAYT, with a goal of saving \$120,000 from the

town trash budget. This figure is the approximate difference between the value of the 1991 Proposition 2 1/2 override and the actual trash costs.

On April 9, 2009, the Selectmen held a Public Hearing to invite town residents to give input on the various PAYT programs being considered. The same night, the Selectmen voted unanimously to adopt

a PAYT program, with small and large bags costing \$.50 and \$1 respectively. This fee structure was chosen because it created the least amount of financial impact on residents while reducing the trash budget by about \$120,000.



#### **West Boylston's Trash Costs**

Throughout 2007 and 2008, the SWAT had researched the town's trash costs and alternative management options. This research revealed that trash was a large item in the town's budget and that trash costs were escalating rapidly. In FY 2008, the town budgeted \$404,000 for trash (\$243,000 for collection and \$161,000 for disposal), while \$418,000 was budgeted for FY 2009. This 3.5% increase occurred while the library was level-funded and

cuts were made to the Council on Aging and school budgets. In the 5 years since FY2004, the town's trash costs went up from \$249,000 to \$418,000, a 68% increase. **The town was spending an average of**

**\$2.38 to collect and dispose of each bag of**

**trash that residents put out.** Many residents observed multiple households that put out 6+ bags per week and NO recycling bins. This was wasting a lot of money. With the cost of fuel skyrocketing, the SWAT anticipated a sharp rise in trash costs, especially in 2010 when our collection contract was coming up for renegotiation. Fortunately, the current contract has no fuel-adjustment clause, but it was thought unlikely that we would achieve that in the next contract.

#### **Recycling Rates**

In fiscal year 2008, the town's recycling rate fluctuated from 18% to 23%, which was significantly below the MA median rate of 30%. Many residents were placing recyclable and compostable waste into the trash, which unnecessarily raised the town's disposal costs (called "tipping fees") because the town was spending \$80/ton (later \$84/ton) to dispose of trash at the Wheelabrator incinerator, while NO disposal fee was charged for our recyclables.

#### **What Were Other Towns Doing?**

The SWAT also discovered that as other towns were feeling budgetary constraints, they were opting to make solid waste a smaller part of their budget (or taking it out of their budget altogether) through various forms of PAYT.

**Shrewsbury** started a PAYT program on August 1, 2008.

**Holden** used a modified PAYT program, where residents would buy bags for extra trash that would not fit in their totes and also pay \$180/year for their tote trash. These user fees enabled Holden to take trash out of their town budget.

**Clinton** adopted PAYT 8 years earlier, and, like Holden, had taken trash out of the town budget altogether.

**Worcester** adopted PAYT around 1993 and saw its trash tonnage drop 37%, saving the city millions of dollars in avoided disposal costs. Its curbside recycling rate is about 30%. Its very successful program had been copied by Portland, Maine, and many cities in MA.

**Boylston** offers NO trash services. Its residents had to hire their own private trash collector.

**Sterling** has curb-side trash collection, but is limited to the equivalent of three 30-gallon bags.

In short, all the communities surrounding West Boylston expected residents to pay (at least partially) for trash services, except Sterling.

More than 1/3 of the cities and towns in Massachusetts had converted their trash programs to PAYT. Details of the programs varied greatly, but there were unmistakable trends: PAYT towns produced substantially less trash than non-PAYT towns, including those that had implemented mandatory recycling bylaws (1000-1500 lbs per household vs. 2000-2500 lbs per household in towns with mandatory recycling laws). Why do we see this difference? PAYT provides the "personal" economic incentive for



residents to produce less trash through recycling, composting, and consuming less. Those who reduce the amount of trash they generate save money because they don't have to buy as many town-issued trash bags, which are usually priced anywhere from \$1.50 to \$2.50 in PAYT towns.

