



**Auburn's Ad Hoc
RECYCLING
& Sustainability
COMMITTEE**

Final Committee Report

June 15, 2020

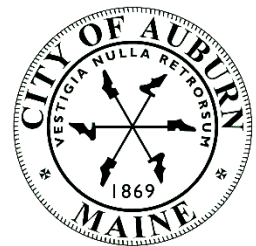
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Recycling is our commitment to sustainable living - our collective effort to reduce harm to our environment by minimizing what we throw away to be burned and buried in landfills.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Recycling Ad-hoc Committee is pleased to submit its report to the Auburn City Council fulfilling its charge to assess the effectiveness of Auburn's recycling program on the basis of cost, impact in the community, and in comparison to other Maine municipal programs. We were asked specifically to comment on evidenced-based methods to enhance community engagement in sound recycling practices. Below are our findings and recommendations.



Our assessments are carried out, in part, in response to volatile and shrinking markets for recyclable commodities worldwide that have reduced recycling revenue and adversely impacted municipal budgets across the United States. In addition, we write this report in the midst of a global pandemic that has upended our local and state economy and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Having said that, as a community, a neighborhood, a household, we practice recycling not because of its impact on the municipal budget alone. Recycling is our commitment to sustainable living - our collective effort to reduce harm to our environment by minimizing what we throw away to be burned and buried in landfills.

Findings

Our investigations have shown that Auburn has the basis for a strong, forward looking municipal solid waste program. Waste incineration at Maine Waste to Energy, a consortium of surrounding towns, generates reusable energy in the form of electricity. Recycling is processed at a single-sort facility in Lewiston where commodities are separated and sent to available markets.

The weaknesses in our recycling program compared to those of Maine communities detailed in the report include:

1. **Poor Participation and High Contamination:** An estimated 7- 8% of Auburn households recycle compared to 30-50% in other communities. Fifteen to eighteen percent of Auburn recycling is contaminated with food waste, non-recycling materials, or moisture.
2. **Low Recycling Rate:** About 7% by weight of all curbside waste and recycling collected is diverted from the solid waste stream. Better performing communities divert 40-50%.
3. **Lack of Education:** The lack of educational materials, of a feedback mechanism where residents are continuously educated about recycling, and the absence of educational programming about the waste management system in the city creates a lack of information for citizens.

4. **Current Contracts:** Contracts for collection and processing of waste do not fairly share risk between the City and the contractor in this volatile recycling market. In addition, the services provided do not include any education or tracking for residents and the City.
5. **Lack of Data Transparency:** We have no Auburn specific benchmarking and performance evaluation of the recycling program. This is in part due to the nature of the regional associations Auburn has joined for municipal solid waste processing and recycling. City specific data is not always collected.

Fortunately, opportunities for improvement are available. Several evidenced-based interventions, some relatively low-cost, could be implemented with immediate return on investment with increases in participation and reduction in contamination.

Other longer-range program changes include implementing community composting. Organic waste comprises about 20% of municipal solid waste by weight. Diverting this to a composting program could potentially impact Auburn's disposal costs favorably by lowering the total tonnage. In addition, composting would help reduce the portion of Auburn's waste that is now sent to a landfill because of capacity issues at Maine Waste to Energy during peak months.

Finally, sustainability efforts are increasingly part of municipal government's portfolio. Success in these efforts often requires unique management skills in coordinating multiple programs across several departments or jurisdictions. Municipal recycling has changed since it started at the dawn of the environmental movement in the United States almost 50 years ago. Although the reasons to recycle are largely unchanged, we are operating in a much more complex environment. This will require re-thinking, not only our methods but also the management of our recycling program. We hope this report contributes positively in both regards.

Recommendations

- 1) Invest in improved recycling infrastructure
 - To provide city-specific, designated bins, and/or integrate a composting program
- 2) Implement an education program that has an effective feedback and residential engagement component.
 - To increase convenience, awareness, engagement and vitality of the current recycling program, in turn improving participation and reducing contamination
- 3) Consider changing recycling contractors or negotiating a better contract with Casella
 - To reduce the overall cost of recycling for the city, and/or to add a robust education program in the community and schools. EcoMaine has such programs as a part of their contract.
- 4) Implement a Composting Program
 - Intended to reduce solid waste tonnage, improve contamination rates, and encourage recycling. Auburn is incinerating approximately 1800 tons of organic waste, representing an estimate of \$76,000 in processing costs.

INTRODUCTION

Committee Background and Goals

On June 24, 2019, the City Council adopted a resolve to create an ad-hoc Recycling Committee. This resolve arose due to the current state of the volatile recycling market. Increasing recycling costs led to a discussion of suspending the program. Instead, Auburn chose to take the time needed to consider all aspects of recycling and sustainability in our community. After a delay in appointing members, we began work on October 31, 2019. Since that time we have provided two updates to the Council; on December 2, 2019 and March 2, 2020. During the second Council update, we received approval to extend our work to May 1, 2020.

Committee Charge

The Council charged us as follows:

- 1. Identify the key impacts of the current recycling program**
- 2. Compare the current model with different models Auburn could adopt**
- 3. Identify Auburn's current costs for recycling and compare with other municipalities which have adapted to the changing market, and**
- 4. Create a public education and awareness campaign for the recommended changes**

Since work began in October 2019, we have reviewed, in detail, the current state of Auburn's recycling program. Interviews with key Auburn staff members like Billy Hunter, Director of Support Services, and Dan Goyette, Public Works Director, were particularly helpful. We visited Auburn's waste management facilities, spoke to staff at each site, and spent time in committee meetings pouring over data and lived experience. Through conversations with regional actors, such as the South Portland Sustainability Coordinator Julie Rosenbach, we have explored program models adopted by other municipalities. By enlisting students and faculty researchers from the Environmental Studies Program at Bates College, we have been able to assess and weigh the cost and environmental impact of various waste management practices, along with best practices for improving recycling rates and lowering contamination. The reports completed by Bates provide robust detailed data and generated recommendations for the City.

We have remained active despite the COVID-19 pandemic, holding virtual meetings continued as scheduled with weekly or bi-weekly meetings. We recognize the fiscal and programmatic challenges to the City and Council at this time, and we propose our recommendations with these issues in mind. It is our intention to be thoughtful in our proposed changes to the current recycling program. This proposal takes into account both short and long-term changes that build a recycling and sustainability infrastructure that will position Auburn to become one of the best cities in America.

Value and Importance of Sustainable Waste Management

What has guided our work is our belief that a comprehensive, sustainable waste management program will benefit the city, its residents, and the health of the region now and into the future. Our research indicates that there is potential to create a more efficient program by improving our waste management practices. We also want to acknowledge that the market rates for recycled products will fluctuate over time, and no one is able to predict its trends, positively or negatively. While initial investment will be necessary, we believe potential environmental and social benefits far outweigh these costs.

Committing to sustainable practices will continue to have a ripple effect throughout the city. Moving toward environmentally conscious programs shows residents that the city values the health and lives of Auburn residents for generations to come. An improved waste management program will provide residents with a greater sense of responsibility for their city and a direct way to participate in protecting Maine's natural beauty and the health and wellbeing of residents. Auburn is a beacon for the Androscoggin Valley and pursuing these potential programs has the power to change not just our community, but the whole region.

These issues are not unique to Auburn and stakeholders statewide have identified their importance. One suggestion in the report, separating out food waste for composting, contributes to our long-term vision of sustainability. The newly formed Maine Food Production Leadership Council has identified composting food waste along with diverting other organic waste from landfills, as its highest priority. The Natural Resources Council of Maine has been a catalyst for Maine recycling reform. They assert that Maine has been struggling for years to increase recycling rates above 40%, and the statewide goal of recycling 50% of all discarded materials remains out of our reach. Municipal recycling struggles like ours exist across the state, and Auburn has the opportunity to be a leader.