## **Other Trash Handling Options That We Considered**

### ***Private Trash Haulers***

The SWAT briefly considered eliminating the town's trash costs altogether by eliminating all trash services and having residents hire their own private hauler. This privatization option was quickly rejected because it would be very expensive for residents, as private haulers are charging fees ranging from about \$250 to \$500 per year to service a household. Furthermore, in 1991, residents voted a **Proposition 2½ tax override**, allowing an additional \$200,000 in additional taxes to be raised to fund trash collection and disposal, indicating support for town funding of trash services (the vote was 757 in favor and 677 against this override.) This override was bringing over \$310,000 in additional taxes to the town. Privatization was also rejected because it is very inefficient for many different trash companies to be servicing the same street, wasting gasoline and adding wear and tear to these streets.

### ***Mandatory Recycling Bylaw***

The SWAT considered pursuing a Mandatory Recycling bylaw, but its research showed that PAYT will be more effective for three main reasons:

**1)** Experiences in other municipalities have shown that PAYT is more effective in cutting solid waste than bylaws making recycling mandatory. The towns that have passed mandatory recycling bylaws, such as Danvers, Chelmsford, Tyngsboro and Andover, are generating 2,300 - 2,800 lbs of trash per household, while PAYT communities, such as Gardner, Maynard and Worcester, are generating only 1,100 - 1,250 lbs. per household. In general, Mandatory towns average 2000 - 2500 lbs. of trash per household, while PAYT towns average only 1000 - 1500 lbs. of trash per household. Also, towns with mandatory recycling bylaws usually don't achieve as high recycling rates as towns with PAYT programs. Chelmsford, which adopted a Mandatory Recycling bylaw in 2005, was recycling only 23% of its trash, not much higher than West Boylston's rate before PAYT. Milford adopted a mandatory recycling bylaw in 1991. At times it has produced a high recycling rate and at times a low recycling rate. Milford worked hard on public relations and the recycling rate went up to 33%, but we were unable to find out whether its trash tonnage dropped as much as in PAYT towns. And, tonnage reduction per household is really the most important measure of a program's success.

**2)** A mandatory recycling bylaw is very difficult to enforce. Under a mandatory recycling bylaw, a resident could put minimal recyclables into the recycling bin and trash the rest, and this would appear acceptable to the



hauler. Some towns have had to hire extra staff to enforce the mandate. Some have tried to achieve compliance by having their haulers rip open trash bags to see if there are any recyclables inside. This raises privacy and worker safety issues. It also means picking up trash takes longer for the hauler and our hauler had already said he would not do it. It should also be mentioned that the hauler has no economic incentive to enforce a mandatory recycling bylaw because he usually must PAY a disposal fee for the containers being recycled, while the disposal fee for regular trash is covered by the town.

**3)** Most people respond better to economic incentives than to government mandates, so a mandatory bylaw would require significant, ongoing education, drawing on limited resources. Onondaga County in New York, where Syracuse is located, had a mandatory recycling bylaw for both residents and businesses and spends \$400,000 per year to educate them and enforce the bylaw. This large funding, which amounted to about \$2.25 per household, came from the tipping fees paid at the incinerator of the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency, the same agency that does the education. This type of revenue would not be available to West Boylston.

### ***RecycleBank***

The SWAT also explored using RecycleBank. This is a private company's program to promote recycling and is being used in Southbridge. It rewards residents who recycle by giving them coupons to buy merchandise based on the amount they recycle. The first priority of most solid waste programs is to **reduce** the amount of waste being generated, so the idea of giving coupons to purchase more stuff, leading to **more** waste, seemed counterproductive. Often the stores honoring the coupons are chain stores, which one must drive a fair distance to reach. Another problem is that each household must have a computer to receive their coupons. Although *RecycleBank* increased the recycling rate, it was not as effective as PAYT in reducing the amount of trash generated.

### ***Single Stream Recycling***

In addition, the SWAT looked into changing to Single Stream Recycling. It was being used in Holden and Worcester and allows recyclable containers and paper to be mixed together, making recycling easier. This increased the recycling rate, but West Boylston's hauler would not take single stream recyclables. A representative informed the SWAT that broken glass becomes embedded in the paper, making it unfit for recycling (and therefore losing money). Single stream recycling was later instituted by the Board of Selectmen in FY 2011, making it much easier for residents to recycle, but it has not resulted in a higher recycling rate or reduced trash tonnage.