Alignment with City of Auburn Plans

A second guiding principle in our work is to align our recommendations with the City's comprehensive and Strategic Plans. Both the 2010 Comprehensive Plan and 2019 Strategic Plan outline goals that support the programs discussed throughout this report. These plans clearly show that the City has intended to invest in recycling and sustainability programs and continues to value the benefits the programs can have over time.

2010 Comprehensive Plan Goals

In 2010, the City prioritized two recycling related strategies within the Comprehensive Plan. These goals were pursued by the first Recycling Committee that was formed in 2015, but the recommendations for infrastructure changes and educational outreach were never put into practice. Our recommendations seek to implement these goals.

The City will soon be developing new Comprehensive Goals for the next ten years. This will be a chance to strengthen the plan and infrastructure for supporting and growing recycling in Auburn. Below are the 2010 Comprehensive Plan Goals that align with recycling and sustainability in Auburn:

Goal C.2, "Provide adequate public facilities to support the delivery of efficient, cost-effective services" includes the Objective C.2.2 "Increase the level of recycling within the City by expanding efforts to engage citizens in recycling, and by educating them on ways to decrease trash production." This statement strongly supports our recommendations, as we value the importance of generally decreasing waste production altogether, as well as improving recycling efforts. The two strategies within the objective highlight the need to research and assess potential recycling programs, as well as to establish a citywide recycling campaign. (Comprehensive Plan 2010 to 2020, pgs. 25-26) Both of these elements were key to our work as a committee and directly inform our recommendations for continuing work in the future.

City of Auburn Strategic Plan 2019

The proposals in this committee report are new only in their details; everything fits with Auburn's 2019 Strategic Plan for our community going forward. The Strategic Plan's vision for Auburn includes "a community that balances urban & rural living, with safe, sustainable, livable neighborhoods that are well-connected; a community to be proud of, with a vibrant workforce and resources that are preserved and protected". (Auburn Strategic Plan, pg. 9) Auburn clearly envisions itself as a sustainable community, responding effectively to environmental changes, and conscious of health. Rather than simply taking "no backward steps", the recommendations in our report support and advance Auburn's dedication to implement both the spirit and the specific activities of its Strategic Plan.

GROWTH Goal 4 of the Strategic Plan seeks to "invest in and maintain the infrastructure necessary to provide a sustainable, safe and livable environment." (pg. 11) While a lack of recycling does not pose immediate threats to the city's environment, a continued reliance on landfill and incineration could have long term impacts on the availability of virgin materials and air quality. In turn, infrastructure encouraging or facilitating the creation of a more efficient waste management plan, including organics collection, could limit these threats and potentially support growth in our agriculture community and maintain soil quality over time.

GROWTH Goal 5 includes two solutions, "1) Rehabilitate and improve curb appeal of downtown neighborhoods" and "2) Create more pride in neighborhoods". Both initiatives, while directly related to sustainable residential development, are supported by a recycling program that prioritizes and encourages responsible waste management. An improved infrastructure and waste education program are potential starting points for other steps listed in this workplan. (pg. 24)

COMMITTEE RESEARCH

Current Recycling Program

The city currently holds a contract with Pine Tree Waste, Inc. for all waste and recyclable collection, with recyclables going to Casella in Lewiston and most municipal solid waste (MSW) to Maine Waste to Energy in Auburn. Maine Waste to Energy incinerates solid waste to generate energy for the region. However, when the Maine Waste to Energy facility receives more waste than it can process, excess waste is sent to landfill. This happens only at peak times of the year, typically summer months. The leftovers of incineration ash are disposed of at the Lewiston Landfill. Landfilling diverted waste and ash contributes to both the financial and environmental cost of the City's solid waste disposal as discussed below.

In April 2019, the contract was extended to March 31, 2022. The city pays a fixed rate for collection and processing of municipal solid waste (MSW) at Maine Waste to Energy and for collection of recyclables. The cost or benefit to the City from processing recycled materials varies monthly in response to changes in the market rate. The low recycling participation rate in the city, 7.3% in 2019, affects the average cost per ton of collection. With higher participation rates, we could see lower average collection costs per ton.

The Auburn Department of Public Works compiled the cost data in Table 1 for municipal solid waste and recyclables in the last full year. According to these figures, total recycling costs represent 17% of total waste management costs annually.

	MSW	Recyclables
Collection		
total tons collected per year	8421	650
total collection cost	\$452,000	\$102,500
collection cost/ton	\$53.68	\$157.69
Processing		
total tons processed per year	8421	650
total processing cost	\$353,682	\$76,050
processing cost/ton	\$42.00	\$117.00

Regional Models | South Portland: Role-Model City

We choose to highlight the City of South Portland, one of the leading cities in Maine regarding sustainability initiatives. Through their Office of Sustainability, led by two full-time sustainability coordinators, the department primarily works to advance the city's Climate Action Plan, as well as five strategic goals. The goals are ordered by priority for 2019-2020, and the first of these is Waste Reduction. Specifically, the city hopes to "increase South Portland's Recycling rate to 40% by 2020, through purposeful purchasing, reuse, recycling, and composting".

Within this goal, the City points to multiple action items that contribute to an increased recycling rate. Included in these action steps are providing infrastructure and an education and outreach program to increase citizen awareness and action. In turn, program planners recognize

the unique challenges of recycling at multi-family units and businesses, so a step is included to research how other communities deal with these streams.

Other steps in South Portland's plan consider waste reduction in a larger sense, recognizing that recycling responds to the amount of waste generated, as opposed to reducing the amount of materials in the waste stream in the first place. Included under waste reduction in the plan are also steps to reduce the use of single plastics, improve the citywide food waste program, and move the City towards "zero waste" practices. While these are not recycling specific, they can lighten the burden placed on recycling and solid waste management by improving other effective means of eliminating and or reducing waste.

Other Comparable Communities

Part of the work assigned to the Bates Environmental Studies students included researching the recycling programs and their relative successes in other comparable communities. The students chose to look at South Portland, Biddeford, Bangor, and Farmington. Information from each municipality varied, but comparisons were made with what data was available.

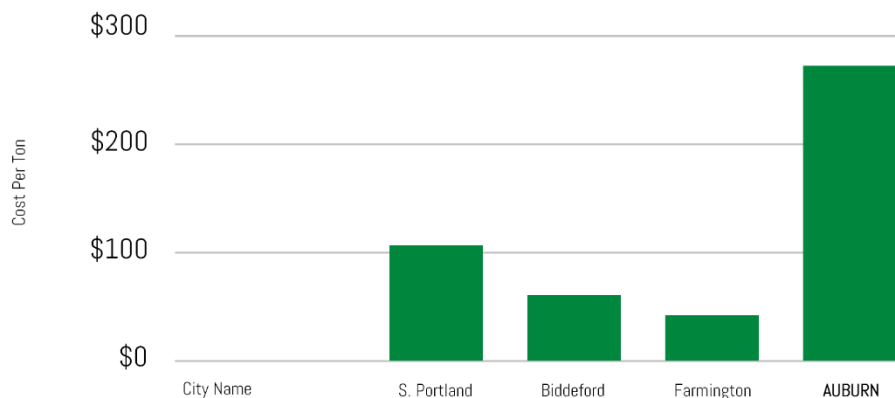
The following chart, Figure 1, compares recycling costs per ton, including both collection and hauling. Data was not provided by Bangor. Farmington charges residents for optional curbside pick-up of all waste which covers the costs of hauling and gives them the lowest rate per ton.

Figure 1. Average cost of recycling per ton in comparison communities. ("A Recycling Recommendation for Auburn, Maine", Sedoric & Bucki)

Auburn's high cost per ton is due in part to the cost per ton of processing, as well as the average cost per ton of collection.

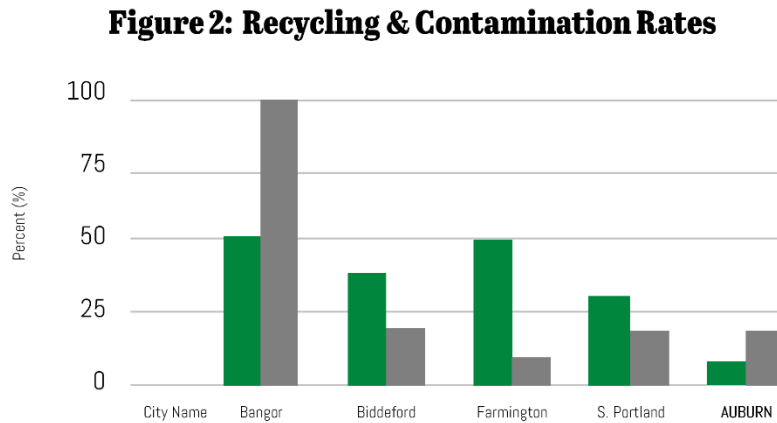
In Figure 2, which compares recycling rates and contamination rates among the communities, Auburn's rate of 7.3% in 2019 is the lowest of the four cities studied. In addition, our contamination rates are on par with Biddeford and South Portland, communities with more than double the participation. Bangor's 100%

Figure 1: Average Cost of Recycling Per Ton



contamination rate is due to their “One Bin, All-In” system, where all waste is put in one receptacle and recyclables are separated from other solid waste after collection.

Figure 2. Percent of total waste recycled and percent of total recycled waste with contamination. (“A Recycling Recommendation for Auburn, Maine”, Sedoric & Bucki)



The following table, Table 2, provides details of the recycling programs in each municipality. There are marked differences between these municipalities’ programs and that which exists in Auburn. Assets such as weekly curbside pick-up, visible City support, educational initiatives, more favorable recycling contracts, and composting programs contribute to the more successful costs and participation rates in these communities.

	Type of Program	Curbside	Contractor Name	Types of Education	Composting
South Portland	Single Stream	Yes, free	Pine Tree Waste & <u>EcoMaine</u>	Brochures & App	Yes, at resident expense
Bangor	“One bin, all in”	Yes, free	Coastal Resources	Meetings	Yes, free
Biddeford	Single Stream	Yes, free	Casella	Audits & Brochures	Yes, at resident expense
Farmington	Dual Stream	Yes, at resident expense	Archie’s Co.	Brochures, Website link & School talks	Yes, free
Auburn	Single Stream	Yes, not weekly	Casella	Minimal site on City website	No

Committee Key Findings

There are various weaknesses with the current recycling program compared to other Maine municipalities:

Participation and Contamination: The low participation rate of 7.3% is also accompanied by high contamination rates, which reduces even further what percentages of collected recyclables are processed.

Low Recycling Rate: Auburn has no mechanisms for reducing total waste production. Primarily, the total tonnage of solid waste could be reduced by implementing a composting program to remove organic waste from the solid waste stream.

Lack of Education: The lack of educational materials, of a feedback mechanism where residents are continuously educated about recycling, and the absence of educational programming about the waste management system in the city creates a lack of information for citizens.

Current Waste Agreements: The services provided do not include any education or tracking for residents and the City. Agreements for the processing of recyclables do not reflect the current market, and therefore pose unfair risk to the City

Lack of Data Transparency: We have no Auburn specific benchmarking and performance evaluation of the recycling program. This is in part due to the nature of the regional associations Auburn has joined for municipal solid waste processing and recycling. City specific data is not always collected.

Outside of our immediate program, the Maine Waste to Energy facility receives more solid waste than it can process during peak months of the year, causing it to send its extra waste to a landfill. Efforts within the city to reduce waste production would improve the efficiency of the WTE facility.

Improving recycling and pursuing other methods of reducing solid waste tonnage could reduce MSW processing costs, reduce average recycling costs per ton, and improve the environmental outcomes of Auburn's waste management system.

While gathering information about the municipal waste program in Auburn, we found it particularly challenging that there is no specific data about the program performance. This is in part due to the intergovernmental nature of our current waste management, as information on individual municipalities is rarely reported. We believe that implementing a more straightforward and standard form of data tracking and performance evaluation measures will significantly improve the ability to support and adapt the program in the future.

BATES COLLEGE RESEARCH

After approaching the Bates College Environmental Studies program with the challenges faced by Auburn, two projects were developed to aid the city in researching recycling in Auburn. These projects focused on researching national and regional best practices in waste management and comparing these options with Auburn. Research proposals for each project were received in early 2020, and final reports were sent to the recycling committee in May.

That being said, the data regarding these costs and impacts is qualitative in that it is based in part on extrapolations and assumptions from the municipal data provided to us, as well as on scholarly articles and research studies. Therefore, the information should be understood to be generally true, but not exact with respect to Auburn's costs and impacts.

Comparison of Waste Management Strategies | Carbon and Costs

The students involved with this project, Lars Gunderson and Ryan Giunta, researched the “relative merits” of various waste management methods, including both greenhouse gas emissions and costs to the municipality. Primarily, the research centered on waste-to-energy incineration systems, composting, and recycling. After gathering information about the merits of each of these methods, the group compared the outcomes of four management scenarios the city could consider:

- 🌿 Continue current recycling program as-is
- 🌿 Implement composting in addition to current program
- 🌿 Replace current recycling program with composting, or
- 🌿 Eliminate recycling entirely

Composting is highlighted in these optional scenarios as either a potential alternative or an addition to the recycling program based on the amount of solid waste it can divert from the waste stream. In 2014, the EPA estimated that 21.6% of municipal solid waste disposed of in landfills and incinerators was food scraps. If this estimate is true in Auburn, based on the 2019 estimate of 8421 tons of solid waste, around 1,818 tons of that waste is made up of organics, or food scraps. With this estimate, at a processing cost of \$42.00 per ton, Auburn is spending approximately \$76,000 annually to incinerate organics, an environmentally valuable and compostable material. Composting also facilitates the separation of food scraps from other trash within the home, which can help to reduce recycling contamination, which frequently occurs in the form of food scraps or moisture.

It is clear that to efficiently maintain any recycling program and improve its environmental benefit, investment is necessary. The students’ findings suggest that some basic changes could have a large environmental impact. Figure 5 compares the processing cost per ton of five possible waste management methods. EcoMaine is included as a comparable recycling contractor.

Table 3 compares the same methods based on emissions generated per material. Comparing these two charts allowed us to think critically about the options available going forward.

Figure 5. Cost per ton of management options available to Auburn, (“Conducting a Greenhouse Gas Lifecycle Analysis”, Gunderson & Giunta)

Figure 5: Cost Per Ton of Management Options

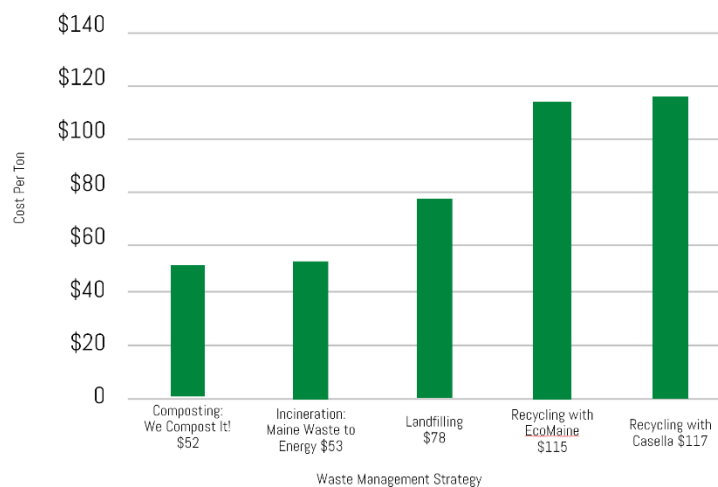


Table 3. Emissions in tons of CO2 equivalent per ton of waste				
	Composting	Recycling	WTE	Landfilling
Paper	-	-3.53	-0.51	0.13
Plastic	-	-1.02	1.23	0.2
Metal	-	-4.34	-	0.02
Organic Waste	-0.16	-	-0.16	0.2
Glass	-	-0.28	0.03	0.02

Table 3. Emissions in tons of CO2 equivalent per ton of waste. Green indicates the fewest emissions, red indicates the most. WTE stands for Waste-to-Energy. (“Conducting a Greenhouse Gas Lifecycle Analysis”, Gunderson & Giunta)

The findings in both Figure 5 and Table 3 represent the relative value of the waste management strategies available to Auburn. Given its relatively low cost of implementation and high environmental benefit, implementing a composting program allows the City to improve the effectiveness of both recycling participation and the Maine Waste to Energy Facility’s capacity issues. In this effort, we would reduce the need for landfilling, the most environmentally harmful disposal method, shown above.

Curbside Recycling Practice: Recommendations for Auburn

Given the low recycling participation rate and high contamination of recyclables in Auburn, Bates students researching this aspect made recommendations to both increase participation rates and reduce contamination rates. Research of best practices nationally, as well as information about other Maine municipalities, informed their results.

Overall, the students found that education programs are most effective for decreasing contamination rates if the messages are reinforced over time and not just based on a one-time educational program. Other infrastructure improvements can also be used to increase participation including weekly curbside pick-up, dedicated covered containers, and composting programs.

Education initiatives and feedback systems are recommended methods for improving Auburn’s recycling program. The distribution of materials such as flyers and brochures, in addition to town meetings, can provide information and improve awareness. In particular, programs with a feedback system are effective. A feedback system is anything that tracks the total recycling waste and solid waste on an individual or neighborhood level and reports the data back to residents. These programs can take many forms, but the key element is the ability of the individuals to see how their waste habits compare to those throughout the city. Residents have the opportunity to see how they are doing with recycling in real time. Individuals are motivated by social norm, understanding that responsible, sustainable waste management is an expectation from their neighbors as well as the city can be very persuasive.

For example, South Portland implemented a very successful “Red, Yellow and Green” tagging system where interns spent a summer putting stickers on residents’ recycling bins to indicate how well the individual residents were doing. A green sticker meant they were doing a great job separating and cleaning recyclables, a yellow meant the resident was doing well but needed improvement, and a red sticker meant that they needed to pay closer attention to what to recycle and how to prevent contamination. This work was supported by print materials to reinforce the information. Neighbors were very engaged in the project and felt a sense of accomplishment and community spirit when they went from red or yellow to green. This type of project models not only good recycling behavior, but also engages individuals to take an active role in the recycling process.

Convenience is of utmost importance when it comes to residential recycling. Making “the right choice the easy choice” is vital. The most effective form of increasing convenience is by offering curbside pick-up, something that Auburn already offers. According to the Maine municipality data, high participation rates are observed in some communities even when curbside pickup is paid for by the resident. Another aspect of convenience includes city provided containers which, in one study, increased participation rates more than 50%. In addition to having a city provided container, it was found that the color of the container mattered as well. Making the practice of recycling easy, obvious, and familiar with large blue containers has also been shown to increase recycling rates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Final Committee Recommendations

Both the Bates student reports and the committee research came to the same conclusions about what would be effective improvements to the Auburn recycling program. We conclude that the following steps are essential for revitalizing our waste management:

Invest in improved recycling infrastructure | To provide city-specific, designated bins, and/or integrate a composting program

Implement an education program that has an effective feedback and residential engagement component | To increase convenience, awareness, engagement, and vitality of the current recycling program, in turn improving participation and reducing contamination

Consider changing recycling contractors or negotiating a better contract with Casella | To reduce the overall cost of recycling for the city, and/or to add a robust education program in the community and schools. (EcoMaine has such programs as a part of their contract.)

Implement a Composting Program | Intended to reduce solid waste tonnage, improve contamination rates, and encourage recycling. Auburn is incinerating approximately 1800 tons of organic waste, representing an estimate of \$76,000 in processing costs.

Committee Benchmarks: Extension through 2021

To achieve the goals outlined above, we are requesting that the Recycling Committee Resolve be extended through to June 15, 2021.

Below, you will find our goals for the coming year with specific benchmarks. We believe this is the most appropriate way forward, given our intention to be fiscally responsible while ensuring that important improvements to the program can be implemented.

September 15th, 2020: Recycling Infrastructure Improvements

Report on specific infrastructure needs, e.g. bins, collection schedule and educational/feedback program to improve Auburn's recycling rate and lower its contamination rate. In addition, we would review and recommend personnel resources, short and long term, to support efforts to enhance Auburn's sustainability mission.

December 15th, 2020: Reconsidering the Recycling Contract

Report on options for improving the services we receive from a recycling contractor, specifically focusing on their educational outreach to households and schools, assistance with reducing the recycling contamination rate, compilation of publicly available data, experience helping communities reach performance benchmarks, and recycling efficiency/return on investment for the various products. In addition, we will consider the contract lengths and risk-sharing policies of possible contracts, as we believe a contractor in the modern recycling market needs to be aware of both the positive and negative risks faced by the City in this process. This would include a review of these services and the contractual options offered by various vendors.

March 15th, 2021: Options for a Composting Pilot Program

Report on initiating a pilot program for the collection of household organics, e.g. food waste. This effort would include identifying vendors, costs, and options for collection. We would also recommend the best option, method of evaluation of success, and timeline for the pilot program.

June 15th, 2021: Annual Report

Present the Annual Report on our work, outcomes from various projects, and summer opportunities.

Future Needs

It is important for us to note that the hiring of a Sustainability Coordinator in the City Manager's Office is still a priority. Much of the work required to create a dynamic and sustainable program is beyond the capabilities of this committee. As Auburn decides what options are best, we will someday need leadership within the City to oversee their execution. In addition, this individual would be an asset to the city by coordinating all sustainability efforts to yield maximum financial, social, and environmental benefits for the city. We

understand that now is not the time for Auburn to adopt this position, but we look forward to a day when we are able to make this investment.

In addition, the City should work to establish a set of publicly available data elements that will be used to evaluate changes to, and performance of, the recycling program based on measurable impacts on the environment, budget, and quality of life in Auburn. There is no doubt that this program will need to adapt and change over time. Maintaining standardized data available to future committees or research groups will ensure this process is easier and more effective going forward. We hope that our work in contract negotiation or the eventual hire of a sustainability professional will include efforts towards this need.

FINAL THOUGHTS

A recycling program that supports all three areas of a sustainable lifestyle - reduce, reuse, recycle - is the most visible sign of Auburn's wholehearted commitment to a more wholesome life for all of its citizens. Community members will be justifiably proud to live in a modern and environmentally conscious city and motivated to participate in programs which maintain it. One of the reasons people choose a particular community to live in is the natural beauty of its setting. Committing to a robust, innovative, sustainability program will demonstrate Auburn's commitment to preserving our own unique environment. Other towns will see that we are a city that prioritizes the natural beauty of our region, using us as a model of caring for the health and safety of Mainers for generations to come.

Implementing our suggestions will achieve long held goals stated in the City of Auburn Comprehensive Plan to "provide adequate public facilities to support the delivery of efficient, cost-effective services". Even then, we knew that we must "increase the level of recycling within the City by expanding efforts to engage citizens in recycling, and by educating them on ways to decrease trash production." Auburn has continued to prioritize these goals as recently as the 2019 Strategic plan, proclaiming the need to "invest in and maintain the infrastructure necessary to provide a sustainable, safe and livable environment."

These goals envision a 21st century Auburn that is at the forefront of innovative practices in every way possible. The recommendations in our report move Auburn to the forefront in the important area of sustainable waste management.



Respectfully submitted by the Ad Hoc Recycling and Sustainability Committee, June 15, 2020.